

# Have WEBER, will travel

Writer Pableaux Johnson discovered the wonders of tailgate cooking while traveling the country researching his new book, *ESPN Gameday Gourmet*.

Pableaux Johnson grew up in New Iberia, but he was never infected with a fever for the LSU Tigers. "It just wasn't a big deal for me," he says. "I've got no real skill at spectating."

He went to college in football-obsessed Texas, but enrolled at Trinity University, where football was far from king. "There was a team," he says, "but it was about as popular as the lady's field hockey team."

In 2004, he wrote about a game day in Baton Rouge for *The New York Times*, and ESPN decided that the New Orleans-based food and travel writer was the right guy to pen a college tailgating cookbook. After a year writing and researching *ESPN Gameday Gourmet*, Johnson is now a fan of the game and the pre-game feast.

Tailgating has become a spectacle as elaborate as any halftime show. In the beginning it might have been just burgers and canned beer, but a competitive spirit among tailgating chefs raised the stakes and doubled the necessary equipment. Gas-powered blenders abound and generators run PA systems and satellite televisions. The basic Weber kettle often sits next to boiling vats of crawfish or even a commercial deep-fryer. Fans also love to cook the other team's mascot. "Probably Arkansas fans have seen more than their share of people turning pigs on a spit," says Johnson, "eating the razorback in effigy."

A certain strain of tailgaters takes their inspiration from white tablecloth restaurants. "People try to do the fanciest possible food," Johnson says, "all that mango stuff." One competing tailgating cookbook includes a recipe for grilled lobster with limoncello vinaigrette.

For Johnson, a little heavy equipment and culinary bravado is fine, but he can't approve of the more precious fare. In *ESPN Gameday Gourmet*, "gourmet" is anything not poured directly from a can. It's not about innovation,

## Bucky Badger's Orange Dip

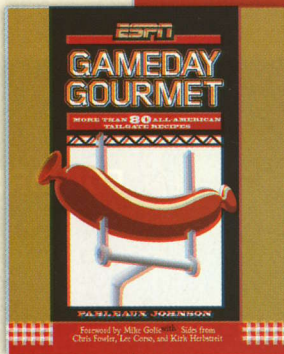
Serves 4 to 6

8-oz cream cheese, at room temperature  
2 tb bottled French salad dressing  
1/3 cup ketchup  
1 tb minced onions  
1/4 ts salt

Mix together all the ingredients in a medium bowl. Cover with plastic wrap and set aside at room temperature for one hour.

Serve with salty pretzels.

Adapted from *ESPN Gameday Gourmet* (2007) by Pableaux Johnson



it's about comfort food. And comfort food means something different across the country.

To collect the recipes, Johnson asked people in different states to answer one question: "It's not a tailgate without what?" Some answers

weren't surprising, such as chili and seven-layered dip. Some answers were regional favorites, like pulled pork barbecue in the Carolinas. And some answers were unexpected.

"A friend of mine whose family are Wisconsin fans from four or five generations back said, 'Oh my God, you've got to put in orange dip.'"

The Midwestern delight is a mix of onions, cream cheese, ketchup and bottled French dressing. According to tradition, it's eaten with pretzels and not chips.

"It sounds bizarre and it's fantastic," Johnson says. "You can go through a whole bowl by yourself."

Even the snobbiest foodies often relax their standards at a tailgate. "People raise their eyebrows at things like hot dogs split down

the middle, filled with cheese and wrapped in bacon," Johnson says. "But if they are on the table they're the first thing to go."

*ESPN Gameday Gourmet* has a secret mission. It aims to convert into a cook the guy who normally brings just beer and chips to the tailgate. The recipes are easy to follow and full of basic tips and techniques. By trying out the recipes in the book, novice cooks should pick up enough skills to cook a hot meal for themselves on a day without a game.

During the college football season, Johnson returns to the road. He will be on a three-month book tour and along the way, he plans to visit plenty of tailgates. "I want to go up there on a Friday night or a Saturday morning and see the wide variety of things people do," Johnson says, "which might turn into an advanced book."

## OTHER NEWS

Rotolo's Pizzeria now operates the French Quarter's only snowball stand. Grab a cool treat daily from 1-8 p.m.... Chef Tenney Flynn of G.W. Fins took second place at the Great American Seafood Cook-Off on August 5 with his red snapper with melon and mango salad. Chefs from 19 states competed, and Tim Thomas of Georgia took the top prize.... To celebrate 100 days of being open and more than 8,000 eggs served, Camellia Grill donated \$10,000 to area non-profits on July 27.... Patois opened Uptown in the former Nardo's space. The menu focuses on seasonal, regional ingredients.... La Vita del Forno, an Italian restaurant with a wood-burning oven, opened in the former Santa Fe location.... Taqueros y Coyoacán, chef Guillermo Peters' upscale Mexican restaurant, has closed. ★

Camellia Grill: 626 S. Carrollton Ave., 309-2676.

G.W. Fins: 808 Bienville St., 581-3467.

La Vita del Forno: 801 Frenchmen St., 944-6854.

Patois: 6078 Laurel St., 895-9441.

Rotolo's Pizzeria: 201 Decatur St., 948-EATS.