



It's amazing what you can learn in sports bars. Or any bars.

By Kerry Schmidt 11-23-2008

From the classiest sports bar to the sleaziest back hole dive, you can really learn a whole bunch of stuff.

Now some of the people you hear it from, you most likely would not want to invite to dinner, but they are interesting, and just about all of them have something to say.

Sports bar extraordinaire. With over 30 plasma TV's and twice that number of scantily dressed and well endowed women serving many beers, I found a guy that could tell you not only the starting line up of the '69 "Amazing Mets," but he could tell you the batting averages of every player and the records of each pitcher!

He was an old New Yorker, transplanted here to New Orleans, because, he said, "All the damn bars up there are too classy. Down here, I can find some really great dives.

I guessed him to be in his 70's, a chain smoker and a beer and a shot guy, so I asked him why he was in a "classy" place like this instead of a dive.

He quickly replied, "Case they got some damn fine titties to look at here, boy!"

He did have a point.

After about his fifth round of shots/beer, he even told me how many errors the Mets made that year, and "I'm damn proud to say they topped the league in f...ups" he bellowed, as he ordered round 6.

Hoping to get some more old timer stuff from him, I bought rounds 7 and 8, but when he grabbed the right boob of one of the young ladies serving him, he was rather rudely escorted out the door.

He said he was going down to his favorite dive, so I followed him to "The Grungy Old Skunk."

I went in, then quickly told him I had left something at the sports bar and I'd be right back. BS! There was no way I was even going in that place, let alone drink from one of their glasses.

I think the only reason it stayed open was because the health inspectors were scared to death to go in there.

I went into a "near dive" bar and ordered a beer.

Next to me were a couple of, well, somethings. They were from Iowa, and they looked like a cross between a whale and a cow. When I introduced myself, one of them jumped up and said "I reaaaad your dang column!" I did not know if I believed him, since I was shocked to find out he could read.

But both of them had to tell me to write about the most famous guy in Iowa, the Olympic gold medal wrestler, Rulon Gardner.

The best parts I got out of this was how crazy this 300 pound Gardner was.

He and two friends, one of them the pilot, crashed their little plane into Lake Powell.

They had to swim for 45 minutes and barely stayed alive.

They then excitedly told me "'bout anuther tiime" that this old boy as hit by a car on his "motorcickle." "Damn near died there, too, they said proudly.



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I was trying to flee, but they had one more goodie. Back in 2002 he wrecked his snowmobile in the Wyoming wilderness and it took over 3 days to find him. They proudly said that “he lost his big toe to frostbite, but the ole boy just had it cut off and carries it around in a jar in his truck.”

I offered to buy them each a pickled pig’s foot on the bar, and they quickly said “All right!”

I hummed a few bars of the Iowa team song, asked them how the corn crop was, and escaped.

I then went into a well known Saints bar, and ran into a couple of folks who remembered me from when I covered the Saints. They asked me why Joe Horn, their fine, popular receiver had been let go. I said he wanted to damn much money and he was getting old. It’s just the business,” I said. They looked like they wanted to fight me.

I got out of this one by telling them how all the press loved Joe. I mean, there were many a time, after another lousy performance that us writers had to somehow, as they say in the trade, “Make some chicken soup out of chicken s..t.

Solution: Just go talk to Joe. He was a reporter’s dream. He would be the first out of the showers, get all decked out in his \$3000 purple, gold, bright green, et al suits, and would never shut up. You could fill up your entire story on him.

That got those two fans so excited, they bought me a beer. I then ordered a round for them, said I was going to the men’s room, but left instead.

Hey, you know how cheap sportswriters are.

I have spent a number of “working tours” in these bars for info, but one of them topped them all.

I drove out to the Bayou country one Saturday, because several people had told me of this real old timer, who, they said, had been a baseball and football scout for many years. Knew about everything.

I finally found the “Gator Den” shanty shack on top of a levee. My first clue was the giant matched stuffed alligators in front.

I went inside and the place looked like a hurricane had just come through.

But there was the “legend,” guy named just “Tails.” According to the local lore, he got that name because he used to catch gators by the tails.

Probably why he limped badly on both legs, one arm was bent the wrong way and his fingers looked like a lost game of “pick up sticks.

He asked if I wanted to hear of all the old days, or if I wanted to hear about an unknown place way out in the Arizona dessert where, according to Tails, there existed a group of “young bucks” whose athletic skills were astounding.

He began to tell me about kids that were not even teenagers that were over six feet tall, could pitch at 100 miles and hour, and others that could run and jump like the wind.

After a bit, I politely told him I’d prefer to hear of his past experiences. I figured this guy was about 15 teeth short of a mouthful, but he only wanted to tell me about Arizona.

