



THE BUFFALO NEWS

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Fans of wings have tons of fun

With its supply of 30,000 pounds voraciously devoured, Dunn Tire Park festival staff scurries for more Sunday

By Jay Rey NEWS STAFF REPORTER

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You would think 15 tons of chicken wings — that’s right 30,000 pounds — would be enough for the two-day national Buffalo Wing Festival, held at Dunn Tire Park over the weekend. It wasn’t.

The record crowd gobbled all those down — on just Saturday.

“ ‘I’m in trouble,’ ” organizer Drew Cerza said he thought.

So late Saturday night, a nervous Cerza bumped heads with staffers of the Buffalo Bisons and managed to get his hands on another 12 tons of wings, which were trucked to the ballpark in time for the second day of the festival Sunday.

In the end, the festival enjoyed its largest attendance ever, and a half-million wings were consumed.

“It was unbelievable,” Cerza said late Sunday. Oh, how we love the chicken wing. And everyone has an opinion on what makes the perfect wing.

“I like them well-done,” said Stacy West, 38, of Rochester, “and not too much sauce.”

“It has to have some sauce on it,” said John Macedo, 35, also of Rochester, “and it has to have some meat on it, not just grizzle.”

“Crispy and saucy,” said Joe Staniszewski, 27, of Hamburg. “I like the different varieties. You can get hot, medium and mild anywhere in Buffalo.”

As thousands of wing fans dripped hot sauce on their T-shirts and licked barbecue sauce from their lips, festival experts were asked: What makes a good chicken wing?

“You don’t want to overcook them, and you don’t want to undercook them,” said Tom Sadler, part owner of Hurricane Grill and Wings in South Florida. “You want them crispy, but still moist in the middle.”

“Try to use a fresh wing. That really helps with the quality,” Sadler added. “Then, it’s all about the sauce.” Crawford Ker agreed.

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The former guard for the Dallas Cowboys and Denver Broncos now owns Ker's WingHouse, which can be found in more than 20 locations across Florida and Texas.

"What makes a good wing is the sauce you put on it," said Ker, who was back in Buffalo this weekend for the first time since playing in the AFC championship game in 1992. "Now, we're going into other kinds of sauces — oriental, honey barbecue, chipotle — and the wings are taking off."

Wing connoisseurs were lined up at the booth where the Fiddle Inn, located outside Erie, Pa., was serving up its "Sassy & Sweet" and "Sugar Kane Cajun" wings.

"Crispiness and variety. That's the key," said Shawn Festa, the restaurant manager. "You have to have something different."

At the Buffalo Wing Festival, there's definitely that sense of competition to prove your wings match up to the best, said Ker and Sadler.

"Buffalo is the home of the wing," said Sadler, his first time at the wing festival. "As intimidating as that is, we've had a good time. The people of Buffalo are great. We'll be back."

Sadler's Hurricane was named festival favorite, while Ker's WingHouse was recognized for its extra hot sauce.

Other winners Sunday: Country Sweet, from Rochester, was named Rookie of the Year; Buffalo Wild Wings won the Wing King Award; WingStreet was honored for its hot sauce; Legend Larry's Wings & Things won for its traditional medium wings; Bocce Club Pizzeria was recognized for its traditional barbecue wings; The Wing Coop won for its creative barbecue wings; World of Wings won for its creative spicy sauce; and Captain Spongefoot was honored for its creative sweet sauce.

After winning the professional wing-eating competition on Saturday, Sonya "The Black Widow" Thomas won the Buffet Bowl on Sunday. In eight minutes, she ate 5.95 pounds of wings, pizza, pierogies, beef and "hog wings."

Meanwhile, Jeremy Cuevas, of Thibodaux, La., won the amateur wing-eating competition, downing 2.72 pounds of wings in six minutes.

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