



Testing one...or three...or five juicy meatballs part of good eatin' process at The Cell

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The chief taste-tester of the White Sox insists his job isn't "rocket science."

Yet Joe Nigro and his staff don't simply start serving a new concession food product at U.S. Cellular Field out of the clear blue. There's a method to the process.

Take the case of the new meatball sandwich, part of an expanded menu just introduced for the 2013 season on the South Side. You can't just say Nigro looked at it and called it the proverbial "one spicy meatball," threw the protein on a bun and sent it out for sale in sections 121 and 522. How many orbs of beef and how big was at least a six-inning job. A quality start in any book for any food sampler.



The taste-testers didn't treat this sandwich lightly as they weighed the number of meatballs and size of each one in constructing the dish.

"We go through different levels of tasting and prepping," said Nigro, Chicago general manager of Delaware North, parent company of Sportservice, the Sox's six-decades-long concessionaire. "Our prep kitchen down in our warehouse stays busy in the off-season.

"We get different sized meatballs in this instance. We put three or four on a bun, we put five on a bun. We basically cook meatballs, load up the sandwich, take some pictures and see what looks the best. We look at bite-size, if the meatball is too big. I was a fan of the bigger meatball. It looked more appetizing and appealing.

"However, when we went to bite the meatball, it was bigger, a little bit harder to eat and created more of a mess. We backed it down to half an ounce and it's a good portion. It's more of a mouthful than a big, huge bite."

Next up is the sauce. Two ounces of marinara sauce comes out of a recipe card. Sprinkle on some parmesan cheese. The designated way station before the final destination of Cell patrons' palates are stands where the meatballs are sold with kissin' cousin Italian beef sandwiches.

But one last mass mouthful awaited before the final OK. Sox executives and employees have a near-feeding frenzy session on new concession items. Nigro is lucky he also doesn't invite media, given the quick work (the stuff usually is gone in two innings' time) done to special vittles brought to the pressbox at least once a homestand from the surrounding suites food service. The new concession samples would be gone in a flash if the pen-and-mic crowd participated.

"We'll showcase some of our new offerings to the White Sox the first or second week of February," Nigro said. "Brooks (marketing chief Boyer) wasn't here this year. Howard Pizer (Sox top VP), Terry (ballpark operations boss Savarise) Tom Sheridan (director of ticket sales) usually come. They'll bring plenty of mouths to get us there. Before people leave, we try to chat 'em up: 'What did you like?' We go through each item step by step and let 'em loose to sample them."

The Sox are noted for being home to one of the more varied and tasty offerings of treats of any big-league franchise. Be it old Comiskey Park or The Cell, any fan who claims he went hungry wasn't really trying.

The offerings were tasty yet more basic four decades ago, and better than the low-level lunchtime menu of Wrigley Field. Hot dog and hamburger basics at Comiskey Park were complemented by Chicken Unlimited offerings and Mexican food. But you can't find a comparable basket of fried chicken now. The fans want chicken fingers and wings.

"I can't see that anymore," Nigro said of an old-school basic menu. "Our fans are telling us they like the variety. These themed items, these ethnic items really help us create the diversity."



The Comiskey Burger appears almost two sandwiches -in-one.

Joining the meatball sandwich in the expanded menu for 2013 are:

- **Bull's BBQ:** Named and created by longtime fan favorite and member of the 1983 "Winning Ugly" White Sox, Greg Luzinski, this sweet barbecued pork sandwich certainly will be offered at the two BBQ locations (sections 151 and 531).

