

The NFL HomeGate Party

“Tailgate” – at sports and special events, supercharged super fans, urban picnic, congregate around the car, listen, enjoying great food and cold libations, bonding.

“Party” – affair, amusement, celebration, festivity, occasion, soiree, feast, bash

“Home” – where you reside, physical structure locale, native habit, where the heart is

I am fairly comfortable in my own skin as one of those nutcases who lives, breathes, sweats, and bases all dietary needs or dietary detriments, and family commitments around the National Football League year. For several decades now, I have used the preparatory path of labor-intensive tailgate gameday planning as a diversion to midlife stress. For NFL tailgate chefs who do the same, it truly is a labor of love. All things within NFL tailgate culture are righteous, and have become as important to the gameday experience as the actual bum in the seat at kick-off. NFL tailgate culture represents a hardcore fan culture that is far and away more engaged than the average sports fan. Tailgaters are the true “Super Fans” of their sport - spending the most, travelling the furthest, and more likely to be fully engaged in all aspects of their sport.

One day three seasons ago while enjoying our Sunday rituals at one of the meccas of NFL tailgating - “The Ralph”, mid morning I observed about half of our crew in lawn chairs, beverage in hand and appetizer on lap, staring at either their phones, talking on them, or reading the sports section. Other than the chewing, quiet as a church mouse! Ironically, for years I had always called our rituals “Church in the parking lot!” Tailgating is religious to me, and thus appropriately so. But this eerie calm led me to finally realize how engaged my crew was in their gameday rituals – perusing the fantasy waiver wire; updating office pools; getting the latest injury lists; procuring additional tickets for their late arriving pals; or getting the latest wire updates from their home team.

Two weeks later, I was hosting some friends in my man cave for a prime time game. Although we had good food, and a big screen, it just wasn't the same. It wasn't as bad as lipstick on a pig, but it was more than obvious that there was a huge void without that stadium setting. Tailgaters know what I mean, that somethin'-somethin' that makes it a great American pastime. We were obviously missing plenty of the core social elements and accompanying gear that made our tailgate experience so unique week to week. So, over that season, I made some changes. Now, if I am not putting the miles behind me for road games, I rest easy knowing that I've incorporated an incredible array of equipment, licensed gear, gaming and many other authentic tailgate elements now applied to my Home experience. That compounded by the plug and play technology of wireless devices, high definition monitors and video, and web entertainment, I know we are now more equipped to emulate the authentic NFL tailgate at home.

My 24-hour Tailgate Radio channel covers all things within tailgate culture, and along with our regional NFL tailgate shows featuring the best parking lot chefs, I guarantee plenty of HomeGating content. It's now a sidecar of American tailgate culture. If you can't join me in the NFL parking lot, then I highly suggest bringing the party home. Celebrity chef Guy Fieri and I spent an afternoon together last fall. In our time together, it became very clear that he's an avid tailgater. One of the more resonant topics that afternoon was a long chat about how we both agreed that for the last 15 years, tailgate chefs have been transferring the “pantry” to the “parking lot” (from standard brats and beer to now 5 course offerings). And now with the onset of home conveniences and advanced technology, we have spent the past few years transferring the interactive “parking lot” to the “home.” Products entering the football market in 2012 are as applicable to the HomeGate as they are to the TailGate.

So, I am happy to provide you with some of those authentic tailgating elements that have made HomeGating a new American pastime. Instead of giving you templates on perfect party planning (because everyone is an expert, right?), I aim to give the NFL fan those tricks of the tailgate trade. I guarantee they will round out your gameday experience for your home party, add some of those creative hooks, and certainly parallel the bliss I feel planning massive interactive tailgates on the NFL blacktop. HomeGating is the very best of home parties!

Planning:

Remember it's the journey getting there, not the destination. And careful meticulous planning and coordination of your HomeGating event is not only a blast to execute, but will allow YOU – the host to experience the same as your guests. Everything should be turnkey, allowing you to truly enjoy the fruits of your labor. Make the planning fun! Whether it's just the family, a large group of NFL enthusiasts or your fantasy pool buddies, you want as many authentic football tailgate elements as can be had. And with one click, and a little outside the box thinking, they can be had.

