



THE GAME SPORTS BAR

BY BRYCE PARKS

A couple of years ago, Boyd Gaming, the parent company of Diamond Jo Casino, made a significant investment of over \$100 million to reinvigorate their non-gaming amenities across several of their casinos. As part of that investment's first wave, the Diamond Jo added a new gastro pub to its gaming floor with the opening of the Filament Meetery + Eatery. In addition to a huge list of craft beers, the menu is a more eclectic mix of fare, ranging from the expected to things like a Cuban burger, reuben egg rolls, hummus, and tomato bisque with grilled cheese sliders. If you want good old-fashioned sports bar fare along with your ball game, it was Mojo's Sports Bar upstairs that fit the bill.

With the second wave of investment, it was Mojo's turn to get the star treatment. Having been part of Diamond Jo since its opening a decade earlier, the venue was ready for new audio-visual enhancements and a fresh look at the menu.

"It was a package with The Filament," says Diamond Jo Casino's Director of Marketing, Marty Maiers. "Our company understood we wanted and needed to reinvigorate our non-gaming amenities. There was a company-wide push to get new restaurants, and we were lucky enough to get not one, but two. It's also been 10 years in this facility, and it was a good time to put a fresh face on things."

The Game Sports Bar is a brand within Boyd that already exists in their Blue Chip Casino in Indiana and is now going to the Suncoast Casino in Las Vegas as well. The sports bar-themed eatery was already a family-friendly environment, having removed gaming and smoking from the venue six years ago.

"It created more of a synergy with our family friendly upstairs entertainment at Cherry Lanes Bowling Alley. It's all ages, so you can bring the kids. Maybe take in some games of bowling before or after dinner. You can even order from the full 'Game' menu in Cherry Lanes next door."

Or send the kids bowling while you catch up on the big game.

"It's an overall enhancement of what we already had. Everything that was great about Mojo's is still there.

We kept a lot of our favorites on the menu and carried some over from other restaurants. For example, the reuben was our No. 1 sandwich at the former Jo's Deli, so we've added it to The Game's menu."

"We installed new pizza equipment so we could provide faster service to our patrons, but what you notice first and most of all is the new audio-visual equipment. Technology changes in the blink of an eye, and what was the latest and greatest 10 years ago is old now. We put in all new and more ultra-high definition flat screen televisions."

We counted 17 TVs on our visit, measuring up to about 75 inches on at least 6 of the screens. If you want to see any game in any sport, you can probably find it or request it at The Game.

"It's a cleaner look. It pops more. I love the blue covers on the chairs."

We agree that the vibe is fresher and more energetic, and if you're looking for a great place to watch a game, look no further. For a lot of sports lovers, they're not looking for a place to reinvent the wheel. People want the favorite pub foods they love and expect, and that's what The Game delivers.

At its core, The Game is a burger, pizza, wing, and sandwich joint. If you want a curveball on the menu, you can go downstairs to The Filament and discover something new. If you want a pizza piled high, a classic burger assortment, various wing flavors and, of course, a host of game time appetizers, you've found your home for the big game.

Let's run through the menu quick.

Appetizers include your staple of the "World's Greatest Fries" (they really are pretty good), onion rings, cheese curds or sticks, nachos, and chicken tenders. If you want to go crazy, add chili and cheese to those fries and try out the fried pickle chips.

We feel it is our duty to admit that yes, you can get a salad at The Game. Three of them actually, so your healthy friends are safe to come along.

But let's get real. A sports bar is about the key platters, starting with chicken wings. The wings

at The Game are meaty, breaded, bone-in traditional drummies and flats or you can go boneless (but that's not really a wing, is it?). Call it what you like, they're still good, and you can choose from eight great sauces ranging from mild to hot and including buffalo, parmesan garlic, Asian sesame, bourbon BBQ, sweet chili, and Caribbean jerk.

