

Best burger, best girl in leagues of their own

By Jerry Soverinsky
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

SAUGET, Ill. — I was beginning to think I would never meet her. Too many bad dates, too many relationships that went nowhere, too many “not quite rights” both from their perspective and mine had created a hopeless feeling for me, and I started to think my status would be permanently single.

My criteria were relatively simple — I didn’t think I was asking for too much. She would have to be funny, of course. And love the outdoors. Not too fond of books would help, but then again, I needed to keep an open mind. Could there be anything else? Not sure. She had to be out there somewhere, I kept trying to persuade myself, while spending yet another couch-bound Saturday night watching “Iron Chef” reruns on the Food Network. She had to be out there . . .

My friends said I was looking in the wrong places. How hard could it be in a city like Chicago, they continued to ask incredulously, to find a girl who liked to watch sports and drink beer? Not difficult at all, I conceded, but I’ve got tons of guy friends to do those things with. Take away sports and beer from those relationships, and what’s left for us to do together? Eat sugar cereal?

But things have changed. As of this past weekend, I think I may have found her. A mutual friend introduced us in the spring, and we’ve been dating since then. I had been proceeding rather

cautiously, though, as I didn’t want to get my hopes too high. I had experienced too many disappointments over the years, many just at the time when I thought I’d met “the one.” Even though she seemed to have most of the things I was looking for, how could I know for sure, I continued to ask, to the blank stare of my therapist.

If you go . . .

Gateway Grizzlies

2301 Grizzlie Bear Blvd.
Sauget, Ill.
618-337-3000

www.gatewaygrizzlies.com

The Grizzlies have two more home series during which the burgers will be served: today through Tuesday with the River City Ras-cals, and Sept. 2-4 with the Rockford River Hawks. Tickets \$5-\$8; “Baseball’s Best Burger” \$4.50.

Directions: Flights daily from Boston to Lambert-St. Louis International Airport. Sauget is 15 miles southeast of St. Louis.

There had to be a sign.

I’m pretty sure I got the sign, and it came at the most unexpected place: a Frontier League baseball game.

The Frontier League is a 10-team independent professional league whose players are working toward making a big league ball club’s minor-league system. The league’s 2006 cellar dwellers, the

Gateway Grizzlies, play in Sauget, a little town across the Mississippi from St. Louis. We drove nearly seven hours to get to Sauget and wound up watching the Grizzlies play for not even three innings. But that was OK. We had made the trek for something else. We had come for the burgers.

“Baseball’s Best

Burger,” as the Grizzlies describe it, is a quarter-pound patty topped with cheddar cheese and bacon and sandwiched between halves of a Krispy Kreme doughnut. Finally, I thought to myself, a reason to eat red meat again. And at \$4.50, it was priced to sell.

I mentioned the details to my friend, expecting at best a patron-

izing eye roll. Instead, I was embraced with an enthusiastic “We’re there!” an uninhibited heartfelt expression that was at once passionate and provocative. My heart fluttered, and I felt my face flush. “We’re there,” I heard her say later that night as I replayed our exchange over and over in my mind. “We’re there.”

We arrived at GCS Ballpark and toured the park with Jeff O’Neill, the team’s director of media relations. He talked about the park’s capacity, pitching prospects for 2007, and the opposing team’s ERA. But I was thinking about burgers.

Though the Grizzlies don’t release details of the burger’s nutritional value, O’Neill offered up figures of 1,200 calories and 70 grams of fat as an approximation. The scientific data was lost on me. Calories? Fat grams? What are we, scientists? I just wanted a burger. I was light-headed with anticipation.

Finally, it was time. With a little over an hour to game time and the park still fairly quiet, O’Neill escorted us into a crowded grill room to view the burger’s preparation. The initial cooking process unfolds as expected: ground beef is placed on a grill, bacon draped onto the burger, and then a cheese slice blankets both. Two minutes went by, then three, as the flavors slowly fused. I could take it no longer.

“How about the Krispy Kreme?” I blurted. Embarrassed, my friend elbowed me gently in the side, reminding me that we were guests. O’Neill smiled and nodded to the cook, who reached into a Krispy Kreme box and extracted a glazed doughnut. In one deft motion, he sliced it and placed the two halves next to the burger on the grill.

“We warm the doughnut just slightly, allowing the sugars to melt,” O’Neill explained. I looked over at my friend, who bowed her head slightly, before turning away sheepishly. They repeated the process, preparing one for each of us.

Finally, they assembled the burgers, and it was time to sample them. She went first. There was



JERRY SOVERINSKY FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE (ABOVE); JANA BASKIN FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

A bacon cheeseburger and doughnut approach their proper temperatures on the grill. The author puts “Baseball’s Best Burger” to a strict pregame test at GCS Ballpark in Sauget, Ill.



nothing tentative about her first bite. It was a purposeful, perfect indulgence, neither too small nor too big. And just when I thought things couldn’t get any better, she

turned to me, her mouth full of food, and exclaimed, “Mblfkfhah, blkobghhh, frghhhhhh.” Tasting mine would be just a formality.

I bit into the burger, first one

bite, then another, never losing eye contact with my friend, who continued to eat hers. Before I knew it, we had both finished, the fragrant traces of grease and sugar dotting the bottom of our Krispy Kreme hat-plates (a nice touch!). Neither of us spoke for several minutes. We were out of breath. We gazed out at left field, our bellies heaving dramatically in the warm summer air. I looked over at her and stared into her eyes, and she stared back into mine. We both smiled knowingly.

The rest of the night was a blur. All I know is, I met someone whose love of red meat and doughnuts matches mine, someone who could care less about salads and sushi. It has now been nearly 48 hours since I returned home to Chicago, and every time I close my eyes, I think only of “the burger” and her.

Sometimes, you just know when you’ve met the right one.

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