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ILLUSTRATION BY MARK STIVERS



DRINK

Return of Monkey Knife Fight

BY JAMES RAIA

Not since its pioneering beer heydays more than 100 years ago has Sacramento had a signature offering such as Monkey Knife Fight.

With its odd name—a reference to an episode in season 11 of *The Simpsons*—the American pale ale wasn't just a novelty beverage with a weird label. For years, it was a go-to brew at Rubicon, matched with the signature comfort food—fish and chips—at Sacramento's original craft beer establishment. The smooth-drinking ale found its way into many restaurants, bars and grocery stores in Sacramento and other locales.

But when Rubicon closed in August 2017 after nearly 30 years, Monkey Knife Fight connoisseurs were aghast. A liquid culinary companion was gone.

Monkey Knife Fight resurfaced in late February, however. It's now crafted and available at Tower Brewing, the recently rebranded microbrewery in East Sacramento, formerly known as Sactown Union Brewery. It's also available in several locations on tap and in cans throughout the Sacramento region and reaching into the Bay Area.

"Monkey Knife Fight is a Sacramento staple as a classic West Coast-style pale ale in the vein of Sierra Nevada," says brewer Mike Ungerbuhler. "We've kind of modernized it, just a touch. It has a little bit more dry hops and a little bit more hoppy aroma just to make it a little bit more palatable to modern tastes."

When Rubicon closed, its intellectual property became available. Two Tower Brewing owners, enamored by its beer for years, acquired the recipes and other items, such as a panel truck. Still with

faded Rubicon logos, it sits in the Tower Brewing parking lot.

Described as a pale ale with malt character and pine and citrus aromas, Monkey Knife Fight has 5.6% alcohol by volume and 35 international bitter units.

"When I moved here in 2012, it was the first local Sac beer that I ordered," says Sam Long, a Tower Brewing regular, with fiancé Quintin Chan. "And I ordered it everywhere."

Some longtime Monkey Knife Fight drinkers quickly tasted a change in the re-introduced beer.

"They were like, 'I like this, but there's something a little different.' I think both of the brewers nerded out really quickly," says Lucy Ishizuka, Tower's spokeswoman, menu planner and occasional bartender.

Ungerbuhler is pleased when customers taste subtle differences. Head brewer Evan Rosatelli, who formerly worked at Rubicon, says, "Instead of being hop-forward, Monkey Knife Fight has balanced malt and hop characters. It's a refreshing beer."

Now approaching its four-month anniversary, the new Monkey Knife Fight appears well on its way to craft beer prominence.

But it will soon have familiar competition. Tower Brewing will reintroduce Rosebud English Old Ale, another former Rubicon favorite, in August. □

Sip on Monkey Knife Fight and Tower Brewing's other craft beers at 1210 66th Street in East Sacramento. (916) 272-4472; towerbrewingcompany.com.

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