

Bubba's Sports Bar

For the big game, Bubba's makes the cut



Photo by Joshua Bessex
The Lefty Burger at Bubba's Sports Bar in Warrenton is a stout, barrel-chested burger, with a crusty-soft bun, blue cheese crumbles, a burger patty and roast beef.

Are you ready for some football? Bubba's is.

Of course, just about every bar with a TV in Oregon is prepared to serve up some hot wings, cold beer, crank the volume and claim some loose affiliation with the Ducks, Seahawks and — to a lesser extent — the Beavers.

And in many ways, Bubba's is the typical sports bar — it just happens to be celebrating a team whose home games are played some 2,500 miles east of Warrenton.

It's clear from the parking lot: "Home of the Pittsburgh Steelers" signs announce. Inside, around a long, L-shaped bar, the walls are rimmed with diamond steel plating and teeming with jerseys, autographed memorabilia, photos and, of course, an abundance of Terrible Towels.

And with a Steelers playoff game on the docket, I figured: Why not go now? Better yet, quarterback Ben Roethlisberger and co. would be taking on their division rival Cincinnati Bengals. For proper color, I brought along two friends, both Steelers fans, dressed in full team regalia.

TVs are everywhere at Bubba's, but the real theater is in the back, in a long, loud, windowless, echoey, stone-floored fan cave. There we maneuvered a table alongside the 20-odd Steelers fans, just after kick-off.

Pursuing the menu I realized something: Bubba's is joined at the hip with Fultano's Pizza, which is next door. Essentially, Bubba's is a themed franchise — they provide the atmosphere, Fultano's takes care of the food.

From the voluminous menu, we had a little bit of everything. And since it was football, we started with some of "Bubba's Famous Wings." Regretfully I couldn't persuade my teammates to try the "Hell Hot" nor the "Very Hot" wings. We ended up with eight pieces of the "Hot" wings (\$10), which is Bubba-speak for "mild." They were fairly typical, the sauce likely a base of Frank's Red-Hot. All eight were wings (no drumsticks) and all were larger than average. The skin could've been crispier, but they made it through the uprights.

Unlike the "hot" misnomer with the wings, the "small" pizza (\$12.75) was generously sized. From the "Gourmet" pizza menu (AKA: more toppings, more expensive) we split ours: one half Luigi, one half Spice of Life.

Of everything we'd try that evening, my group and I agreed: the Luigi was Bubba's franchise

player. On a medium crust was a base of garlic ranch sauce, loads of melted cheese, big chunks of chicken, pepperoncinis and a drizzling of Frank's RedHot. The creaminess of the cheese and the sweet, buttery tinge of the ranch played well with the sharp pepperoncinis and zingy hot sauce.

The Spice of Life too was capable, though predictable. Over a traditional red sauce was pepperoni, pineapple, jalapeños and crumbled bacon. It's a taste you can imagine, no more or less than the sum of its parts. Were bacon left out, though, I wouldn't have thrown a penalty flag.

As the game wore on, the crowd followed, rapt, cheering at every play the Steelers made. Pittsburgh was playing well, and the atmosphere was jovial, just south of wild. Among the revelers, I noticed, was the owner. (He was in all the photos on the walls.) He was helping out, delivering a pizza here and there, but more a part of the group than working. It made for a good vibe — like the

owner of a football team whose emotions run like a fan. Someone noticed me without any Steelers regalia and handed me a Terrible Towel. We plowed ahead, watching, cheering and eating.

Despite the packed house, our food arrived in reasonable time. More impressive was our server, who did yeoman's work taking care of the back room almost entirely by herself. She gets the game ball.

The highly recommended Italian Sub (\$9.75) didn't quite live up to its billing, though I could see how it might one day be Pro Bowl bound. The bread was soft with just the lightest, flaking crust. The salami and pepperoni had bite, though there wasn't enough of them. The bread-meat ratio was off. Also, the tomatoes were woefully out of season. But the real misstep — or mis-squeeze — was the oil: the sandwich was just drenched in it. No knocks on the accompanying waffle fries, however, which were hearty, ample, crispy and soft in the middle.

Finally, we had a burger. And not just any burger — a burger with roast beef on it. We were, after all, watching football and celebrating American abundance. (Or, rather, gluttony.) But the truth is: We didn't mean to order a burger topped with roast beef. We thought The Lefty (\$9.25) was a sandwich that put roast beef in place of the patty. It was a stout, barrel-chested burger, with a crusty-soft bun. The pungent, blue cheese crumbles cut through the meat's defensive line, but the roast beef might as well have been a second burger patty — the two were indistinguishable in taste and texture. This was a concoction that belonged on the practice squad.

With the Lefty, I opted for a run through the salad bar, in some hope of topping out with something healthy. To get there, to the Fultano's side, one has to walk down the hall, past the bathrooms. And I must say, there's something unappetizing about passing the commodes, particularly as someone is entering or exiting and you're carrying a plate of food.

The salad bar itself wasn't much more inspired. Seeing premixed bags of almost-wilting iceberg lettuce with tiny shreds of carrot and cabbage for color beneath the sneeze-guard was like staring into a time portal, to Sizzler, circa 1989. Making the trip back to 2016 were peaches and cottage cheese. The salad bar should be put under official review.

I returned to my table for the final minutes of the game, which seesawed back and forth before a thrilling Steelers comeback in the final seconds. As the clock expired, there were ecstatic, relieved high fives all around.

As it turned out, the game ended up having more drama than the food. In football parlance, Bubba's is an old-school, run-first offense — no Chip Kelly innovation here. But for providing a lively place to chow down and watch sports, the restaurant's game-plan is robust.

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COAST WEEKEND'S LOCAL RESTAURANT REVIEW

Story and photos by THE MOUTH OF THE COLUMBIA • mouth@coastweekend.com

Bubba's Sports Bar

Rating: ★ ★ ★

78 E. Harbor St., Warrenton

503-861-4297

HOURS: 10 a.m. to 11 p.m. daily

PRICE: \$ — Most entrées under \$10

SERVICE: Ready for game day

VEGETARIAN / VEGAN OPTIONS: If you eat cheese,

you'll make do.

DRINKS: Full bar, coffee and soda.

KEY TO RATINGS

- ★ poor
- ★★ below average
- ★★★ good & worth returning
- ★★★★ excellent
- ★★★★★ outstanding, the best in the Columbia-Pacific region