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SAUGET, Ill. -- As most Chicagoans know, baseball can break your heart. But the game is tame when compared to the burn of "Baseball's Best Burger," served this summer at home games of the Gateway Grizzlies in Sauget, about five miles from St. Louis.

The Black Angus burger is topped with sharp Cheddar cheese and two slices of bacon. The burger is then placed in between each side of a Krispy Kreme glazed doughnut. The burger weighs in at about 1,000 calories and 45 grams of fat.

Earlier this month I drove to GCS Ballpark in Sauget to watch the Grizzlies host the Florence Freedom in an independent Frontier League game. In respect to what this burger does to your cholesterol, the Grizzlies should have been playing the Florence Nightingales.

Outside of having the ability to kill you, the only other bad thing about "Baseball's Best Burger" is that it is hard to hold. The \$4.50 burger is served in a Krispy Kreme paper hat. The glazed doughnut is sticky and the burger tends to slip out of your hands like Wrigley Field dreams. But there is a fine balance between the sweetness of the doughnut and the moist meat. The flavor breathes without vegetable and condiments.

The burger is the idea of Grizzlies general manager Tony Funderburg. During a conversation in his office, he pulled out a copy of a story he read last year in Maxim magazine. The story championed "The Luther Burger" at Mulligan's in Decatur, Ga. Supposedly the late R&B singer Luther Vandross helped create the doughnut burger when the restaurant's chef ran out of hamburger buns.

Look what happened to Vandross.

"When we do something, we just don't throw it together," said Funderburg, who sampled 10 beastly burgers in "test runs" between last November and February. "We probably tried 100 different kinds of cheeses and a couple types of bacon. The people who make our burgers Holten meat are actually here in the Sauget business park. They supply burgers for most ballparks and racetracks. We went through their entire line."

'It is messy, but it works'

Funderburg, 31, eyed my burger from a safe distance. "That one is called an old-fashioned," he said. "It's a hand-pattied Black Angus burger." He looked at my sticky fingers and asked someone to fetch napkins. "It is messy, but it works," he said. I then wondered about the proper beverage to wash down "Baseball's Best Burger."

"Always a Budweiser," Funderburg replied. I chose a bottle of water.

Funderburg added, "Krispy Kreme loved the idea. They supply about 300 hats and about 400 doughnuts a game. Mulligan's loved the idea. All they asked was that we send them a jersey they could hang in their bar."

On a good day, the Grizzlies sell between 200 and 250 "Baseball's Best Burgers," according to Funderburg. "It's not a ton," he admitted. "We've found that people split them with their family and everyone takes a bite."

It is cost-effective. Kids get dinner and dessert in one bite.

Peter H. Seidenberg is the Grizzlies' team doctor. He has yet to sample "Baseball's Best Burger."

"This is not for the faint of heart," he said in a separate interview. "As a treat now and then, maybe it's OK if you don't have known cholesterol problems. If you have known cholesterol problems, this thing is not going to help."

This is the third season Funderburg has served extreme food at the ballpark. Last year the Grizzlies debuted the "Swiss Brat," a bratwurst with a slice of Swiss cheese in the middle, topped with a dollop of sauerkraut. Using Belleville-based Landshire as a purveyor, the brat is loosely modeled after brats served at the Brat Stop in Kenosha, Wis.

In 2004 Funderburg rolled out "Baseball's Best Hot Dog," an 8-inch Black Angus weiner topped with two strips of bacon, an ounce of sauteed onions, sauerkraut and a half ounce of Cheddar cheese sauce. This stuff is only available in the ballpark -- thank goodness.

"I love food," said Funderburg, who stands 5 feet 10 inches and weighs 240 pounds. "Not to take anything away from the game, but this is like dinner theater. If we have great food, good baseball and affordable prices, we're going to put people in the seats." The Grizzlies led the 12-team Frontier League in attendance last year, drawing 177,353 fans for 49 home games.

Funderburg began his wild food riffs in 2004 when he was watching a cable special honoring baseball's best hot dogs, such as the Fenway Frank in Boston and the Dodger Dog in Los Angeles.

"Chicago-style hot dogs have always been one of my favorites," he said. "We tried duplicating one here and we couldn't. But we sent some guys to Boston and we didn't think the Fenway Frank was the best hot dog in baseball. Same thing with Los Angeles. What made ours work is that we had Landshire get us a Black Angus all-beef hot dog -- the steak of hot dogs. ... We still serve it (\$4) and it is one of the best hot dogs anywhere in the region. It is not a normal hot dog. We put a lot of time and effort into these sandwiches."

The hot dogs are best sellers of the three extreme food items. "We get the best reviews for the brat," Funderburg said. "And the burger is the most talked about."

Funderburg is already thinking about next summer's menu. He looked at the Maxim article again. There was something about "Da' Bitchin' Fat Camaro," a nine-inch slice of French bread slathered with canned chili, a quarter pound of bratwurst, two chopped dill pickles, sliced onions and sharp Cheddar cheese. The monster sandwich is then marinated.

"I'd eat that every day," he said.

I wanted to leave the room.

"We feel the need to get kind of crazy," said Funderburg, who also owns the Sweet Stop custard stand in Belleville. "I don't mind telling you secrets. We were working on a pizza. We have a new oven, we've tried spicy chicken pizza that was good, but boring. We may do our own custard. That's huge around St. Louis. We're thinking of a 'Seventh Inning Stretch,' a custard that's blended with Cracker Jack. I have tried it and it is good."

And it is not boring, which is the way of the Gateway Grizzlies.