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WINGS



PORK TENDERLOIN SANDWICH

SPORTSTERS PUB & GRUB

BY DANNY FAIRCHILD

A mistake brought your not-so-humble 365ink food columnist to the steps of Sportsters Pub & Grub. A few other members of the team were all set to go to a different location. One we haven't done a column on before. One that more than one source said would be open. It. Was. Not. Open. I'll refrain from putting them on blast in this column. I haven't given up on checking out their food.

But as we stood outside in the cold with our thumbs up our butts and a deadline approaching, the question was posed, "Well...what do you wanna do, Danny?"

I wanted to eat, dag rabbit. I wanted to eat something good enough to bring me out of my grumpy mood. I wanted something reliable.

"Alright," I said to myself. "No more screwing around."

I turned my frown upside-friggin-down and said, "Let's do Sportsters."

I should point out that Sportsters Pub & Grub is not exactly my kind of hang. It's a bit of a biker bar, and I've only ever ridden a moped. Fox News is always on one of the TVs, and that ain't my brand of political bias. It's got a very don't-start-no-crap-won't-be-no-crap atmosphere and I start crap all the time. But I like a place that doesn't screw around when it comes to food. I like a reliable place that's reliably good. I'm a copywriter in my day job, often writing advertising copy for restaurants. Restaurants tend to not be okay with calling their food "grub." I like a place that has enough confidence in their product and their customer to put the word "grub" in their friggin' name! If the rest of that stuff doesn't sound like your thing, then at least they're reliably not your thing. You have to at least respect Sportsters reliability. But you'd best reserve full judgment until you try their food. y'all. I'd hate for you to miss out.

Sportsters was originally brought to my attention by a former city council

member dutifully promoting a business in her ward. "Try the wings," she said. "You'll love the wings." I tried the wings. I loved the wings. I don't know if you've noticed, but I've been on a bit of a wing kick lately. If wings are on the menu, I've made sure to try them and tell you all about them. I've even devised a quick method for making them at home from the inexpensive bag of frozen wings you can get at Aldi. (Put 'em in your Instant Pot on high for 12 minutes. Five minutes under a broiler on each side or until you get your desired crispiness. Sauce to your liking then down the hatch. You're welcome.) So it is no small deal to say that Sportsters Pub & Grub is one of my absolute favorite places to get wings. Their housemade sauce is wonderful. It's close enough to a buffalo wing sauce that you wouldn't be wrong calling it that, but that doesn't quite cover it. There's a garliciness and maybe even a little smokiness to it that you're going to crave. I prefer flats over drummies, and the way the meat twists off the bone along with the crispy skin and incredible sauce is just about everything I want in a chicken wing.

So what I'm saying is...try the wings. You'll love the wings.

I ordered the pork tenderloin. It wasn't my first time ordering the pork T at Sporsters. The first time, I read the menu description and nearly scoffed. "A homemade, lightly dusted tenderloin." Yeah, right. I was positive I was going to get a saucer-sized pork fritter with just as much breading as pork. To be clear: I would have been absolutely fine with that. That's pretty much what I wanted at the time. Until it was put down on the bar in front of my fat, stupid face. That ain't no pork fritter. That's a friggin' actual factual pork chop up on that there bun. I know that sounds like something you wouldn't be able

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REUBEN SANDWICH

to bite through. Wrong. It's tender and delicious and it IS lightly dusted. I've ordered it since and it's been reliably amazing every time. So if you ONLY want the huge pork T fritters we're known for around here, consider this a warning. It's still a huge piece of pork, but Sportsters ain't the fairgrounds.

Also ordered was the Reuben. I'm not the world's biggest Reuben sandwich fan, but I'm easy to please with it. In my mind, the sauerkraut and the Thousand Island dressing (Fun fact: Thousand Islands is an actual place. Or many places, actually...about a thousand of them) should complement the corned beef. NOT the other way around. It's no big deal, really. If there's too much kraut, I'll take some off. Sportsters seems to share the same ideas on flavor balance because it's the sum of their parts, the rye, the Swiss, the dressing, the kraut, the corned beef form my ideal Reuben sammy. So if you're all about that sauerkraut, Sportsters doesn't skimp, but maybe ask for extra.

Speaking of sandwiches that require a balance of flavors for me, let's talk about the BLT. BLTs are weird because it's made of three things that are considered toppings or "fixin's" on any other sandwich that you could leave off and still have the same sandwich. Bacon? Just about anywhere you go, you can add bacon to your sandwich. A bacon cheeseburger is the only example I can think of right now where taking off the bacon changes the sandwich. Lettuce? Duh. Tomato? More duh. But take away the bacon OR lettuce OR tomato and you no longer have a BLT. Anyway. At Sportsters you're not getting this American classic on a couple of flimsy slices of toasted white sandwich bread. Nah. You're getting this beauty on Texas toast. And you're not getting one or two slices of bacon. Nope. Six slices of

bacon. Know how I know that? Because it says so in the menu description and, in case you haven't gotten the picture here, Sportsters is reliable. I usually wait to eat BLTs until tomatoes are at their prime, but damned if that crunchy, juice beauty at Sportsters Pub & Grub wasn't a bite of summer on a subzero day.

The bathrooms! Maybe it's my own hangups, but I did not expect much from a bathroom at a biker bar. So I was very pleased to find clean tiles and fixtures with charming exposed brick walls, with assistance bars where they should be (the main entrance to Sportsters isn't very accessible with the steps, but there is an accessible entrance on the side through the billiard room.) There's these odd sheet metal boxes around the plumbing under the urinals I don't quite understand. Is it just to hide the pipes? I don't know. Can't make it easy to clean, but it is clean. I had to chuckle a little bit at how the urinals were situated. There's two of them, and usually in a men's room, they're side-by-side. The Sportsters men's room has one urinal on one wall, and the other on the adjoining wall. I guess it solves the often uncomfortable shoulder-to-shoulder pee session.

So yeah! While Dubuque winters are anything but reliable, Sportsters Pub & Grub gets the job done consistently and deliciously.

And again: Try the wings. You'll love the wings. ■



SPORTSTERS PUB-N-GRUB
 2600 CENTRAL AVE, DUBUQUE, IA
 563-582-6822
Hours: Sun-Sat: 6 AM-2 AM
 Kitchen: Sun-Thu: 6 AM-11 PM;
 Fri-Sat: 6 AM-1 AM

DANNY FAIRCHILD

DANNY DOESN'T TAKE CRAP FROM NOBODY, BUT HE'LL TAKE FOOD FROM ALMOST ANYBODY. IF YOU WANT TO FIGHT DANNY, OR FEED HIM NOM-NOMS, EMAIL HIM AT DINING@DUBUQUE365.COM.



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