

It's 26 days until April 22, when the Newark Museum's 100-hour Centennial Celebration Marathon begins. Visit newarkmuseum.org.



Today's numerical artwork was created by Aiden Kashi, Daniel Teren, Arielle Werthaim and Rochelle Belfer from Shalom Torah Academy of Western Monmouth County, Morganville.

The Star-Ledger

malt madness

Two days, 4 brackets, 11 judges and countless cups — how would a dozen Jersey beers fare in our field of 64?

PULSE-QUICKENING action. Edge-of-seat suspense. Dramatic come-from-behind victories. The NCAA men's or women's basketball tournament? No — Malt Madness!

Our hopper if not happier version of March Madness had its share of sudsy surprises and frantic finishes, as our esteemed judges worked their way through our field of 64 beers, bracketed in four styles — lagers/pilsners; pale ales/IPAs; wheats and whites; stouts and porters. There were few lopsided victories, with many of the matchups decided by one-vote margins. The judges took their duties seriously. Well, most of the time anyway.

"If this dog was in a pound," one judge said of Flying Dog Old Scratch Amber Lager, "I'd adopt it."

"Get your nose in there; experience the beer," another said of an entry in

the stout category.

Hey, get your nose out of our beer! "Do the readers know we worked really hard at this?" wondered judge Marcia Sheldon of Scotch Plains.

They'll have to take our word for it, Marcia. Jersey beers did reasonably well. Climax's Hoffmann Helles won the lager/pilsner division, while another Climax beer, Hoffmann Hefeweizen, knocked off Samuel Adams Hefeweizen and Magic Hat Circus Boy in the wheats/whites category before being edged by Victory Sunrise Weissbier.

Coney Island Steel Hop Lager — its sword swallower-themed label was the tournament's best — was a sudsy Cinderella, racing past Cricket Hill East Coast Lager and Yuengling Traditional Lager before being ousted by Hoffmann Helles.

Biggest first-round shocker: Stone

Imperial Russian Stout, winner of our Suds Sweet 16 last year, upset by Arcadia Imperial Stout, from that little-known hops heaven, Battle Creek, Mich.

Best name? Hoppin' Frog B.O.R.I.S. The Crusher Oatmeal Imperial Stout. B.O.R.I.S., alas, was crushed in the second round by Oskar Blues Ten Fidy, the porter/stout winner.

BY PETER GENESE
STAR-LEDGER STAFF

Two toughest categories to judge? The pale ales/IPAs and porters/stouts. All the beers tasted good! We couldn't say the same for the lagers/pilsners, or wheats/whites. "Garbage-y aftertaste," one judge said of a wheat that shall go unnamed.

Below are the results of Malt Madness, with play-by-play action of the Sweet Sixteen and winners in each category.

Lagers/Pilsners



Coney Island Steel Hop Lager Shmaltz Brewing Co., Saratoga Springs, N.Y. coneyislandlager.com



Hoffmann Helles Lager Climax Brewing Co., Roselle Park, N.J. climaxbrewing.com



Flying Dog Old Scratch Amber Lager Flying Dog Brewery, Denver, Colo. flyingdogales.com



Brooklyn Pilsner The Brooklyn Brewery, Brooklyn, N.Y. brooklynbrewery.com

Pale Ales/IPAs



Boulder Mojo Risin' Double IPA Boulder Beer Co., Boulder, Colo. boulderbeer.com



Dogfish 60 Minute IPA Dogfish Head Craft Brewery, Milton, Del. dogfish.com



Troegs Pale Ale Troegs Brewing Co., Harrisburg, Pa. troegs.com



Southern Tier Unearthly IPA Southern Tier Brewing Co., Lakewood, N.Y. southern-tierbrewing.com

Lagers/Pilsners

Coney Island Steel Hop Lager

We love Coney Island, the beer and boardwalk, but the circus sideshow-labeled lager is no match for Jersey's own Hoffmann Helles. One judge admired its "floury finish." Fear the jug!

Hoffmann Helles Lager *

Flying Dog Old Scratch Amber Lager

Brooklyn Brewery makes some fine beers, but it's barking up the wrong tree, or beer barrel. Flying Dog, which two judges rated as their favorite beer in the entire field, wins easily, 10-1. Let this dog out of the six-pack and enjoy.

Brooklyn Pilsner

Hoffmann Helles Lager

One judge called it a "buzzer-beater," another said deciding between the two was just plain "tough." But our distinguished panelists, while fond of the Dog, were won over by the Jersey beer's smooth, slightly fruity finish. Who says you can't drink beer out of a jug?