He said the place was tiny area near Organ Pipe Cactus Monument. Nearest town was Pisinimo, off rural Hwy 28. And I mean rural.

He gave me the name of the guy who ran the place.

Feeling I had wasted a trip, I drove home, but was intrigued by this old guy’s excitement.



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So, a couple of weekends later, I packed some dessert stuff – mostly big boots to ward off rattlesnakes, flew to Tucson, then 4-wheeled it back to Pisinimo.

Sure enough, out in the most God forsaken land you could see was a large athletic field.

They had football, baseball, track set ups and an outdoor basketball court.

I met the guy Tails had sent me to, went simply by the name “Teacher.”

When I told him what Tails had told me, he chuckled and said, “Ole Tails can spin a few tails.”

I thought I had been had, and just wanted to get out of a place that I imagined hell would look like.

But then Teach, for short, told me to follow him. We went out to the athletic field, composed of set ups for all sports.

He brought out a group of kids, ranging in age, he said, from 13 to 18.

He said most of them had Indian names, but were only part Indian, a composite of Black soldiers having lived here during war time training and other makes and models.

First was T-**Bear** (TB). He was 14 Teach said and his face looked like maybe 12.

But (TB) stood well over 6’, and weighed around 200 pounds.

He was a baseball player, Teach said.

Teach brought out a jugs gun (radar for pitching speed) and he and I got behind the plate.

A couple of “warm-ups” registered in the low 90’s, then TB let rip.

I almost fell out of my rattlesnake boots. He threw between 106 and 119 MPH. I told

Teach the gun must be wrong. He said no, showed me it was brand new, top of the line.

He then said, “wait till he grows up.”

Over at the basket ball court, a practice was underway.

First thing Teach did was introduce me to most of the kids, who were from 12 to 18.

Everyone of them took 30 shots from various angles, and only missed one!

I asked if they could dunk, and quickly 6 of them did. **OVER THE TOP OF THE BACKBOARD!**

I had brought along a video cam and I quickly began filling up chip after chip.

I also had a stop watch, and I asked to time some of Teach’s faster kids. He said they all were about the same, and told me to pick a few.

I took 6, ranging from youngest to oldest, and set up at the 40-yard mark.

It was a brand new watch. The slowest kid clocked a 4.2 40. Three of them were **UNDER 4**, the best was 3.4 seconds!!!

I felt like I was in the twilight zone.

He was pressed for time, so we went into the weight room.

Every one of these kids benched **OVER 800** pounds, with the best topping out, easily, at 1,050!

I asked Teach why no one knew about this. I could see zillion dollar shoe contracts for starters, then the keys to the vaults would be distributed.

You remember how a few weeks ago I wrote on the exploitation of young high school basket ball stars.

If the agents, lawyers, coaches and other assorted slime buckets got a hold of this bunch, well, **WOW!**



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I had to admit my mind was working overtime, ashamedly figuring out how I could get my piece of what would be a gigantic pie.

I told Teach that each and every one of these kids needed to be exposed to the outside world. Of the riches and fame that would immediately put them on the cover of every magazine and TV camera around the world.

Teach quietly said, “yes, I know. That is why they will stay here. They are happy.”

I begged to let me bring out a couple of coaches to see what I had seen.

He said no, that if I did, his kids would tank it, not do any of the stuff I just witnessed.

Can you just imagine what a giant bombshell would go off throughout the entire world when this story came out. Billions of dollars could change hands, It would send the sports world upside down.

Teach made me promise not to let this out. He said he did not want to see these very happy, well adjusted young men ruined by a mass of crazed vultures foaming at the mouth for huge dollars.

When I got back, I did show a little of the tape, of the over-the-backboard bit and did mention the 40 times and pitching speeds.

The two were skeptical, but with the tape, they went into a feeding frenzy, their minds leaving their bodies and seeing, yes, “Show me the money.”

I then left them still in their frenzy.

They kept after me, but I ignored them.

I went back to the swamp bar where Tails was, and was told he had passed away. They said an old gator finally got him. Poetic justice they might have said if they knew what that meant.

So finally, I went to my favorite sports bar, and told the story. Some said, no way, but others quickly believed that something like this was possible.

Finally, I found the old timer at the Grungy Old Skunk and told him the story. He just said, you sure put one over on all those idiots, didn't you.

Yes I did. A dumb sportswriter got many an educated man to think that kids like this could be out there. Dollar signs can make one believe anything.

I'll bet some of you did too. But I doubt it, since I know all of you are much smarter than lawyers and agents.

I still make my “business” trips to bars.