Four specialty pizza options are featured on the menu, and we enjoyed our Pig Out, which featured a meat-a-palooza mix of pepperoni, bacon, Italian sausage, and ham. It had a good crust and a nice flavor with plenty of toppings piled high. Other specialty pies include the BBQ Chicken, Taco, and Deluxe, or you can just create your own with a host of topping options.

The burgers will fill you up with half pound deluxe options including the Cheese Head which features three cheeses, the Western with bacon and smoky BBQ sauce, or the Grilled Portabella. Any of these burgers will do you right for \$10.

The selection of sandwiches is nice as well. A host of chicken sandwiches include favorites like the Buffalo Chicken and the Classic Chicken sandwich, grilled or fried. And then there's the Parmesan with ricotta, provolone, and marinara. The Baja Chicken features fresh takes of pico de gallo, avocado, and jalapeños, with the prerequisite bacon and pepperjack cheese with chipotle ranch. Yum!

Like Marty said, the famous Jo's Deli reuben lives on at The Game with shaved corned beef, sauerkraut, Swiss and Thousand Island on grilled marble rye. It's joined by the fan-favorite Philly Cheesesteak and the Patty Melt, which is basically a burger that thinks it's a reuben. It can be whatever it wants as long as it goes in my belly.

Finally, straying just slightly from the traditional sports pub fare, The Game keeps some Cajun favorites from the Mojo's days with Southern fried catfish and shrimp, or get them in a combo if you can't decide.

Across the board, prices at The Game are very affordable. Apps range from \$3 to \$10, pizzas from \$13 to \$17, burgers are all \$10, and sandwiches from \$10 to \$12.



Add to that your favorite selection of domestic beer in the bottle as well as several craft beers on tap, and you're all set for kick-off, tip-off, face-off, or the green flag. You can even get one of The Game's signature cocktails like the Slam Dunk featuring Southern Comfort, cranberry and orange juice. But I'm more of a Touchdown guy, with is Jim Beam, lemonade, and iced tea. The Hit the Slopes features vanilla vodka, cherry soda, and ice cream.

"We want to create the comfortable experience of a traditional sports bar," says Maiers. "It's a great fit for our casino which now has five great restaurants (including The Kitchen Buffet, Woodfire Grille, The Filament, and Subway). This is your traditional burgers, wings and pizza, done well and at good prices with lots of seating, big TVs and conveniences. It's comfort food."

One last thing to mention is convenience. It's right in the heart of a great casino with lots of other gaming and entertainment options. You can park in a covered ramp with easy access to the restaurant. Unlike some sports bars, the bathrooms at Diamond Jo are always

wonderfully clean and accessible, and as we mentioned before, there's no smoking upstairs, so no worries there.

Looking ahead, while sports gaming is not yet legal in Iowa, it seems like it's just around the corner. When that arrives you'll surely be able to wager on games downstairs and then come up and enjoy watching those games in The Game itself. How convenient is that?

The Game will open early March 21-22 for early tournament games, including Iowa's 11:15 AM game on Friday vs. Cincinnati. The Game will feature some great tournament specials that you can enjoy while taking in the Hawkeyes and other great college basketball teams playing for all the marbles. These specials include the Satisfying 16 which give you 24 bone-in or boneless wings, celery, ranch or bleu cheese, and your choice of seven different sauces for just \$16. The Exclusive 8 is an \$8 burger or chicken sandwich basket of your choice, and the Finishing 4 is a good ol' pitcher of Bud light or Coors Light for just \$4.

If the game is important, The Game Sports Bar is the place to enjoy it in comfort. ■



THE GAME SPORTS BAR
LOCATED INSIDE
DIAMOND JO CASINO
301 BELL ST., PORT OF DUBUQUE
563-690-4815
DIAMONDJODUBUQUE.COM
Hours: Mon–Thu: 4–10 PM;
 Fri: 4 PM–Midnight;
 Sat: 11 AM–Midnight; Sun: 11 AM–10 PM



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