

Tailgaters touch down

The game plan is food and camaraderie when the football faithful turn stadium lots into vast outdoor kitchens.

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The aroma of sizzling meat swirled from his six-burner grill as Bob Cavanaugh flipped steaks of filet mignon on a perfect late-summer Sunday. Then he checked the row of sausages browning on the grate, as he prepared lunch for 175. He was not at a restaurant kitchen, or a catering hall, but among a green sea of Eagles jerseys in the parking lot of Lincoln Financial Field before the first home game. The tailgating began before dawn. By noon, the whole parking lot was eating. While there's no real living to be made at a tailgate – Cavanaugh's guests pitch in to cover costs – there's definitely a reputation to be maintained. And Cavanaugh, who had the biggest crowd in sight, was upholding his. He ran through the menu: "Penne pasta with shrimp in a blush crème sauce. Filet mignon sandwich. Hot sausage with peppers and onion. Boneless chicken breast. A seafood trio of clams, mussels and shrimp in wine – oh!, and don't forget the pizza.: it, like the rolls Cavanaugh was using, came from Cacia, Cavanaugh's favorite bakery, in South Philadelphia. Tailgating – from Bob Cavanaugh's high style to the doggie-on-a-bun – is never in or out of season these days; it's a constant, even in winter, in parking lots at pro and college sports, community events or, lately, before concerts. Even so, the powerful triumvirate of food, beer and company, built loosely around an event, is never more compelling than at this time of year. Tailgaters live for football. Historically, their passion for outdoor partying grew around college football and exploded as the National Football League became an American rite of autumn. The partying has become more elaborate over the last several years. Although hamburgers and hot dogs rule on the grills at the Linc lots, you can also find pulled-pork sandwiches, barbecued chicken breasts and wings, elaborate shish kabobs, chicken satays and teriyakis, along with all manner of dipping sauces and salads. Some people trace tailgating to Yale home games in the early 1900s, and others to the first college football game, between Rutgers and Princeton in 1869, when fans grilled burgers behind horses that pulled their carriages. Only the year before, *tailgate* came into English: a detachable rear vehicle wall – for loading, really, not grazing, boozing and schmoozing. In *The Tailgater's Cookbook* (Broadway Books, \$21), author David Joachim writes that several years before college ball in 1861, folks lined up with food in Manassas, Va., to

witness what would be a Civil War turning point, the Battle of Bull Run. The troops brought the ammunition. The spectators brought the pies.

"Tailgating is really the confluence of several different trends in our history," says Joachim, whose book is full of recipes for the parking lot. It aims at tailgaters but is also appropriate for Sunday-afternoon couch potatoes.

"One trend in tailgating is our love of spectacle, and you can trace that back to the Battle of Bull Run. ...After Ford released station wagons in the early 1900s, the popularity of tailgating grew. Then, our love of outdoor cooking and barbecue merged with eating together before football at NFL games in parking lots."

Essentially, we're talking here about an American picnic – on a grand scale. "Tailgates can be very elaborate events," says Joachim, who lives near Allentown, and whose everyone-can-cook book, *A Man, A Can, a Plan*, softened the resolve of many a male culinaphobe. "People spare no expense to put on a good party and outdo everyone else in the parking lot. It's your way of competing along with the team that's competing." In his attempt to codify the culinary part of all this, Joachim offers everything from a tailgating tool list to safety rules for dealing with food in the outdoors.

And, of course, he offers recipes, frequently soaked, mopped or somehow treated with imbibables. His beer-butt chicken, for instance, is a tasty template for a popular tailgate show-off meal; the chicken grills over the coals as it sits upright, on a half-filled can of beer shoved into what would be called, in almost uncommonly polite tailgating circles, its lower cavity.

In a thoroughly American way, tailgating – the very picture of come-on-over informality – has become a formal institution. Not only is Joachim's book new to store shelves, so are two others, *The Tailgating Cookbook* by Bob Sloan (Chronicle Books, \$15.95) and *Tailgates to Touchdowns* by Nina Swan-Kohler (Willing Vessel Books, \$18.95). There's an American Tailgaters Association, which says it represents the interests of more than 20 million tailgaters annually, and Web sites include the large www.tailgating.com. Jack Daniel's Tennessee Whiskey offers a much-used tailgating marinade – and a national award for tailgating prowess.

