



Emma McDougall is the Communications and Administration Co-ordinator of the NZSCA.

First timers fly high

Emma McDougall of the NZSCA discovers that anything's possible when you believe, just ask first-time New Zealand Barista Championship competitor and now winner, Honoka Kawashima.

New Zealand has a new Barista Champion. Honoka Kawashima of Frank's Coffee in Wellington won the Meadow Fresh NZ title, which took place from 25 to 26 March at Whirinaki Whare Toanga, Upper Hutt, Wellington.

"Coffee gives a connection," Honoka said in her routine. It was her first time competing on the NZ stage. Honoka took home the winner's trophy and \$2000 for being the Best Newcomer, awarded to the highest placed competitor who hadn't competed at a Barista Championship before. Honoka also won the prize and trophy for Most Outstanding Milk Beverage. Honoka had previously placed third place in the 2022 Meadow Fresh NZ Latte Art Championship. It just goes to show that a newcomer can win – in more ways than one.

Honoka credits "support from the Wellington crew" for helping her win, including Logan Collinge; five-times competitor himself; and her boss, Frank Hsu from Frank's Coffee, who roasted her coffee and is no stranger to both sides of the competition stage.

Mike Tan of Meebz Coffee Roasters in Auckland was runner up after a break from competing, and Jenny Kim of Atomic Coffee Roasters placed third.

Back stage, Honoka says it was a "very warm atmosphere, respectful, and professional. The competitors showed a high level". "All the competitors must have gone through a lot of difficulties and I could feel that any of us could have won this championship. Everyone brings a unique approach to the championship, and that inspired me a lot," she said.

Honoka spent six months developing her routine. It consisted of a milk-based coffee, an espresso, and a signature drink with notes of strawberry yogurt, hibiscus, pink grapefruit and an orange peel aftertaste.



Honoka Kawashima is the 2023 New Zealand Barista Champion.

Honoka's music playlist deliberately complimented the connection she made in her routine, featuring *Here comes the Sun* by The Beatles, *Dancing in the Moonlight* by Toploader, *What Makes You Beautiful* by One Direction, *Isn't She Lovely* by Stevie Wonder, and *You've got a friend in me* thanks to Rex Orange County.

In each of her courses, Honoka used a lactic washed process coffee, produced by Luis Anibal Calderon from Acevedo, Huila region, in Colombia. The concept she wanted to get across was the need to make complicated information on the coffee simpler, and more approachable. "I wanted to share that all the coffee has their different unique characters just like us," she said.

For the milk-based round, Honoka used Meadow Fresh, 50 per cent freeze distilled cow's milk. This created a rich texture, reminiscent of melted ice cream. By combining this higher fat milk, Honoka says the coffee's sweetness was enhanced. The flavour notes included strawberry ice cream, caramel, with a chocolate milkshake aftertaste.

Honoka remembers her first year in the industry with "fear and excitement".

Her advice for those looking to compete in the future, is to not wait for the "right" time to compete.

"I always wanted to compete in a Barista Championship, but I was freaked out to see

the super high-level performances every year. I didn't have the courage to enter the championship because I didn't want to be embarrassed. Now that I think of it, I should have competed earlier as there has been so much to learn as a barista," she says. "Luckily, I got a really good team from all over in Wellington, and I say out loud that it is the most important part – that you find a good team because we do [this] together."

Honoka has massive support from her partner Tsubasa Nico Nozaki, also a head barista and keen latte art competitor. She would like to thank the Wellington coffee community, team Mojo coffee, and Flight Coffee, especially Luise Metelka, "one of her reasons that made me feel that I want to be in the industry". Thanks also to Dove Chen from Grey Roasting Co who helped Honoka on competition day, green bean supplier Cofinet, farmer Luis Anibal Calderon, and her lovely customers.

"I want to be the barista that brightens your day," Honoka said in her routine.

I think most people watching her routine would agree she's already doing that.

Honoka will compete in the 2024 World Barista Championship in South Korea. **E**



For more information on the New Zealand Specialty Coffee Association, or to join, visit www.nzscA.org

Image: ATPhoto, Andrew Turner