



The 16-inch brisket sandwich, garnished with mac and cheese and even more cheese, and topped with a stack of onion rings, is obviously more than a trencherman can handle. The gargantuan concoction can obviously feed an entire suite at Guaranteed Rate Field.

## ***Food for thought—Sox can offer a baseball feast for all***

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The White Sox will offer some Wok-Offs...noodles, that is, not far from the left-field foul pole at Guaranteed Rate Field this season.

Even more delectable would be some more classic walk-offs. Paging you, Mr. Abreu. How 'bout you, Mr. Frazier? And you're welcome to join in any time, Mr. A. Garcia out there in right.

The mix of interesting baseball, with some of the game's most hyped prospects making their Sox debuts, and some of the best stadium food in sports should be a good value anytime with anyone with even a modest interest in the summer game.

You'd have to try really hard to go really hungry or thirsty at the South Side ballpark, now sporting its third name in its 27<sup>th</sup> season of operation. The tradeoff for the more expensive seats in the lower bowl is they've got great sightlines and are readily available. The concourses are wide enough to easily traverse without bumping into every third person, or just hang around to kibitz with your friends.

There are enough distractions and play areas when the kids get antsy and want to let off steam in the fourth inning. An added region with tasty sandwiches just opened to the

under-21 crowd behind the visitors' bullpen in right field, so the younguns' can dart around or watch the opposing closer warm up, up close and personal.

Given the world-champion Cubs' almost-total seizure of sporting consciousness through Chicago and far beyond, you'd figure the Sox would shout from the top of the ballpark they've got a lower-cost, fan-friendly alternative to a still-cramped, old, elevator/escalator-lacking and bathroom-short Wrigley Field. The North Side tickets will be among the most expensive in baseball in this new Reign Men era. The seats won't be plentiful at listed prices as ticket brokers and scalpers gloam onto part of the supply. If you don't want to take the L to Wrigley Field, you will sit in traffic coming and going, and pay \$30 or \$40 to park in between.

The Sox still can easily beat the Cubs on price, spaciousness and sheer variety of food and drink, long before they can equal the talent level on the field. The average ballpark consumer wants a total experience that does not require months of saving discretionary dollars, and one where the kids don't have to be on their best behavior in their seats, as in a house of worship or graduation, with no where else to play during the course of the game.

When the Sox showed off all their new food- and craft beer-centric features March 29 with their home opener April 3 looming, they did repeat a common sales point. I just think they do not do it loud or often enough, and should expand the angle, and not be afraid to mention themselves as an alternative to the expensive, increasingly exclusive Cubs. In the golden age of network television, the tactic was called "counter-programming."

"I think we've been doing that," said Sox public relations director Sheena Quinn, after shepherding the well-attended media tour of the culinary and craft-brew newbies at G-Rate Field. "We've been doing Family Sundays for a few seasons now. It's one of our more popular game days."

Quinn said tickets are available as low as \$5 on Sundays with parking reduced to \$10. Kid's activities abound with face painters, balloon artists and the post-game run-the-bases blow-out for young legs. Meanwhile, a special April ballpark pass guaranteeing a good seat for all games in the first month can be accessed via the ballpark app at [WhiteSox.com/ballpark](http://WhiteSox.com/ballpark).

### **Sox pitch kinder, more genteel than in past**

The Sox pitch vs. the Cubs is kinder and more genteel than in past decades. I recall a sign above the lot at the northeast corner of Waveland and Sheffield promoting some better world eight miles south. The memory is foggy – the sign could have originated from the Sox flagship radio station twice removed. But it was still a Sox message smack dab at Ground Zero in Wrigleyville.

The Sox must find ways to expand their fan base among potential consumers who are not dyed-in-the-wool Cubs fans, and can be swayed accordingly.

"The White Sox are going to do what the White Sox are going to do," Quinn said. "The Cubs are also doing some great things on the North Side. We're doing what's best for

our organization. We're focused on what's happening here and being ready for Opening Day."

Combined with a rebuilding team that could play above its head thanks to motivating leadership from new manager Rick Renteria, the Sox have a lot to advertise. They just have to do it louder and more aggressively, because from the bread-and-circuses standpoint, they pass the taste test.

Such as the Wok-Off Noodles referenced a few minutes ago. That Asian dish, inspired by nearby Chinatown and featuring egg lo mein noodles sprinkled with chicken, will be prepared in a wok from a new main concourse stand in Section 157 near the left-fielder corner. Samples went fast in the tour. The Wok-Off is at least 3½ stars.