Checklists are available everywhere. I see tailgate party checklists as functional as any, as you will be assured of including those tailgate elements into your gameday gathering.

Simpletailgating.com has a free downloadable checklist for your custom party. It includes all the tailgate essentials. And while you're there, check out some of Rae's mouthwatering recipes.

Why not start with your invitations? Invitations may be an afterthought for most, but a football-themed outreach gets your partygoers tastes of what they can expect, and immediately guarantee they're in for a big day.

SportsThemedWeddings.com is a great resource for NFL fans looking to showcase their love of the game. Custom ticket-style invitations will impress your guests with high quality and realistic feel, and detachable stubs. Also available are custom game-day programs. The programs are a perfect place to include your personal "starting lineup", include maps, menus, and event details.

Atmosphere:

Whether you gathered on a patio, the garage, the living room, a man-cave, or a combination of these, here is where you begin to create atmosphere. Either you provide it, or ask your football loving friends to bring theirs. But plenty of licensed outdoor seating and canopies can be used inside or out, be it your favorite team or brand or just your most comfortable options.

www.tlg8gear.com carries all your NFL licensed canopies, coolers, and chairs. You see them in the lot, but they look just as good and add a ton of flair on the patio, in the garage, or living room!

Gaming:

No tailgate (indoor, outdoor or on the moon) is complete without some fun tailgate "gaming" options. The tailgate outdoor gaming industry has gone wild the past few years, and is great way to get everyone involved in your gameday. And (wink-wink), it keeps revelers from gravitating to the grill/kitchen area where you're cooking up a mess of gameday food. You can only watch so much pre-game action, so grab a cold one, head out to the garage or patio and start gaming.

A cornucopia of gaming options are found at www.wildsports.com. Home to "Tailgate Toss" games (many variations), they carry all the tailgate gaming staples. While you are there, check some of the very coolest tailgate tables on the market, absolutely perfect for your gameday food and bevies. And if you really want to sit in absolute NFL comfort, check out their General Manager and Commissioner chairs.

Now, with plenty of gamers drinking plenty of cold drinks, you'll need many koozies to keep the drinks cold, and you need, I repeat – "you need" to keep score (ask your buddies). Go ahead. Kill two birds with one click!

"Scorzie is the world's only score-keeping koozie. It has two built in score keeping rings (from 0-21) that allows you to keep score of your favorite tailgating games, such as cornhole, ladderball, washers, bocce, etc. Scorzie is a truly functional HomeGating accessory. Check it out at www.scorzie.com

If little outside space is available, or you stumble upon inclement weather, you can always think "board games."

www.Tailgatetouchdown.com is a dynamic new board game created by football enthusiasts. I have seen this game in action and guaranteed, once set up, it's like "flies to a bug light."

Party Supply

Party hosts, you're going to love this.

Here is uniquely designed football themed tray - Party Companion Tailgate Tray. This innovative "hand free, themed" designed tray provides the ability to combine your favorite food and beverage onto a single tray allowing the homegator the freedom and convenience to "eat and greet". Combine the football field theme with your favorite teams colored plates, cups, napkins & utensils and happy HomeGating! www.Blumoosemarketing.com

Beverages

Now as far as your favorite libations, sure you can "old school" it. But why would you? Think a little left of center. Sure, a selection of light beer and popular spirits and wine are a staple. But how about some signature cocktails or some fresh sangria featuring your favorite team colors?

Check out one of the best mixologists on the continent – author Jeremy Parsons and grab some funky ideas at www.beerchill.com. How about a selection of gameday Bloody Mary's?

