

Restaurant Review:

Players Grille knocks one out of the park

Players Grille is located at 1605 CR 220, in the strip center located next to the Home Depot. Its motto is “Where the neighborhood meets, a real family grille,” and the feeling you get when you walk in the door makes that sentiment ring true.

First, we received a gracious greeting by the host. The space inside is open with lots of TVs; we had our own TV at the table, and with 122 stations to choose from, it was a huge hit. Plus, it’s the first sports bar in Jacksonville to be completely nonsmoking. According to owner/manager Rose Sarkees, “I’ve had five people mad, and 500 ecstatic.”

The restaurant itself is exceptionally clean. The service was friendly and fast. The menu was an extension of the establishment’s family-friendly philosophy in that there’s something for everyone including low-carb specials of steak and chicken with fresh, sautéed veggies. Their smothered chicken was excellent.

And if you’re good during dinner, you can finish up with a shake. Unlike any sports bar I’ve ever visited, they hand dip their shakes with Haagen Dazs ice cream. Three generous scoops later, I was duly impressed. Their chili cheese fries also enjoy a good reputation.

Players Grille also features chicken wings at a great price, and you can get them to go. I’m not a wing fan, but Players actually grills their wings which gives them robust flavor. The staff recommended the Jim Beam BBQ variety and I have to admit I cleared the plate. My wings were accompanied by the Players version of poppers, made with red spicy peppers filled with cream cheese and a gel-based pepper sauce for dipping. They were like nothing I’ve tasted, and the results at my table were rave reviews.

But it’s not just about the wings; everything in the place is freshly grilled. The burgers are a half-pound of beef, hand molded and cooked to order. If you stop in for lunch though, and you’re in a hurry, your best bet is one of the Players sandwiches. Served on a white-and-dark marble rye bread, these are filling and healthy. I ordered the Reuben, a sandwich I’ve never liked but I gave it a shot. I’m glad I did. It came with a large portion of thick-sliced corned beef, a light hazing of Thousand Island, and just the right amount of sauerkraut and Swiss cheese. I must say I’ve been thinking about that sandwich ever since ...

Since condiments are a must, why not get creative? At Players, their condiments come in a cardboard six-pack container that includes bleu cheese, honey mustard, ranch, Thousand Island, mustard and mayonnaise. It’s a novel way to deliver dinner’s little necessities.

If you’re in the mood for something heartier, Players has lots of that too. They have homemade mashed potatoes and a first-rate country fried steak. And for the kids they cook up hot dogs, burgers, grilled cheese and chicken fingers. There’s even a kids’ section where, if you have a sports team or big crowd, you can call ahead and they’ll decorate it. There’s an attached section where the adults in the gang can sit and enjoy their meals too.

Another notable thing about Players Grille is they weren’t afraid to show us their underbelly. We saw everything from the back rooms to their stainless bar — everything was spotless. This added to my positive impression of the place.

Now that I’ve mentioned the bar, I should note they have a fantastic selection of liquor and wine, and a ton of beers too. Beer snobs beware, you’ll have no complaints here.

There’s lots to do at Players Grille besides eat and drink. They have NTN Trivia, a pool table, video games, live entertainment, and karaoke. They even have a lobster grab where you put in your money and if you get one, they’ll cook you an entire lobster dinner for \$2.00.

Players Grille is open seven days a week from 11 a.m. till midnight during the week, and a little later on Fridays and Saturdays. Call 264-4633 for additional information, large group reservations and to-go orders.