Flying Dog Old Scratch Amber Lager

Hoffmann Helles Lager

So which beer is the best in the field of 64?

No easy answer. Of nine judges questioned in our exclusive Malt Madness Exit Poll, two chose Flying Dog Old Scratch Amber Lager as their favorite beer overall. Other overall favorites included Coney Island Steel Hop Lager, Oskar Blues Ten Fidy Imperial Stout, Hoffmann Helles Lager, Stone Pale Ale, Ommegang Witte, Hoppin' Frog B.O.R.I.S. The Crusher Oatmeal Imperial Stout and Founders Imperial Stout. What's your favorite beer? Post your comments at www.nj.com/homegarden/entertaining/

Wheats/Whites

Hoffmann Hefeweizen *

Victory's Prima Pils was a first-round fizzle in lagers/pilsners, but its Sunrise Weissbier knocked off Southern Tier Heavy Weizen, Ramstein Blonde and Hoffmann Hefeweizen to advance to the finals.

Victory Sunrise Weissbier

Allagash White

It was a slam dunk, all right — for Allagash. "This is beer royalty," one judge said reverentially. The pale-yellow, citrusy, slightly spicy Allagash — the pride of Portland, Maine — marches on.

Weyerbacher Slam Dunkel

Victory Sunrise Weissbier

Judges admired Victory's "bite" and "strong flavor," but in the end Allagash played Louisville to Victory's Siena. Close until the final few minutes, with Allagash pulling away. Must be something in the water up there — Allagash won our SuperBeer Bowl, a matchup between New York/New Jersey and New England beers, a year ago.

Allagash White

Allagash White

* Jersey brewed

Pale Ales/IPAs

Boulder Mojo Risin' Double IPA

Three of the four championship matchups were decided by 9-2 margins, and this was one of them. One judge, Paul Dodge of Morris Plains, was a major Mojo fan. "The combination of extra hops and malt made it rise above the rest," said Dodge, who owns the largest New Jersey beer can collection in the country. Mojo proves bolder, and better, than the rest.

Troegs Pale Ale

Boulder Mojo Risin' Double IPA

Mojo walloped Cricket Hill Hopnotic IPA and Sierra Nevada Torpedo Extra IPA in the first two rounds, and the Colorado beer, named after a line made famous by Jim Morrison, shows Delaware-based Dogfish the, uh, door.

Dogfish 60 Minute IPA

Troegs Pale Ale

It's Troegs, not Troggs, for you Wild Things out there. One judge called it a "thinking person's beer," and the judges agreed. The Pennsylvania pale edges the New York-based Southern Tier, 6-5.

Southern Tier Unearthly IPA

Porters/Stouts

Sierra Nevada Porter

A battle of literal heavy-weights. The tasty, toasty Sierra Nevada pours smooth, and will appeal to the porter-uninitiated. But Ten Fidy — looks like motor oil, tastes like a mega-malty chocolate milkshake/beer, sends the California porter packing. Resist the urge to pour it in your crankcase, and aim for your mouth instead. Marvelous.

Oskar Blues Ten Fidy Imperial Stout

Sierra Nevada Porter

The tournament director spent much of the competition seeing his favorite beers lose, and this was another example. Jah-Va, with its seductive chocolate/coffee, sweet/burnt flavors and overtones, is edged by the more mainstream Sierra Nevada. Malt Madness judging, unfortunately, is a democracy. Sierra Nevada moves on.

Southern Tier Jah-Va Imperial Coffee Stout

Green Flash Double Stout

The Flash is mashed by the deep, dark, delicious Ten Fidy, from Colorado. Oskar Blues calls it "cancupiscent," a play on concupiscent, which means vigorously passionate. You'll lust over, or after, this beer.

Oskar Blues Ten Fidy Imperial Stout

Wheats/Whites



Hoffmann Hefeweizen Climax Brewing Co., Roselle Park, N.J. climaxbrewing.com



Victory Sunrise Weissbier Victory Brewing Co., Downingtown, Pa. victorybeer.com



Allagash White Allagash Brewing Co., Portland, Maine allagash.com



Weyerbacher Slam Dunkel Weyerbacher Brewing Co., Easton, Pa. weyerbacher.com



Sierra Nevada Porter Sierra Nevada Brewing Co., Chico, Calif. sierranevada.com



Southern Tier Jah-Va Imperial Coffee Stout Southern Tier Brewing Co., Lakewood, N.Y. southern-tierbrewing.com



Green Flash Double Stout Green Flash Brewing Co., Vista, Calif. greenflashbrew.com



Oskar Blues Ten Fidy Imperial Stout Oskar Blues Brewery, Lyons, Colo. oskarblues.com