2027

JUDGING HANDBOOK

JUDGING SESSIONS

DAY 1:
FRIDAY 1/29/27
5:00 PM - 8:00 PM
Including judges orientation and calibration beer, 1-2 potential flights of judging and welcome reception

DAY 2:
SATURDAY 1/30/27
8:00 AM - 5:00 PM
+ off-site evening event TBA

DAY 3:
SUNDAY 1/31/27
10:00 AM - 2:00 PM

All times are preliminary. Hours for each day may shift slightly depending on the number of entries/category sizes and will be finalized after registration closes.

LOCATION INFO

JUDGING VENUE
Holiday Inn Town Lake
20 N Interstate Hwy 35
Austin, TX 78701

AWARDS
Saturday 2/20/27
Double Tree by Hilton
Hotel Austin

ABOUT THE COMPETITION



TEXAS CRAFT BREWERS CUP is the premiere professional beer competition run and organized by the Texas Craft Brewers Guild to showcase the outstanding quality and variety of Texas craft beer and the brewers who make them.

TCBC is excited to welcome qualified, passionate individuals to join the competition's sixth year judging roster!

COMPETITION STRUCTURE

- Each AM and PM session consists of 2-3 rounds of judging, with 15-20 minute breaks between rounds and a break for lunch.
- For each round, judges work in teams of three to evaluate a flight of 6-10 beers, depending on the size of the category and round.
- To the extent possible, teams will remain the same for each session. Changes may be made to avoid conflicts of interest (i.e. Judges sitting in on categories in which they are entered).
- Each team has a Lead Judge; someone with significant experience judging at other national competitions. The lead judge is responsible for facilitating the decision-making process, building consensus and recording the feedback results in the competition's cloud-based judging application. Their vote/opinion holds the same weight as the other judges.
- Teams will select 3 beers, unless instructed otherwise, from each flight to move on to the next round. In the medal round, the judges will select the Gold, Silver and Bronze medal-winning beers from the beers in the flight.



THINGS TO BRING

FULLY CHARGED ELECTRONIC DEVICE

Scoring is conducted digitally, so judges should make sure to bring a laptop or tablet. Judging can also be conducted via smart phone, but a laptop or tablet is recommended to improve the speed/ease of judging. **Please make sure your device is up-to-date on all software updates and logged in to your Beer Awards Platform (BAP) account** to help reduce time delays due to technology issues. If this is your first year judging, an invitation to create a new BAP account will be sent to you prior to the competition.

CHARGERS & POWER BANKS

Along with your fully charged device, please make sure to bring your charger--bonus points if you have a portable power bank. We will have outlets throughout the room and the Guild will have a few loaner iPads and chargers but we appreciate folks bringing their own as we won't have enough to go around.

AN EXTRA LAYER & OTHER ITEMS FOR PERSONAL COMFORT

It might be 30 degrees or 80 degrees depending on what the Texas winter weather decides to do. Regardless of the outdoor temp, plan to bring an extra jacket/sweater...especially if you're the "gets chilly in conference centers" type. Additionally, some judges opt to wear ear buds or headphones to help them concentrate. Please bring what you need to support a positive judging experience.

A GOOD BOOK

Beer competitions can be a bit 'hurry up and wait.' We recommend bringing a good book, audio book, crossword puzzle, etc. in case you have some down time between judging rounds. This may be particularly true as we move into Sunday and beers advancing to medal rounds are determined in real time.

NOT ALLOWED

FOOD / COFFEE

Odors and flavors from food can quickly disrupt your palate and others' ability to judge beer. Eating food or drinking coffee during judging is strongly discouraged, and bringing either to the judge table is prohibited.

CELL PHONE USAGE

While you will need your laptop, tablet, or phone to access evaluation forms while judging, we ask you to please refrain from using your phone while at the judging table for any other purpose (texting, checking emails, scrolling social media, etc.).

PERFUME/COLOGNE

Please refrain from wearing scented deodorants, perfumes, or colognes. These types of odors can easily distract while judging.

SMOKE OF ALL TYPES

Tobacco, marijuana and e-cig/vape use during judging hours is **STRICTLY PROHIBITED**. Judges who smell of smoke will be asked to leave for the duration of that judge session.



