

UNICEF Tap Project: The Other 'Top Chef Masters' Winner

BY DAVID BOIS | FRIDAY, JUNE 11, 2010 3:21 PM ET

Marcus Samuelsson's selection as Top Chef Master is not just a personal victory, but a huge win for safe drinking water where it's so badly needed as well.

Fans of the Bravo cooking competition show *Top Chef Masters* already know that the world class food crafted to express the talent and creativity of the competing chefs took center stage.

As with last year's inaugural season, Season 2 gathered a roster of chefs well-known and admired for their gifts and their presence at the top of the culinary arts world. But in addition to seeking the additional accolade that being crowned Top Chef Master would deliver, the panel of competitors were going for a big cash prize: not to keep for themselves, but to earn the \$100,000 top prize for the charity of their choice.

Wednesday's finale, for which the initial field of 22 chefs had been whittled down to a trio of finalists, culminated in the crowning of **Marcus Samuelsson**.

In addition to wowing the judges with his artistry and charming viewers with his warm smile and affable demeanor, Samuelsson carries a fascinating personal story. Born in Ethiopia and raised in Sweden, Samuelsson pursued culinary studies and apprenticeships in Sweden, Switzerland and Austria prior to making his way to the US where he rapidly gained attention for his work at New York City's Aquavit. A James Beard Best New York Chef award winner and the youngest chef to have been awarded two three-star ratings by The New York Times, Samuelsson has served as guest chef for an Obama White House state dinner and is the author of the book *New American Table*, which is excerpted on at the Top Chef Masters website.

But also coming out on top right alongside him is the UNICEF Tap Project, Samuelsson's charity of choice.

Launched in 2007 as a partnership between the United Nations humanitarian aid organization and participating restaurants, Tap Project raises money through asking diners to pay \$1 for the water that they might otherwise expect to be complementary. All collected funds raised through diner donations go to the development and improvement of projects that improve access to safe, clean drinking water around the world.

With the reduction in illness and death from water-borne disease, especially among the world's children, as a top Tap Project priority, the project's efforts reach more than 100 nations with special attention to the greatest level of need in such particular nations as Togo, Central African Republic, Vietnam and Guatemala. Responding to the devastation in Haiti resulting from the recent earthquake also figures prominently in the Tap Project's outreach.

For those who care about access to safe drinking water around the world, this week's victory is an especially delicious one.

