

The Game Sports Bar

By Bryce Parks

The Game Sports Bar has finally reopened at Diamond Jo Casino in the Port of Dubuque. Like almost every service-based business in America, they struggled to properly staff the bar to give the highest level of consistent customer service, which held up the reopening of its doors and serving a dining menu. Well, that day has come and just in time for a double dose of college and professional football seasons starting up this month.

The streamlined menu is not reinventing the wheel but is instead focusing on very well-engineered versions of people's all-time favorites: burgers, sandwiches, and appetizers.

The burgers are now of the smash burger variety. What does that mean? Well, technically a smash burger is minced beef and salt, smashed flat over a searingly hot flat-top grill until you get a crispy, craggy-edged, asymmetric, cooked-through patty that's juicy, caramelized, and beefy, making it one of the most popular ways to grill up a burger these days.

The Original Smashed is a ¼ lb. all-beef patty with your choice of cheese, lettuce, tomato, onion, pickles, and house sauce on a toasted bun for \$6.25. You can double the patty and double the cheese for \$9.25, or triple everything for \$12.25. That'll get you through a whole football game for sure.

They'll probably let you amend your burger in a number of ways, but they do offer a few pre-imagined favorite concoctions to take the difficulty of invention off your shoulders. Go for Bacon Cheddar, Mushroom Onion Swiss, BBQ (bacon, house-smoked BBQ sauce, coleslaw), or a Chili Cheese, with housemade chili, cheese sauce and an onion ring topper. Still just \$7.25! I know, right?! You can also add another beef patty to any burger for \$3.25.

Everything is à la carte. So if you want fries, order them. You can combo any burger or sandwich with those "World's Greatest Fries" and a 16 oz. drink for \$4.75.

Beyond the burgers, The Game is serving big, juicy hot dogs in a few delicious ways from the Classic Chili Dog and the famous Chicago Style hot dog to a Kansas City BBQ Dog that brings in smoked BBQ sauce and creamy coleslaw to fill out that toasted bun. Again, just \$6.25.

A fried chicken sandwich also comes three ways: the traditional (house sauce, lettuce, tomato, onion, pickles, and toasted bun); a spicy version with cayenne hot sauce and slaw; and a BBQ with smoked sauce, bacon, and cheddar. Traditional or fancy, they are only \$7.25 and ours featured a really good-sized, juicy chicken breast at the center of it all. That leaves plenty of change for a second beer!

A straightforward set of sides and appetizers take aim at the happy tummy sweet spot starting with the "World's Greatest Fries." You know, about a decade ago when the Diamond Jo Casino first moved ashore, I had the pleasure/chore of sitting down with the general manager at the time, Todd Moyer, and we sampled about 20 different varieties of fries in order to decide what we thought were indeed the World's Greatest Fries. And they still hold up today. Should you dare believe they can get even better, you might opt for the Loaded Nacho Fries version. You might also need a nap if you pair that with a triple smash burger!

The House Made Chili that you can get on the burger or dog also comes on its own, naturally. It's a very meat-forward chili with big chunks of tomato. No canned chili here, folks. This also makes the chili dog different than your run of the



WORLD'S GREATEST FRIES, BBQ CHICKEN, MUSHROOM ONION SWISS BURGER WITH BACON, AND CLASSIC CHILI DOG

mill dog. So on its own, you can call it a meal and still get another side that you call a “side.” Perhaps some gooey fried cheese sticks. A basket of hand-breaded chicken tenders is also a fine option with a choice of dipping sauces.

While The Game Sports Bar is only open for dining on Friday from 5 to 10 p.m. and Saturday and Sunday from noon to 10 p.m., the restaurant technically shares its kitchen with the Cherry Lanes Bowling Alley right next door on the second level of the casino. And since the walk-up snack bar for the lanes is open when the lanes are, that technically means that you can still get any of these smash burgers or other menu favorites on any evening that bowling action is happening.

There is no gaming (except for what’s on TV) in The Game Sports Bar, so it is open to all ages. We counted 16 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.

You can take advantage of FanDuel Sportsbook just down the escalator from The Game to place wagers on any games you want to watch upstairs. And yes, you can definitely get a cold beer while you watch the game. There are a number of favorite domestics by the bottle

and a good handful of craft brews on tap, plus a full bar for any mixer under the sun. But you can also still bring the boys, even if the boys are, say, still in high school, to enjoy the game... and the meal, with you. Heck, kids can even go bowl a game or two while you take in a Bears vs Packers game right next door.

In addition to that convenience, it’s also right in the heart of a great casino with lots of other gaming and entertainment options. You can park for free in their covered ramp with easy access to the restaurant. Unlike some sports bars, the bathrooms at Diamond Jo are always wonderfully clean and accessible, and there’s no smoking upstairs.

With all casino buffets in the area closed, it was important to get another dining venue open at the Diamond Jo. I’m sure that when the place is rockin’ on the weekend, they need all the dining options they can get to meet visitor demand as The Kitchen Buffet is in transition.

Speaking of the buffet, on a recent visit you may have noticed a lovely giant mural right now spanning the space that was The Kitchen Buffet. Artist Cheryl Hermansen created a Field of Dreams-themed piece to celebrates the culture of our area which blends into memories of the Diamond Jo when it was on the

water. Even after more than a decade, people still refer to the Diamond Jo as “The Boat,” and this artwork reflects that tie-in to vivid memories people have of the casino. It also allows for great selfie opportunities along the mural. Meanwhile, behind the mural wall, new things are coming in the way of dining at the casino.

The buffet is truly retired, but according to Diamond Jo Casino General Manager Wendy Runde, what’s coming back in its place is a versatile cafe space that will touch on many of the assets that visitors to the Diamond Jo want most and in a very accessible and vibrant way. The current casual restaurants (The Filament and The Game) have very small, limited space kitchens. The cafe will be able draw on the firepower of that extensive former buffet kitchen to allow them to bring back some of people’s favorite things from the past, like smothered meatloaf, the Diamond Jo’s famous fried chicken, and even the much loved and missed Reuben sandwich from the old Jo’s Deli. And when they do, you can be sure we will let you know right away!

Until then, The Game Sports Bar awaits your next visit to fulfill the big game hunger needs of your crew... after you place your game wagers downstairs, of course! ■



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DIAMOND JO CASINO

301 BELL ST, DUBUQUE, IA

563-690-4800

DIAMONDJODUBUQUE.COM

FACEBOOK: @DIAMONDJOBQ

Kitchen Hours: Fri: 5-10 PM;
Sat-Sun: Noon-10 PM; Mon-Thu: Closed
(Menu also available on weeknights and weekends at Cherry Lanes Snack Bar)

SUBMIT YOUR DINING SUGGESTIONS!

DO YOU HAVE A FAVORITE RESTAURANT YOU WOULD LIKE TO SEE US VISIT? PLEASE SEND US YOUR REQUESTS, SUGGESTIONS AND COMMENTS!
EMAIL: DINING@DUBUQUE365.COM



Select Fridays, 11am to 1pm
May through September

Walk, bike, or drive to Washington Park where food trucks will line the streets, ready to celebrate the end of the week with you.

Local live music is provided by 365ink. For a lineup of trucks, visit traveldubuque.com. (Truck schedule subject to change.)

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