TABLE ETIQUETTE

The Texas Craft Brewers Cup strives to recognize the vast array of beer styles brewed commercially in the state of Texas while limiting overall medal categories to maintain the TCBC's competitiveness and the prestige of each medal win. The competition will employ rigorous judging standards to award beers based on their exceptional quality. To that end, the planning committee of the TCBC included both BJCP and GABF sub-styles in the medal categories. Judges should evaluate beers using industry-accepted understandings of each style, and beers that win medals should fit squarely within the sub-style guidelines the brewer chooses within each category.

- Judges should regularly reference GABF and BJCP style guidelines, which are displayed in the electronic judging system the judges use, in an effort to better inform themselves about the technical aspects of the beers in front of them. The planning committee has strived to eliminate substantial overlap amongst the sub-styles identified within each category while still allowing brewers flexibility in picking the appropriate sub-style for their entries. Additionally, the planning committee defined a small number of their own sub-styles and one original category to stay current with modern and emerging style trends. For example, in the Decadent Beer category, instead of containing strict style guidelines, these beers will be judged for their ability to mimic the flavors of the pastries, desserts, or fruit for which they are named. Also considered will be the drinkability of the beer, its novelty and balance as well as lack of flaws and infection.

- In certain categories, additional information may be provided to better understand the entry (e.g. base beer, fruit addition, etc.). All of the information is provided directly from the brewers during registration.



TABLE ETIQUETTE CONT.

- Unless it is typical of the style, technical flaws such as diacetyl, acetaldehyde, sulfur, acetone, astringency, unpleasant bitterness, oxidation, autolysis and DMS should not be present, even at low levels, in winning beers.

- While it is impossible to deny personal preference entirely, it is important to recognize your biases and not allow them to color your decisions or evaluation form comments as a judge. For example, if you are judging Belgian & Farmhouse Ales and have a strong preference for the Witbier sub-style over the Biere de Gardes sub-style, it is important to **not let that preference sway your opinion** of the beers on the table or incorporate notes that indicate your personal preferences for the styles or sub-styles. (I. E. scoresheet comments like "*I like to see* my Biere de Gardes with a bit more...")

- This is a blind competition. All beers are poured in the cellar and presented to the judges with an anonymized sample code in order to maintain the integrity of the competition. To maintain the anonymity of the beers, please **refrain from speculating** as to what any beer on the table might be; this is particularly true of beers in the flavored and specialty categories where anonymity can be harder to maintain.

- All decisions by the table need to be built by consensus; **no one judge should expect that their opinion is more right than anyone else's at the table**, and it's important to approach the judges' conversations with open-mindedness and an eye towards unanimity.



FEEDBACK PROCESS

- Each round is allotted one hour for judging. To stay on schedule, **we require expedient judging**; please be mindful of the time your team is taking in each round and stick to your allotted hour!

- Before the beers are served, the Lead Judge should review the style guidelines for the category with the other judges at the table. When the beers are served, the Lead Judge will go over any specialty information provided about the beers.

- In specialty beer categories, judges should request additional information about any ingredients or processes that they are unfamiliar with BEFORE beginning the judging and discussion of the beers in front of them.

- The Texas Craft Brewers Cup uses electronic scoresheets that are integrated into our cloud-based competition management system. You will be able to access the scoresheets for each round by using your Beer Awards Platform account. While **you will need your a laptop, tablet, or phone to access the scoresheets**, we ask that you use these devices for recording your impressions of the beers and not for any other activities while at the judging table.

- When beers are served, judges should **evaluate their flight of beers individually and enter the appropriate data in the electronic scoresheet for each beer.** Judges should taste through the full flight of beers in front of them before starting to discuss the beers amongst the team. A staggered/randomized tasting order between judges at the table is encouraged.

- Judges will move through the beers on a flight at different speeds. During the silent portion of each round, please respect other judges' time. **Do not start discussing the beers until everyone has finished tasting and filling out their score sheet.** This portion of tasting should take no more than 30 minutes of the allotted hour.

- During the conversation period, the judges should determine the top 3 beers on the table, and in the case of a medal round, identify the Gold, Silver, and Bronze medal winners.

- It is essential that every beer on the flight be discussed by the judge panel.

- Once the conversation is completed, the Lead Judge will go through each beer with the other judges and enter the judging results in our electronic judging application.



AWARDING MEDALS

- Three medals should be awarded in each category. There can be no ties or honorable mentions. Judges are ***strongly*** encouraged to award all medals.

