

Glenview Student is a ‘Chopped Junior’

by Emily Spectre • April 12, 2017

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Jake Dizon, a Glenview resident and seventh grade student at Marie Murphy Middle School, is a contestant on Food Network’s “Chopped Junior.”

Jake Dizon, a seventh grader at Marie Murphy Middle School, prefers the savory over the sweet when it comes to cooking, an interest he’s been developing since he was in preschool.

“When it comes down to it, I am more of a savories person,” Dizon told *DailyNorthShore*.

The Glenview resident had an opportunity to put his culinary skills to the test as a contestant on the television show “Chopped Junior,” which will air on April 18 at 7 p.m, CDT, on Food Network.

Dizon was inspired after watching other kids try out dishes on television competitions that looked pretty cool. “I just thought hey, why don’t I try that?” he said. So Dizon filled out an application on the Food Network website, and passed a series of hurdles that included a few interviews, before being accepted onto the show.

In fall 2016, Dizon traveled to New York and spent an entire day filming. “Chopped Junior” is a reality cooking show where four contestants between the ages of 9 and 15 compete for a chance to win \$10,000. The challenge is to take unique ingredients — which the contestants see for the first time on the show — and prepare a dish critiqued by a panel of judges. In the episode “Rescue Mission” where Dizon was a contestant, the challenge was getting creative with wasted left-over food, such as cheese rinds.

Dizon isn’t permitted to say who won the competition, or what the ingredients were specifically, but he did say the experience was challenging. He described the show as pretty intense, and nerve-racking at times, but well worth it. “It was probably the best experience of my life so far. It was really exciting, intense and I even made some friends,” he said. Dizon met other kids from across the country who share his passion for cooking, as well as television host Ted Allen and Barack Obama’s personal chef, Sam Kass, who was one of the judges.

On the show Dizon employed a strategy to quickly decide how to use the mystery ingredients. “It took a lot of planning, but using a system of rules I made up for cooking made it easier,” he said. Dizon essentially followed a mental checklist, quickly asking himself how he could potentially use each ingredient in a recipe, for example as a coating or a flavoring.

Leading up to the show, Dizon’s mother and a friend who is a chef helped him prepare by giving him practice challenges in the kitchen. Dizon would be given four ingredients he didn’t typically use in his cooking, such as cactus or bison, and he would come up with a new dish.

When he is not preparing for a cooking show, Dizon spends a lot of time trying out recipes in the kitchen. He said he usually cooks two or three times a week, helping out with dinner and coming up with unique twists to recipes he’s found either online or in cookbooks. His favorite meal to prepare is seared sirloin steak served with a shiitake mushroom cream sauce, rice pilaf and blanched broccoli.

Dizon’s mother and grandmother both enjoy cooking as well and spending time in the kitchen with them has been an inspiration. In particular, Dizon has learned some culinary tips from his Filipino-American grandmother, who was impressed by her grandson’s appearance on the show.

Moving forward, Dizon hopes to find more opportunities to develop his cooking skills through cooking classes and other extracurricular activities. Already he has taken cooking lessons from from Jen Karakosta, a Culinary Arts teacher at New Trier High School, and from Chef Austin Yancey, Executive Chef at Elite Personal Chefs in Chicago.

After his positive experience on television, Dizon encourages other kids his age who enjoy cooking to try out for the show. “If you are willing to put in the hard work and train, I would say go for it. But it has to be something