The noodles fall into the good-eats tradition of the Sox. While the Cubs' only worthwhile menu item seemed to be the sainted Frosty Malt in the 1970s, the Sox already announced "dinner is served" with fried chicken and Mexican food at old Comiskey Park.

Now, not everyone will have access to all the menu innovations. Some of the richest (calorie-wise) goodies were on display in a behind-the-plate suite that formerly served as the pressbox. These treats will be available only in suites, in the Guaranteed Rate Club and in the Scout Seats.



**Mexican food, for decades a staple at two White Sox ballparks, has a new incarnation in 2017 with a variety of tacos.**

### **Megatonnage brisket sandwich**

Most impressive on display in the Huntington Bank Stadium Club was a monster sandwich of the type a lot of stadiums like to throw out as a challenge. This 16-inch brisket megatonnage with mac and cheese, and another layer of cheese, under the meat, and a tower of onion rings atop the upper layer of bread could feed the entire suite or the president of this museum's former Army medical unit at Aberdeen Proving Grounds.

The basic Mexican fare of the Bill Veeck era has morphed into three kinds of marinated Taco Locos – steak, chicken and tilapia. Then there's a Choco Kebab, shaved from the only 22-pound rotating chocolate cylinder in Chicago and served on a freshly-made crepe.

More basic ballpark eats available beyond the suites includes "The Heater," a Johnsonville jalapeno cheddar sausage on a soft bun topped with spicy cole slaw and a Sririacha mayo drizzle in Sections 116, 126, 139 and 535.

Meanwhile, a new daily-only suite is opening. Suite 134, renting for between \$4,000 and \$6,000 per game and seating up to 25, is located off the main concourse just to the



The view (left) fans will get from the new Suite 134 off the main concourse just to the third-base side of home plate. Meanwhile, fans all over the ballpark can chomp on juicy sausages (right).

left-field side of home plate. The area is the closest suite to the field in the ballpark. Like the far left-field area built into Wrigley Field's only elevator, the space was previously under-utilized. Jeff Bogacki, senior manager of group sales, said the suite replaces two rows of seats and a storage area.

"It gives us a unique viewpoint," Bogacki said of the panoramic view of the ballpark. No nuclear sandwiches or tilapia tacos here. Just basic hot dogs, beef sandwiches, snacks, beer and soft drinks.

Ah, beer. The Sox are getting sophisticated to keep up with the market. The team has ended its age-old marketing relationship with Miller. Fans can still buy Miller and Budweiser products and even time-trip for Old Style from vendors and concession stands. But the big statement for 2017 is craft beers.

Sure enough, the Sox have re-branded and re-modeled the longtime Bullpen Bar in right field the "Craft Kave," using a backward "K" in the second word. But this is not a strictly drinking area. Kids and teen-agers are now welcome here, with a variety of hamburgers for their taste buds. Most creatively-named is "Veeck As In Wreck," a double-patty, American-cheese construction with onion rings.

### **75 craft flavors from 38 breweries**

Delaware North concessionaire official Joey Nigro drew 75 flavors from 38 breweries, mostly in the Midwest, for his craft-beer menu. He has set a craft price level for all brands at \$8.75 for 12 ounce and \$10.75 for 16 ounces.

A Nigro co-worker is concession manager Jenny Gillespie Kribs. If her maiden name sounds familiar, it is. Her grandfather was legendary Chicago baseball coach Gordon Gillespie. His brother and her great-uncle was legendary Milwaukee Braves announcer Earl Gillespie, who broadcast the 1957 and 1958 World Series. Earl Gillespie then served with Pirates radio voice Bob Prince to produce the only broadcast play-by-plays of Harvey Haddix's 12-inning perfect performance on May 26, 1959 at County Stadium.

All the G-Rate folks have a good overall product. If management can wave a magic wand to solve the worst-rated traffic problems in the country, hampering attendance from the north and west, they'd have one of the more attractive ballparks in the country. A 20-mile all-expressway trip from a near north suburb in mid-morning Edens/Kennedy weekday traffic to the media tour took just under 25 minutes. But that relatively speedy journey is not the norm, except for the early arrival for Family Sundays.

No one in Wrigley Field will take offense if the Sox toot their own horn. The Cubs promote a championship club that can also talk, act and even dance a good game. The Sox can sell other things while the first wave of rebuilding talent works its way to the majors.

It's called the free-enterprise system. And it would be a shame if those locked or priced out of 1060 W. Addison Street don't get the message about another baseball destination that tastes great in both solid and liquid form.



**A display of craft beers in the remodeled area replacing the Bullpen Bar in right field.**