- Winning beers should be free of technical flaws. **Judges should give preference to a well constructed, balanced beer that is slightly "out of style" over a beer that is "to style" but shows technical flaws.**

- Medalists will be announced at the Texas Craft Brewers Cup Awards ceremony immediately following the Texas Craft Brewers Guild Annual Meeting on Saturday, February 20 at the DoubleTree by Hilton Hotel Austin.

Judges will each receive one free ticket the TCBC Awards Ceremony *OR* an equivalent value discount off of full annual meeting registration (if employed by a current TCBG member business or organization that's eligible to attend the meeting). Please look out for a thank you email after the conclusion of judging weekend--it will contain a link to a short form you will submit in order to request your complimentary ticket or discount.



LEAD JUDGE RESPONSIBILITIES

- At the beginning of each session, Leads should make sure that all of the judges at the table are introduced. They should also provide an additional check to ensure that no judge at the table has an entry in the category the team is about to taste.

- Leads are responsible for making sure that the table has all of the information necessary to judge the beers including entry information and table identification numbers.

- Leads are responsible for guiding and facilitating the entire conversation about the beers, including helping build consensus around whether to eliminate or keep certain beers.

- In case of strong disagreements, the Lead can decide to use techniques such as matrixing to help determine the group's decision. Similarly, the Lead may ask the steward for a blind re-pour.

At the end of each round, the Lead must ensure the correct beers are advanced in BAP, our electronic judging system. In a medal round, the Lead should sign off on the final results for each category.



MEDAL ROUNDS

Most judges will participate in a number of medal rounds which will primarily occur on Saturday and/or Sunday of the judging weekend. Medal rounds require some additional considerations in both the process and spirit of judging.

- Medal round judges should not undo or undermine the work of the previous judges. One of the great luxuries of judging a medal round is that you--along with a team of peers--get to dig deep and discuss the aesthetic merits of beers and not just the technical ones. As a courtesy to your fellow brewers and judges, it should be a safe assumption that all of the beers that make it to a medal round, particularly in categories with 3 rounds of judging, have been vetted enough that they all fit within the category. Medal round judges don't need to rehash the conversation of whether a beer 'belongs at the table' in these flights.

- Spirited argument about beer quality, composition, and technical accomplishment is part of the fun of medal rounds, but judges still need to work towards unanimity and consensus. Defend the beers that you love and find deserving, but recognize when you are in the minority and allow the beers that please the most palates at the table to rise to the top.

- Judges should be mindful of intensity and preference bias, as well as palate fatigue, at all times, but especially in medal rounds.

- Be sure that you are employing best practices about randomizing your tasting order, asking whether there is any intensity bias at work, and returning to beers as they sit on the table.



COMPETITION PLANNING TEAM

JUDGING COORDINATOR
Charles Vallhonrat - Former Texas Craft Brewers Guild Executive Director (Retired)

TEXAS CRAFT BREWERS GUILD STAFF
Caroline Wallace - Executive Director
Travis Bailey - Government Affairs Associate
Sheila Garcia - Education & Events Manager
Sarah Beckmann - Membership Coordinator

JUDGING/CATEGORY DEVELOPMENT WORKING GROUP
Will Jaquiss - Meanwhile Brewing (Austin)
Andrew Genitempo - St Elmo Brewing (Austin)
Aaron Inkrott - Saint Arnold Brewing Company (Houston)

AND OVERALL DIRECTION FROM OUR PUBLIC RELATIONS & MARKETING COMMITTEE
Lennie Ambrose - Saint Arnold Brewing Company (Houston)
Adriane Hodges - Bold Republic Brewing Company (Temple)
Chris Troutman - Good Line Beer Co. (Lubbock)
Craig Bradley - Vector Brewing (Dallas)
Charday VanOrstrand - Galveston Island Brewing (Galveston)
Kaelin Evans - Southern Roots Brewing (Waco/Waxahatchie/Killeen)

*Special thanks to **Ben Edmunds** and the **Oregon Beer Awards** for allowing the Texas Craft Brewers Cup to leverage a lot of the great information developed for OBA judges for this handbook. Additional thanks to the good folks behind the **Great American Beer Festival**, the **North Carolina Brewers' Cup**, and the **New York State Craft Beer Competition** for generosity with their time, experience, and wisdom!*