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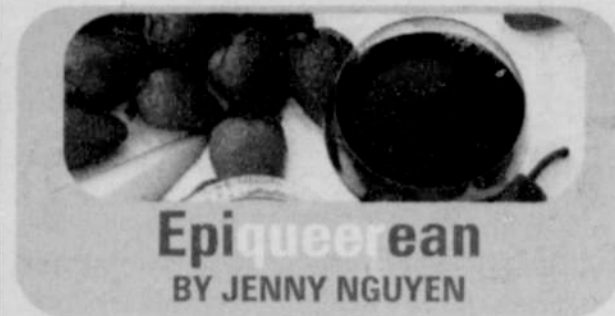
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Where to Catch Your Tight End

It's that time of year: Hibernating football fans everywhere come outta the woodwork to root for their home (or home-away-from-home) teams. With all the pigskin being thrown around, it might be easy to lose track of where the bacon is. I'm here to tell ya about some top-notch spots to do your end zone jig, down a pint and grab some good pub grub, too.

Tom's Pizza & Sports Bar • 2630 N. Lombard St.

My personal fave 'cause it's roomy, less smoky and more low-key, Tom's serves a mean pie. From the Triple Crown (three-meat) to the Hat Trick (salami, shrooms and olives), don't let the clever names fool you—this spot knows pie. A few huge plasmas and one big screen surround the dining area and semi-separate pool section. Play along with on-screen trivia while you wait for Tom's somewhat limited taps, or go a round o' golf on Golden Tee Live. Depending on the game, night or event, the crowd is refreshingly deviant, making even nonsporty newcomers feel they're on familiar turf. Any way you toss the coin, Tom's got something for everyone.

Marathon Taverna • 1735 W. Burnside St.

The Taverna is the kind of place you could get lost in. Go alone and try to be anonymous—you'll feel you own the damn place. Service is so friendly, they could teach folks over the 405 a thing or two. Find a nook and relax; popcorn is on the house, and 19 taps make you feel like the MVP. Flat screens protrude from the otherwise janky-lookin' joint, but when the place fills in, the adrenaline roar is blinding. Though it can get pretty smoky, the vastness makes cloud dodging a bit easier. Plenty of pool tables fill in the lower level, while video poker is discreetly shielded from glaring the precious boob tube. An Internet jukebox is also available, but who's listening when "the game" is on? The burgers are fair, and the crinkle-cut fries score on nostalgic value alone. Do go for the fresh gyros and for game time. Let's get it on.

Claudia's • 3006 S.E. Hawthorne Blvd.

Since 1958, Claudia's has been bringing sport, brew and big eats to the Rose City. Chock full of memorabilia and HDTVs, this local landmark has got it all. Texas Hold 'Em, video poker, pool tables, a vast array of domestic and imported brewskis and now cocktails make Claudia's a great place to touchdown. The scene is full of regulars, but don't be timid; order a gyro with soup and fries, and you'll be feelin' the love. Go early to cop a squat at the captain's wingback chairs and unobstructed views of those athletic padded asses. Ahem, I mean the third-and-11 blitz on Manning. 10

JENNY NGUYEN wants to give advice on Valentine's Day dining. Ask me 'cuz my opinion is that important. Trust me, your lover will thank you. Write me soon at epiqueerean@comcast.net.

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