RICHARD ROSENDALE knows life can change in an instant. That was the case for him Sunday, Jan. 29, 2012, as the lights shone bright and cameras flashed following the announcement that he would represent the United States in the 2013 Bocuse d’Or World Cuisine Contest in Lyon, France, in January 2013. A determined and accomplished chef, Rosendale, a longtime American Culinary Federation (ACF) member, may be only 36, but he has the résumé of a veteran, having achieved many career milestones early in life. In 2005, he won the title of U.S.A.’s Chef of the Year™, he was a member of ACF Culinary Team USA twice, serving as captain in 2008, and has received more than 45 national and international medals. In 2010, he became one of only 66 chefs in the nation who hold the title of Certified Master Chef® (CMC®). Once an apprentice at The Greenbrier, a National Historic Landmark in White Sulphur Springs, W.Va., Rosendale has worked in some of the country’s finest kitchens, owned his own restaurant in Columbus, Ohio, and now serves as The Greenbrier’s executive chef.

All these experiences prepared him for the USA finals of the Bocuse d’Or, held at The Culinary Institute of America (CIA), Hyde Park, N.Y. At the competition, four finalists had five and a half hours to prepare two protein platters—one featuring River & Glen Hookers cod and one using D’Artagnan chicken—and three intricate garnishes. The format will be the same for the global competition in 2013 where Rosendale will face off against the world’s best chefs from 23 other countries.

Fresh off the high of a national victory, we spoke with Rosendale about how each step of his career has prepared him for this journey, what the judges said about his dishes and what good luck charm he will carry with him to France.

In 2008, you won a silver medal in the Bocuse d’Or USA finals. What does winning the right to represent the U.S. in France mean for you and your career? It is something that has been a dream of mine for a long time. Advancing in tryouts Sunday was a blend of a sense of accomplishment and general excitement. That is ultimately why I got into this to begin with. I want to go to France, and I want to compete successfully. I want to do what no American has ever done—to stand on that podium and bring home the gold medal.
You’ve competed internationally before with ACF Culinary Team USA. What lessons have you learned that you will carry with you to this competition?  

There is no question that being a member of ACF Culinary Team USA has tremendously contributed to my depth of knowledge and skills. I utilized these skills a lot even going through tryouts. I’ll certainly use them moving forward to Lyon. Had I not gone through the whole “culinary Olympics” experience, I don’t feel like I’d be where I am today.

So many things that I have learned in the culinary competition arena, such as discipline, organizational skills and dealing with high-stress situations, are principles that I apply every single day at work and in my day-to-day routine. These kinds of competitions can create a lot of anxiety, but I deal with it well because I’ve done so for so long.

What type of feedback did you receive from the judges about your dishes? The judges said that everything was executed really nicely. We did some ambitious preparation. The food at the Bocuse d’Or is complicated from a technique and craftsmanship standpoint, but flavor is the majority of points [40]. Presentation is another 20 points. We had of lot of rave reviews of the cod and chicken, but they also commented on how organized, focused and disciplined we were.

You’re a longtime ACF member and competitor. How did the experience of earning the title of Certified Master Chef® help prepare you for this level of competition? The [Certified] Master Chef exam is such a rigorous cooking exam. Many of the same principles they use during that type of exam are applicable in a competition setting such as the Bocuse d’Or. A good friend of mine, Daniel Scannell, CMC®, was my coach for the Bocuse d’Or USA tryouts, and he also went through the exam. I have found that many of the things I learned when I was on the team [ACF Culinary Team USA] were things that I used during the certification exam, and the exam prep made me deal with putting food out for the Bocuse d’Or.

We’re getting ready to compete against the best chefs in the world. We’re going to Brussels in March to observe the European finals so we can study the competitors. I will be working with such an incredible team of chefs—Thomas Keller, Jérôme Bocuse, Gavin Kaysen, Daniel Boulud, Grant Achatz and Gabriel Kreuther. Honestly, after the awards were given, my entire life changed in an instant.

What advice would you share with students who look at your career and admire all you have accomplished at such a young age? The day before the competition, my mom gave me a magnet. I told her I appreciated it, but I didn’t really think anything of it. It was kind of neat—I set up the kitchen the night before the competition and, as I was getting ready to leave, I reached in my pocket and found the magnet. It is a quote from Pablo Picasso that says, “Everything you can imagine is real.” I put it on the stove. The next day during the competition I looked at it a few times. I’m going to take it with me to Lyon.

Students need to aspire to do great things, whatever that may be. As long as you work hard and you’re passionate about your work, you can succeed.