Bob Cavanaugh, the classy tailgater at every home game at the Linc, won that award twice, and the plaques show nicely on the mini-bus he pulls into the parking lot, painted Eagles green. Inside the bus, his cousin Jim looks after the flow of beer and Jack Daniel's. Outside, popping from its passenger-side wall, two taps pour Yuengling and Coors Light.

Cavanaugh, who works for PGW and lives in the city's Northeast, says he began throwing tailgates 20 years ago, when he was 19. He points to the bus and smiles.

"Since I bought the bus, things are out of control!"

Not really. The swarm of tailgaters is happy, revved for both the food and the team.

"Come see this," Cavanaugh beckons, showing his Coleman Event grill, balanced atop two metal horses. A few other tailgaters sported the king of tailgating grills, but Cavanaugh's was different. His had covers, an accessory Coleman does not make for the model.

"I built my own lids," he said, pointing with pride to the Eagles insignia engraved by a relative on the lids' steel handles.

Kevin Ochs, who has known Cavanaugh since grade school, was enjoying the spread, the company and the day, in a way essential to tailgating and wholly Philadelphian: He was happy to be among several people he'd known for a very long time.

"I love going to Eagles games," he said, "but to be honest with you, the tailgates really do it for me. I'm here with friends I played basketball and Little League with. We've known each other since we were 8 or 9 years old."

In the middle of the massive parking lot, Cavanaugh cooked at a steady pace for his family and friends and their friends. He had the look of a contented man, a man for whom the city, in its largest sense, was one big family.

Bob Cavanaugh's Seafood Trio

Makes 4 entrée servings; 6-8 appetizer servings

2 dozen littleneck clams
2 pounds mussels (beards removed)
¼ bottle white wine
½ teaspoon red pepper
1 ½ tablespoons minced garlic
1 pound large uncooked shrimp, headless and in the shell
½ stick butter
Chopped parsley for garnish

1. Soak clams and mussels in cold water for 20 minutes, so they eject sand, and place the shellfish in large stockpot.
2. Put wine, pepper and garlic in stockpot, cover the pot, and cook over high heat until clams and mussels begin to open, about 5 minutes.
3. Add shrimp and butter, cover and cook until shrimp shells are pink and butter is melted, about 2 minutes. Garnish with parsley.

Note: After seafood is rinsed at home, this recipe can be cooked in a stockpot on top of the grill in the parking lot.

Per serving (based on 6): 350 calories, 41 grams protein, 9 grams carbohydrates, 0.3 gram sugar, 13 grams fat, 198 milligrams cholesterol, 661 milligrams sodium, 0.2 gram dietary fiber.

Bob Cavanaugh's Filet Mignon Sandwich
Makes 6 servings

For the Jack Daniel's marinade:

¼ cup Jack Daniel's whiskey
¼ cup soy sauce
¼ cup Dijon-style mustard
¼ cup minced green onions
¼ cup packed light brown sugar
1 teaspoon salt
Dash of Worcestershire sauce
Pepper to taste

For the sandwiches:

6 1-inch rounds of filet mignon
2 bell peppers, any color
1 onion
1 12-ounce can of beer
American cheese (optional)
6 round sandwich rolls

1. On the night before the tailgate, combine all marinade ingredients and blend well.
2. Pound filet rounds with a kitchen mallet, place in a plastic zipper bag, add the blended marinade and refrigerate overnight.
3. Cut peppers and onion into ½-inch chunks and refrigerate in plastic bag.
4. At the tailgate, saute pepper and onion chunks in beer, over medium heat. For every inch height of vegetables, use ½ inch of beer. Saute vegetables until al dente, about 10 minutes. Remove.
5. Grill the steaks over medium-high heat, about three minutes per side for medium-rare.
6. Place a steak in each sandwich roll, top with peppers and onions and with cheese, if using.

Per serving: 715 calories, 39 grams protein, 48 grams carbohydrates, 15 grams sugar, 36 grams fat, 114 milligrams cholesterol, 1,546 milligrams sodium, 3 grams dietary fiber.