Editorial

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This Special Issue of the *European Journal of Physics C* is devoted to the physics of ultra-relativistic heavy-ion collisions. It consists of selected and refereed papers presented at the Hot Quarks 2008 Conference, which was held at the Aspen Lodge Ranch (Colorado). Among the key features of this issue is the emphasis on highlighting the research achievements of the younger members of the ultra-relativistic heavy-ion community. We are particularly proud of having been able to devote an entire special issue of EPJC to the contributions of these up and coming young scientists, who embody the future of our field.

The novel and exciting results published in this issue clearly indicate that the field of ultra-relativistic heavy-ion collisions is making a transition from the discovery

phase to the exploratory phase of hot and dense deconfined QCD matter. These results represent significant qualitative progress, both in the quality of the data as well as in the theoretical understanding. The advent of the LHC heavy-ion program, the RHIC-II upgrade and the FAIR project at GSI will ensure a bright future for the exploration of QCD matter for several decades to come.

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