



New decadence at Golden 1 Center

BY BRADLEY GEISER

Golden 1 Center might sometimes give basketball fans a hard-to-swallow product on the court, but it doesn't mean that it's doing the same thing at its concession stands.

Since opening in 2016, the Sacramento Kings' arena has offered food options both typical and atypical of standard arena fare, bypassing wall-paper paste disguised as nacho cheese and horror-inducing hot dogs for local favorites LowBrau, Cafe Bernardo, Paragary's, as well as arena-exclusive items.

The team's 90/150 local sourcing initiative ensures that 90% of the food comes from within 150 miles of the arena. The result is an eclectic smorgasbord of stadium staples and unique snacks that most palates can enjoy.

The team went into this season not looking for a specific motif, but to remix established ideas and offer new ones.

"We really want to stick with our core items and really kick those items up into another land, another place," said executive chief Brien Kuznicki. "We're going to take your popcorn and go crazy with [it]."

This includes vegan popcorn, a purple-and-white concoction that bypasses butter for a flavorful, but lighter option. Although the arena has a ways to go to accommodate every dietary need—good luck finding many low-carb options—the team is expanding vegan, vegetarian and gluten-free choices.

These include the surprisingly delicious vegan nachos made with Beyond meat and dairy-free cheese alternative that lacks the rubbery texture and blandness many incognito vegan foods possess. Other plant-based options are also available.

In a year when chicken sandwiches rose from being outrageously popular to downright viral, the team introduced Sweet Bird's Biscuit Chicken variety, a sandwich that, according to executive sous chef Andrew Dereta, took three weeks of trial and error to perfect.

"We had about 20 people try," Dereta said. "We tried it with the chicken thigh. Some liked it, some didn't. ... At the end of the day, it was the [Mary's] chicken breast. Even the Kings players liked it."

This all-encompassing taste test method helps ensure that the food options are unique and desirable, giving customers nostalgia for another form of entertainment.

"At the end of the day, it is a carnival type of theme, and it's really sticking to what the Golden 1 Center really means," Kuznicki said. "We're making our own chili. We're making our own cheese. Those hot dogs, you're not going to get those hot dogs anywhere else."

These include a behemoth half-pound Schwartz's all-beef chili dog and a rotating menu of what Kuznicki calls his "crazy dogs."

Of course, some go to the arena for a drink, and the team is offering its signature mix of Sierra Nevada beers and new cocktails as well.

Doughnuts, tiramisu, churro fries, hot dogs, nachos, rice bowls, even their take on cheesesteak—the Kings are offering a unique culinary experience for adventurous eaters, drink connoisseurs and traditionalists alike this season. □

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