



'We wish Oakfired competitor, Paul Jackson every success in the AVPN international Pizza Olympics in Naples from 8-10 July. A special Olympic menu will run in restaurant during the competition period'

Beccles Olympian Heads to Naples With Gold Postbox in His Sights

The Olympics are arriving a year early for Beccles, with a dedicated 'pizzathlete' heading to Naples, seeking to bag gold for the Suffolk town by taking on the best in the world.

Paul Jackson, co-owner and extraordinarily talented 'pizzaiolo' at Oakfired at the Royal Oak in Ravensmere, Beccles, will be potentially the only British pizza maker representing the country at the culinary 'Pizza Olympics' in Naples, taking place from July 8-10.

Paul has been in training and latterly limbering up beside the acclaimed eatery's wood-fired Valoriani oven – as recommended by the organisers of the Pizza Olympics, the fastidious AVPN (Associazione Vera Pizza Napoletana), due to being an oven capable of cooking authentic Neapolitan pizza.

The AVPN is the organiser of the prestigious Pizza Olympics, for which medals are up for grabs in five different 'events'. These are the 'Vera Pizza Napoletana' category, plus categories for Gourmet, Gluten-free, Deep-fried Pizza and Mastunicola - the very first pizza ever produced in the home of pizza.

Paul will compete in the Vera Pizza Napoletana category, which rewards skills in the making and cooking of the seemingly simple, yet highly complicated to create to AVPN standards, Margherita pizza. He will also be taking on all-comers in the 'Gourmet' pizza category, perhaps showcasing one of the Gourmet pizza specialities that have graced the Oakfired menu this year.

The dedicated pizza chef will be facing up to the culinary might of the very best pizza makers in the world, as only AVPN-accredited eateries can compete in the five Pizza Olympics categories. The AVPN Pizza Olympics are focused on excellence and Oakfired may well be the first-ever British entrant.

Oakfired at the Royal Oak's entry eligibility became assured when it was recognised in autumn 2018 as only the third British eatery, and 743rd worldwide, to be adjudged capable of cooking Neapolitan pizza to the exacting required standards of the AVPN, who are headquartered in the city that was the birthplace of pizza, Naples. Whilst there are only 750 worldwide restaurants eligible to compete, that still means stiff competition for the Beccles pizzeria owner.

Commenting on Paul Jackson's forthcoming challenge, Paul Williams, fellow co-owner of Oakfired says: "This is an amazing thing for both Britain and the county of Suffolk, which surely never imagined having a chef that could compete in the very tough Pizza Olympics, against not just the best in Italy, but the finest pizza chefs worldwide. Oakfired is extremely proud to be part of this event and hopes to bring it home for Suffolk. Football could be coming home with the Lionesses, but pizza spoils could also be coming home with Paul Jackson.

"We hope the whole of Suffolk will get behind us and that county support will help propel Paul over the winner's line. Whatever the result, this pursuit of glory will help deliver even greater pizza excellence to our customers in the months to come, as new ideas and approaches are bound to be observed in Naples and taken on board. Even if it isn't this year, we are sure there will come a time when we bring back Olympic 'gold'. Of course, if we do it this year, we would hope to see Beccles creating a gold postbox, in Paul's honour!"

Paul Jackson is staying typically calm and practising his skills. He says: "The Margherita category will be about producing the finest tomato and cheese pizza possible, so there is little room for improvisation and it will be all about translating the AVPN's stringent guidelines on the cooking of a Margherita pizza. When it comes to the Gourmet category, I will have much more room to manoeuvre and unleash my ideas and flavours. What I will cook is yet to be revealed."