- **Comiskey Burger:** The sandwich will be sold as a double or triple cheeseburger topped with “Chitown Pico,” a relish salsa creation made with all the Chicago Dog ingredients (sport peppers, green relish, diced tomato and onions) topped with celery salt. The Comiskey Burger will be featured at the two Burger Barn locations (sections 113 and 529).
- **Walking Taco:** This item consists of a bag of Fritos served with stadium nacho cheese, chili and a fork. The Walking Taco can now be found in sections 110, 164 and 544.
- **Meatball Sandwich:** A Chicago favorite, the meatball sandwich will be served on an Italian roll with marinara sauce and parmesan cheese in sections 121 and 522.
- **New Beer Offerings:** In section 112 there will be a new craft beer location featuring Henry Weinhardts, Batch19, Third Shift and Blue Moon Agave Blonde Ale. The Miller Lite Bullpen Sports Bar also will feature Third Shift, Redd’s Apple Ale and Blue Moon Agave Blonde Ale. All will be available in the new souvenir Miller Lite Bullpen Sports Bar pilsner glass. Adding to the local offerings, Ebel’s Weiss from Two Brothers Brewery, a Chicagoland local brewery, and Leinenkugel’s Canoe Paddler will be available at the Midwest Brews Locations in sections 155, 141, 109 and 530.



Craft beers are included in the new offerings at U.S. Cellular Field.

The “Bull” barbecue sandwich had the direct involvement of the former Sox slugger, a Chicago native and alum of Notre Dame of Nilus High School. The tangy creation traces its lineage back about a half decade.

“In 2007 or 2008, we brought our barbecue portables to the concourse,” Nigro said. “Before, they were kind of hidden in our permanent stands. Some of the specialty items get lost in a permanent stands so we decided to give it its own dedicated location, and branded it as a destination location. They were barbecue brisket and barbecue pork sandwiches, and they were wildly successful. We probably increased sandwiches sold from the prior year by 300 percent by putting it on the concourse.

“This year, because we’re honoring the ’83 team, Mr. Luzinski reached out to us and we basically sampled his product. We replaced last year’s brand, a Hormel product, with the Luzinski brand.”

Perhaps the absolutely most distinctive sandwich is a holdover that's also a hit in the Sox clubhouse. "The Cuban Comet" sandwich, named after Minnie Minoso, is sold at a cart down the left-field concourse and in the upper deck. Nigro's staff sells 100 to 120 Cuban sandwiches per game.

"I just did some research on-line," Nigro said. "You can find the basics of a really Cuban sandwich. This is our own recipe. Pork, smoked ham, pickle slices, sauces, and we press it at the (vending) locations."



Greg Luzinski was a beefy slugger, and so is the sandwich named in his honor.

The Comet is the only concession menu regularly requested by Sox players.

"We've sent Cuban sandwiches to the clubhouse maybe six times a year when they want something different than the food they are used to getting catered," Nigro said. "We'll get a call, 'Can you get X number of Cubans at 5:15 after batting practice?'"

Yet another holdover eye-catcher are the Wow Bao Asian buns sold in the concourse.

Meanwhile, fans partaking in the Club Level, Diamond Suite or Stadium Club experience can enjoy Levy Restaurant's newest menu items, including:

- **Winning Ugly Grand Slam:** In honor of the 1983 White Sox, a grand slam of Italian beef, Italian sausage patty, pork chop and bacon covered with giardiniera, sautéed onions and peppers on eight inch muffalatta bread (Club Level).
- **Pepper-Glazed Goat Cheese Spread:** Savory warm, sweet-spicy goat cheese dip, served with pita chips and toasted baguette slices (Diamond Suites and Stadium Club).
- **South Side Double Steakburger:** Two 1/3 lb. custom blend steakburgers with American cheese, lettuce, tomato and secret sauce on a brioche bun (Club Level Concessions). In the stands fans can also get crinkle fries to complete the burger experience.
- **Tuna, Chicken and Egg Salad Sandwich Trio:** A Chicago deli style plate with caraway rye, pumpernickel and assorted rolls served with pickle spears (Diamond Suites).
- **Rip and Dip:** Delicious four cheese garlic bread served with marinara and ranch dipping sauces (Club Level and Stadium Club).
- **Eleven City Diner Bloody Mary:** A local favorite makes a debut at U.S. Cellular Field as this signature drink is added to the line-up.