



Ballpark fare so much more than dogs, peanuts !

Food choices around the big leagues offer great variety and taste . . .

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Ever since St. Louis Browns owner Chris von der Ahe began selling hot dogs at his team's games in the 1880s, baseball and food have been a perfect pair. But increasingly it is harder to tell whether fans are merely grabbing a bite while going to a Major League Baseball game or watching some ball while dining at the local stadium.

Just consider what went into the opening of the Twins' new Target Field last year. "We spent almost as much time on the food and beverage experience as we did any other factor in the design and opening of Target Field," Twins president Dave St. Peter said. "All of the research, focus groups and discussion groups with fans told us -- and not a surprise -- that food and beverage was a huge anticipation of the new park. God bless the Metrodome, but I think it failed to meet everyone's expectations on a number of fronts, including food.

The Twins and Delaware North Sportservice embarked on a tour two years before the opening of Target Field, with the sole purpose of shaping a menu that was responsive to what our fans were looking for, and frankly was a celebration of all things Minnesota food and culinary theme. So we formed some strategic partnerships and looked for signature brands, and the results have spoken for themselves. We're very pleased with the response from fans on what it has delivered from satisfaction of ballpark fare plus per caps [spending per fan] certainly meeting or exceeding our expectations."

One of those partnerships is with Michelbob's Ribs, sold in the State Fair Classics concession stand on the main concourse. Michelbob's is an institution based in Naples, Fla., and founded in 1979 by a pair of Minnesotans. Lou Bavaro, chief operating officer of the company that owns it, is now at the **MLB Fan Cave** in New York and on Friday will be giving out those ribs as part of a "Taste of Twins Territory" test for 25 lucky fans.

It is part of Food Week at the Fan Cave, and to help celebrate the ever-increasing importance of ballpark fare, MLB.com looked to the U.S. Department of Agriculture's "MyPyramid" food group for help to show examples of what we're eating this season:

Grains: Recommending that at least half of grains consumed be as whole grains.

You probably know all about Dodger Dogs, but have you ever had Wetzel's Pretzels at Section 6 or 141 in Chavez Ravine? Blazing Bagels near the left-field gate at Safeco Field offers a selection of deli sandwiches, bagel dogs, assorted bagels and schmears.

Take that corn-dusted Kaiser roll and load it with 18-hour beef brisket, smoked onions, secret signature sauce and country slaw and you've got the Turner Field Brisket Sandwich. Top that Texas toast with house-smoked pulled chicken, Vidalia onion straws, secret signature sauce and country slaw, and you've got the Cobb Smoked Pulled Chicken. The Braves and Aramark are asking fans to choose which one they like better during the first half of this season, and the winning sandwich will be added to the ballpark's menu.



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"Fans are looking for more than hot dogs, peanuts and Cracker Jack when they come to a game nowadays," said Mike Plant, Braves executive vice president of business operations. "We are always adding and upgrading our food and beverage items based on our fans' input."

Go to Shopsy's in Section 125 at Rogers Centre, where their specialty authentic deli sandwiches are made with artisan breads such as ciabatta, marble rye and pumpernickel.

Vegetables: Emphasizing dark green and orange vegetables, dry beans and peas.

Here's a category that has become more important in baseball over the years. Black bean dip is a popular treat in Marlins luxury suites, along with amazing Empanadas and Cuban pressed sandwiches. On the Club Lounge menu at Progressive Field in Cleveland, you'll find large selection of salad possibilities, including new twists on the popular favorites such as country potato salad, three pepper slaw, and tortellini pasta salads. The next time you go to a Tigers game, try a corn on the cob in the Brushfire Grill section 131 at Comerica Park.

Fans who head for Phoenix to watch the All-Star Game will find homemade sweet potato fries in the Sedona Club, or a sauteed Portabella mushroom to put on top of your veggie or beef burger. There's a vegetable platter to go with all those grilled brats and more on the complete buffet menu if you have a Club Suite rental for a Brewers home game. At PNC Park, fans enjoy hot, fresh, old-fashioned kettle korn available in three flavors: Original, Caramel and Cheese. That's from JD's stand behind Section 127 on the main concourse and at Section 141 on the Riverwalk next to Manny's Bar-B-Q.

Right now, you can almost taste the sauerkraut in an Angels Smoked Pastrami Reuben at the BBQ stand near Gate 2 in Anaheim. Fries are a longtime staple in baseball food, and suddenly the unmistakable scent of garlic fries seems to be taking over the game, from San Francisco to the Bronx. Try the Bloomin' Onion from Outback Steakhouse Outpost in the Third Base Food Court as you watch David Price deal at Tropicana Field.

Fruits: Emphasizing variety and de-emphasizing fruit juices.

AT&T Park is known for its defending World Series champions, its breathtaking views . . . and also its amazing local cuisine. Make sure to enjoy the massive strawberry shortcake found in the Farmer's Market -- a perfect complement to those famous Gilroy garlic fries and the Dungeness Crab sandwich on baguette French bread.

"When we opened the ballpark in 2000, we viewed San Francisco as a culinary capital, so we wanted to get the very best food experience," Giants president and COO Larry Baer said. "So we got a great overall concessionaire -- Centerplate -- but also did a deal with a company that had never done ballpark food, yet had a great reputation in our area for upscale food: Bon Appetit. They were for Luxury Suite and Club cuisine. We think a big part of the fact that we've been over 3 million [fans] for nine of our 11 years in operations is because we've had food that has been well-accepted by our fans.



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"We don't do a lot of major national brands. We have the Farmer's Market, which is from down the road, so we have great home-grown fruits and vegetables. We have a Francis Ford Coppola-inspired Italian food area, we have that crab sandwich that The New York Times voted the best food item in all of baseball. Gilroy is just down the road from us and is the Garlic Capital of the World, so that made sense. We try to stay local and uniquely San Francisco."

