

Aurora's Levitt steps into the kitchen again to take on Holiday Baking Championship



Steven Levitt felt like something of an 'imposter' when he walked onto the set of Food Network's Holiday Baking Championship.

Sizing up his competition, the Aurora-resident and home baker noticed he was set to face off against professional bakers who made the grade at culinary schools and have made a living in the kitchen doing what they love.

But Levitt came into the competition with a distinct advantage all his own: delivering award-winning bakes within high-pressure time limits, all the while with a television camera hovering nearby - and it served him well on the Championship's premiere episode, which aired on Food Network on Monday evening.

The Holiday Baking Championship, hosted by Jesse Palmer, sees 12 bakers from across North America tasked with coming up on unique spins on holiday treats and staples, evaluated by judges Carla Hall, Duff Goldman and Nancy Fuller.

In the premiere episode, Levitt and his fellow bakers were given two challenges; first up, was a cheese ball-inspired dessert featuring nuts or dried fruits; the second, desserts inspired by and using holiday bark.

Levitt's talent for working under pressure did the trick in the season premiere, and he'll be back for more this Monday night.

'Do I want to do this again?' he asked himself as he applied to be a part of the popular competition show's latest season. 'There's a lot of stress involved, but I had evolved a lot since I was in The [Great Canadian Baking Show (GCBS)] tent, so how would I fare against professionals? I went into the tent thinking we're all the same, until I saw everyone's bakes and then we all had imposter syndrome. Here, I knew going in that I'm the imposter. It's one thing to know you're going against people who do this for a living, but when you start hearing what they've actually done, what they have accomplished, where they're at in their station as far as their work, it was like, 'Whoa, I have really stepped deep here.''

But Levitt went into the studio with an open mind, knowing he was going to learn a lot from both the judges and the other 11 contenders.

'I have been a fan of this show before I even knew how to bake,' he says, adding he hadn't realized just how big the Championship kitchen would be compared to the relatively humble GCBS tent. It may have been a bit intimidating, but Levitt says he's been told he doesn't process nervousness like many others do.

'For me, I went into this the same as I did before [with the mindset of] I get to bake today. Today's going to be a good day - I don't

have to work, I just have to bake. If I have a horrible day, the worst thing that's going to happen is they'll put me on a plane, send me home, and I don't get to play with my friends in the kitchen anymore. It's not the end of the world. I don't put extra stress on myself. Part of me was intimidated, that I had no idea, but it was also freeing because I can let go, let lose, and whatever I'm told to do we all have to do.?

Since Levitt became a fan favourite on the GCBS, he's had many opportunities to hone his craft.

Not only was he invited back by CBC to be a part of a GCBS holiday special, locally he's used his bakes to support worthy causes, including GranAurora, a branch of The Stephen Lewis Foundation, which supports grandmothers raising their orphaned grandchildren in many parts of Africa.

He still gets a kick when people come up to him on the street or even at the gym to share baking stories, and the power of food to bring people together has only been underscored.

?I play hockey twice a week and when I was on The GCBS, they used to say to me quite often, ?I can't believe I am watching a baking show on Sundays when I would normally watch football,? he recalls with a laugh. ?When I was finally able to reveal last Wednesday right before we played, I said, ?I hate to break it to you, but you're going to be missing part of Monday Night Football this Monday!

?There can't be a better place to spend an hour.?

To spend an hour with the Levitt and the Holiday Baking Championship, tune into Food Network Mondays at 8 p.m.

By Brock Weir