



Iron Fork Victory

This year's [Iron Fork battle](#) was one of the most competitive in the seven-year history of the event. The fighting chefs were Matt Bolus of The 404 Kitchen, Chris Carter and James Peisker of Porter Road Butcher, Kristen Gregory of Firefly Grille, and Hal Holden-Bache of Lockeland Table. Bolus, Gregory and Holden-Bache each had sous chefs assisting; Carter and Peisker didn't get a sous because they were competing as a duo. Bites' Chris Chamberlain was one of the judges, and he says scant points separated the four teams when the judges' scores were tabulated. And all four dishes were extraordinarily delicious, prepared with impeccable technique despite the chefs' challenges of cooking to beat the clock, not in a professional kitchen, but at makeshift stations set up inside the venue, the Commodore Ballroom at Vanderbilt. Then there's the matter of the secret ingredient.

Every year the chefs face a curveball: The event's presenting sponsor, US Foods, provides the bounty of produce used in the battle and selects a surprise ingredient that's announced just before cooking begins. This year it was kale, a gorgeous ingredient that requires a deft touch. But all four teams nailed it when it came to coaxing bright, fresh and enticing flavors out of kale. [Check out the pictures.](#) In the end, judges awarded the trophy to Holden-Bache and his sous chef, Danny Boston Bua, for rack of lamb with potato-and-kale hash, a kale-and-pickled-grape salad, and kale verde. Meanwhile more than 20 restaurants, plus a number of beverage purveyors, handed out samples to the avid spectators. Some of Bites' favorites: duck hash with quail egg from Cafe Fundamental; pickled beet salad from chef Laura Wilson of the Grow Local Kitchen at the Nashville Farmers' Market; dim sum dumplings from Lucky Bamboo; pad Thai from Ginger Thai; mango ceviche from Boca Loca Cantina; and duck-fat caramels from Olive and Sinclair.