You also can get a great strawberry shortcake in the Everglades BBQ Smokehouse at Tropicana Field. Fruit smoothies are a hit at Safeco Field, where there are also many options for vegetarians, vegans and those looking for gluten-free fare.

Dairy: Includes fluid milk and many other milk-based products.

You can complete your feast at NYY Steak inside Yankee Stadium by savoring a New York Style Cheesecake with raspberry sauce and whipped cream, and across town, you can see why long lines form at Citi Field's Shake Shack stand in center field, for a great shake to go with your burger. When the temperatures start creeping up into triple digits this summer in the Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex, Rangers fans are going to be all over that ice cream helmet. Some things you just look forward to at the ballpark, like cheese with your nachos at an A's home game. May we recommend the Skyline Cheese Coney -- or anything from the world-famous Skyline Chili, found in Sections 116, 130 and 518 at Great American Ball Park in Cincinnati? The history of gelato dates back to frozen desserts served in ancient Rome and Egypt, made from ice and snow brought down from mountaintops and preserved below ground. Today, you can find the Dolce Gelati stand in Sections 112 and 135 at Nationals Park, featuring a variety of flavors -- some dairy-based -- and sorbet as well.

Happy 20th anniversary to U.S. Cellular Field, where the White Sox were influential in starting a trend of local-flavored and fun concession stands. Take the "Winning Ugly Is Sweet" stand at Section 143, a nod to the 1983 American League West champs. Waffle cones and soft serve are a hot-day staple there.

"Year over year, we have the best ballpark food in the bigs," said Brooks Boyer, White Sox senior vice president of sales and marketing, in an email to MLB.com. "Consistency in quality and creativity make us unrivaled."

Protein: Meat and beans, emphasizing low-fat and lean meats such as fish as well as more beans, peas, nuts and seeds.

Royals chef Dustin Miller won the "Best Ballpark Food" competition at last year's All-Star Game with his signature Kansas City Stack, so we'll start there. It features a seasoned rib-eye with cheese, bacon, sauteed mushrooms, onion rings, KC barbecue sauce, lettuce, tomato and pickle on a bun. A close second was Boston's classic lobster roll, featuring heaps of fresh, cold lobster meat on a grilled hot dog bun, along with thick-cut potato chips made fresh on-site. Located under the green tent behind the center-field bleachers on Eutaw Street is Boog's BBQ. During many Orioles home games, Boog Powell, the former All-Star first baseman, can be found signing autographs and serving up some of Maryland's finest barbecue beef, pork and turkey. Boog's BBQ is also served in the All-Star Café on the Oriole Park Club Level.



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Behind Section 111 at Minute Maid Park is a Little Bigs concession stand that features the same burgers and chicken sandwiches made popular by the stand's namesake restaurant in Houston. Bryan Caswell operates that burger joint, and he earned a spot on Food Network's "The Next Iron Chef" show; the Astros made him their own celebrity chef, and you can find his touch on cuisine around the ballpark, including the new Insperity Club premium seating section.

"We've always been proud of the outstanding food selection and entertainment we offer our fans at Astros games, and with the addition of Bryan's talents, the variety and the experience of food choices just got better," said Pam Gardner, the Astros' president of business operations. "We welcome Bryan to Minute Maid Park, and we look forward to his culinary talents and taking the food experience to a new level here at the ballpark."

Long after von der Ahe began selling his hot dogs, the delicacy reached new masses with the St. Louis World's Fair of 1904. That's a given at Busch Stadium now. If you order "Taste of the Ballpark" on the Main or Terrace level, you'll get a regular hot dog, small bag of peanuts, small pretzel, cheese cup and a bag of cookies.

It's the polish sausage you can't forget from Yawkey Way before settling into your seat for a Red Sox game. It's the Phillies' Summer Hot Dog, an extreme dog with pickled red onions, salsa, chipotle, mayo and cucumbers. It's that classic Chicago deep dish pizza from D'Agastino's, served up at the Blue W located in Wrigley Field at aisles 122-125 and 133-134.

Oils: Recommending fish, nut, and vegetables sources.

Buy me some peanuts and Cracker Jack -- at any of 30 ballparks. Peanut oil is healthy. Rocky Mountain Oysters can be found at Section 144 inside Coors Field, and that's a great source of Omega-3 natural fatty acids. Nobody beats the original fish tacos at La Comida inside Petco Park, and you can also get recommended oils from sushi bars presented by the Padres in Section 222 or by the Mariners up the coast at Safeco Field.

Speaking of Seattle, you probably know all about Ivar's Seafood & Chowder if you have spent any amount of time there. It began on Seattle's waterfront in 1938, and today their restaurants are throughout Safeco and offer some of the best clam chowder around.



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Discretionary calories.

This is a big one for baseball fans, because it's where you put beer.

Fans with kids are familiar with cotton candy. It's the vendor who holds the rapt attention of that restless toddler. Hey, not much nutrition there, but it's a tradition.

Camarena Tequila's new stand is located near section 222 on the terrace level at Turner Field. This location features frozen and shaken margaritas, made with several Camarena brands.

St. Peter is familiar with all of these food group necessities and more, having studied up enough to make sure Twins fans enjoy not only their outdoor facility and AL Central contender, but also the kind of consumption that makes your stomach happy and keeps you coming back.

"It's tough to beat the Kramarczuk's Polish sausages, and Murray Steak is one of my all-time favorites," St. Peter said. "We still sell all those things just like everybody else, four variety of hot dogs through our local Schweigert Meats. Those staples are still crucial to the experience, but we had to expand our menu and the offerings for today's fans."

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The End . . .

