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BY GEORGE DICKIE

It's a better class of 'Worst Cooks in America' as Food Network series returns

Newbie co-hosts on Food Network's "Worst Cooks in America" are often shocked by the ineptitude of its contestants. After all, it takes a special kind of incompetence to not know how to boil water or operate a can opener.

Returning host Anne Burrell finds the reactions entertaining. This season, Michael Symon was the unsuspecting party.

"It's one of my favorite things ever on the first day," Burrell explains, "when I have a new co-host and they see just how bad these people really are, and they look at me and they're like, 'Oh my God! Is this a joke?' And I'm like, 'No, this is the real deal.' And it just cracks me up every time because ... they are just absolutely shocked and they're like, 'What did I get in for?' Like they think that they're mentally prepared for it and we try to tell them and it really is quite amazing."

Premiering Sunday, April 25 (and also streaming on discovery+), the new six-episode "Worst Cooks" season titled "Best of the Worst" brings back fan favorites from seasons past to try again at transforming from kitchen disasters to something resembling a culinary master. Burrell and Symon ("Burgers, Brew and 'Que") lead red and blue teams through a boot camp designed

to improve contestants' skills, then put them through a series of challenges that showcase what they've learned. The winner gets a \$25,000 grand prize.

Because this is not their first time, the would-be chefs are tasked with challenges that are on a slightly higher level than they would be for the rookies. Here, they include a Vegas-themed game show, a camp cookout where stoves and ovens are off limits and a "tour de petit four" dessert relay race.

And there is plenty of pressure as Burrell and Symon will show their recruits a technique such as how to slice an onion, once, and then require them to repeat it on camera during competition – with all the distractions that would imply. While some fail, others catch on and still others wind up embracing skills that serve them elsewhere in life.

"Especially during the pandemic when everyone was on lockdown," Burrell notes, "I heard from a lot of past recruits saying, 'Oh my gosh! Thank God for "Worst Cooks," because now during the pandemic I can actually cook at home. I don't know what I would have done if I hadn't had that.'"



Michael Symon and Anne Burrell

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