



# Oklahoma Barbecue

The cooks and restaurants that make us great

By NATALIE MIKLES  
World Scene Writer



## Mike and Debbie Davis

**Team:** Lotta Bull BBQ in Marietta

**Secret:** Cooking every weekend. Mike and Debbie cook a staggering 40 contests a year — and they cook the same meat the same way every time.

**On Oklahoma 'cue:** "In Oklahoma, we still use a wood-fire pit. A lot of people have gone to gas or electric. But stick burning, real wood, makes all the difference."

**A**t the beginning of every contest, behind a haze of pit smoke, competition barbecue cooks check out their competitors.

And every time an Oklahoma barbecuer rolls up, cooks squirm.

Any one of them — Twin Oak Smokin Crew, Buffalo's BBQ, Lotta Bull — could take the grand championship.

Already this year, Bart Clarke's Twin Oak Smokin Crew out of Stillwater has won grand championships in three out of the four contests he's entered.

"And that's not just a hometown deal," said Merl Whitebook. "He won contests from New Mexico to Kansas City to Enid."

Whitebook would know. As a certified Kansas City Barbeque Society judge, Whitebook has tasted the best of the best. He knows good barbecue, and he knows that Oklahoma's is among the best.

"The level of competition in Oklahoma is unlike anywhere else. We've raised the bar," he said.

## Competitions and checkered tablecloths

Maybe you're not surprised that Oklahoma is home to the top cooks in the country. After all, some of the best barbecue restaurants are right here.

David Gelin, author of the book "BBQ Joints," told us in a phone interview from his home in Atlanta that Oklahomans have some of the highest barbecue standards he's seen.

"You could put any one of them up against some of the barbecue joints in the Northeast," he said.

Here, barbecue doesn't mean grilling. It means smoking — low and slow over seasoned wood. A good rub improves the flavor, and a tangy-sweet sauce is a nice complement. But we'll take our sauce on the side, thank you. In Oklahoma, barbecue cooks, whether in competitions or in restaurants, are judged by their meat — not a sticky rib, brisket or pork butt drowned in sauce.

Ribs are served sauce-free at Elmer's on Peoria. You don't need sauce for these ribs. The Tulsa barbecue institution Wilson's takes it a step further, declaring — "You need no teeth to eat our beef." That's just how tender it is.

So consider yourself lucky to be just miles from some of the best restaurants and competition-style barbecue in America. Each month, from now until the end of fall, you can find a weekend where competition cooks are doing their barbecue thing. Maybe you'll catch the fever and decide to compete. Remember, if you're from Oklahoma, it's in your blood — you're already ahead of the pack.

Every spring, dozens of Oklahoma barbecue cooks fire up their cookers and travel across the country hoping to pick up enough grand championship titles to make them the best. Among them are an elite few — cooks who have won coveted and prestigious national and world championships.

These are the top dogs — the guys who rack up the points through the Kansas City Barbeque Society system — and they're all Oklahomans.

Natalie Mikles 581-8486  
natalie.mikles@tulsaworld.com



## Bart Clarke

**Team:** Twin Oak Smokin Crew of Stillwater

**Secret:** 30-inch Horizon crew smoker and secret blend of rub and sauce

**On Oklahoma 'cue:** "I think we have a lot of people trying to figure out what we're doing here in Oklahoma — why our guys are so good."



## David Boska

**Team:** Butcher BBQ

**Secret:** Taking care of the little things — properly trimming the meat, prepping the meat the same way every time, recognizing the way the humidity will impact the cooking process.

**On Oklahoma 'cue:** "If you're placing here in Oklahoma, you can compete against anybody in the nation. That's a fact. It's top of the world right here."



## Donny Teel

**Team:** Buffalo's BBQ of Sperry

**Secret:** A great barbecue palate. His license plate says, "Never trust a skinny cook."

**On Oklahoma 'cue:** "Everybody you talk to talks about Texas barbecue or Kansas City barbecue. Picture it like a sandwich. Texas is the bread. Kansas City is the bread. And all the good stuff is in Oklahoma."

Find out more about Teel's latest venture and where you can taste his winning barbecue in next week's Tulsa World.



## Paul Schatte

**Team:** Head Country II of Ponca City

**Secret:** Head Country barbecue sauce, seasoning and marinade in competition. Takes the time to pick quality meat and has mastered cooking on his equipment.

**On Oklahoma 'cue:** "In the 19 years that Jack Daniels has hosted the World Championship, teams from Oklahoma have brought that title home four times. That's very strong. To date Head Country is the only competition team to win the American Royal Invitational and the Jack Daniels World Championship. It is a joy for me to see others be successful also. I would like to see the barbecue pit bring family and friends closer together like it did when I was a kid."