Better yet, how about some fresh draught beer for the masses. Think that's too labor intensive? Check this compact option:

"35 degree draft beer, 6 second pints, perfect foam collar, up to 99% keg yield, no electricity or batteries = TurboChill. If you are looking for a great addition to your HomeGate, look no further than TurboChill. Perfect for the garage, the deck, or the driveway. www.TurboChill.com"

Or, here's another great beer option for inside your party room, a battery-powered Kegerator: www.micromatic.com

*With a few dozen partygoers, you count on every fridge in the house being overloaded. Not good for "food safe" temperatures, or organization. How about a mammoth cooler? www.bandlpartycoolers.com/. This one of kind cooler keeps tons of food and beverages cool, upright and insect-free. The transparent lid allows viewing before opening the cooler. Gas shocks keep the lid **open** while in use and fold ups as easy as pie.*

Food (The HomeGating Center Piece)

Depending on the duration of your HomeGate, I could suggest many tailgate staples. Regardless, please pay attention to cleanliness, proper food temperatures and all things food safety.

With a lot of food being prepared from frozen, do not use a knife! Here's one of the greatest kitchen/grilling gadgets I have ever come across – the Pattywacker. www.pattywacker.com. This is inexpensive tool to save the gameday chef from hand and wrist injuries.

Food-wise, you can check out dozens of tried tested and true tailgate recipes at my home – www.tailgateradio.com. Regardless, take this to the bank: Day before prep; marinating; smoking; staggered serving times with tapas style portioning allows the host(s) to enjoy the day rather than sweating each course and missing half the game. On top of that, nothing is a bigger highlight than traditional BBQ at your HomeGate, like brisket, pulled pork, and of course ribs.

Start out with some naturally smoked appetizer options with Eckrich meats. They have lots of tips at www.eckrich.com. Add some phenomenal tasting all purpose sauce for your grilled offerings, from Hoosier Daddy, www.hoosierdaddybbqsauce.com.

Here's a great HomeGating tip from a giant in American BBQ – Dr. BBQ Ray Lampe.

"I like to slow cook my BBQ ribs the day before the big game. After cooking I cut them into serving pieces, sauce 'em up and refrigerate overnight. When it's time to eat I just grill the ribs over medium heat for 10 minutes flipping often. With this tried and true method my guests get to enjoy low and slow BBQ but I don't have to miss any of the action." Ray Lampe, Dr. BBQ author of "The NFL Gameday Cookbook" www.drbbq.com

Think I forgot a party staple, didn't you? Pizza! But how about with a little flare? How about some wood-fired pizza offerings with www.kettlepizza.com. You have never tasted better pie than when its wood-fired off your grill. Your friends may never leave.

Lastly, whichever proteins, starches and veggies you feature, no HomeGate is complete without decadent desserts. HomeGaters want fun desserts. It finishes off your awesome game day!

Feel like baking on your grill? Check out The Grill Plate at www.grillinnovations.com. Chef Ed has some great dessert recipes on the site.

And here's something from our tailgate pal Linkie Marais - one of the finalists on Season 8 of The Next Food Network Star. She came up with a Football shaped Pecan Shortbread cookie, filled with Cranberry Cream Cheese Icing and Dipped Half-way in Dark Chocolate, with piped-on football laces in White Chocolate. It's fun, but so classy for HomeGating event. Linkie also suggests any football shaped cake, and you can find football cake molds at some Arts and Crafts store. Her website is <http://www.linkiecakes.com/>. Check out the above recipe at www.tailgateradio.com

All my tailgates are embodied by one phrase, "excess in moderation." Hey, if you are going to do it up one time, do it with some flare. The party can truly be as good as the game. I hope applying some of these tricks of the tailgate trade will help. But one more important thing, and please pay attention! HomeGating Party Hosts have a "duty of care" to their guests. Without question, have your guests drink in moderation, and have an array of solid designated driving options to get your NFL revelers home safely. Your sweat equity, swag, décor, and copious amounts of upper crust food and beverages at your NFL HomeGating party of the decade will be remembered for all the wrong reasons if you are not a surrogate parent for every one of your guests. Please Take Care!

I have always said that each year, the annual Hall of Fame Enshrinement in Canton is a true pilgrimage for the NFL fan. Celebrate the greatest league in the world this season with your own football pilgrimage - the quintessential HomeGate.

As we say: Keep the drinks cold, the grill hot, and I'll see you in the ~~parking lot~~ living room!

Parking Lot Pro, Host of Tailgate Radio – "Doc" Dockeray