

Succulent Hawaiian-style pork topped with barbecue sauce is a great game day offering.

Tossing around the pigskin: De Soto vs. Dodge Colt

BY LAURA HUNT ANGEL
MESSENGER FOOD WRITER

It turns out that variations of the game of football have been around a long, long time. The oldest football in the world was discovered in Stirling, Scotland, in 1981. It was constructed from a pig bladder wrapped in what may have been deer leather, and it was round, rather like today's European footballs (soccer balls). The ball has been dated to around 1540, but eventually, after Goodyear perfected the process of vulcanizing rubber in 1839, it began to take the place of pig bladders. The ole' pigskin hasn't actually been made out of pig parts since before the Civil War.

Apparently, football games and Sundays have gone together for quite a while, as well. The first football games, says Dan Riegel in his *Wonder of the Day No. 336*, resembled minor religious uprisings and made today's games seem rather calm. Mobs from competing villages would gather and attempt to kick the pig bladder into the goal, which was the opponent's church balcony.

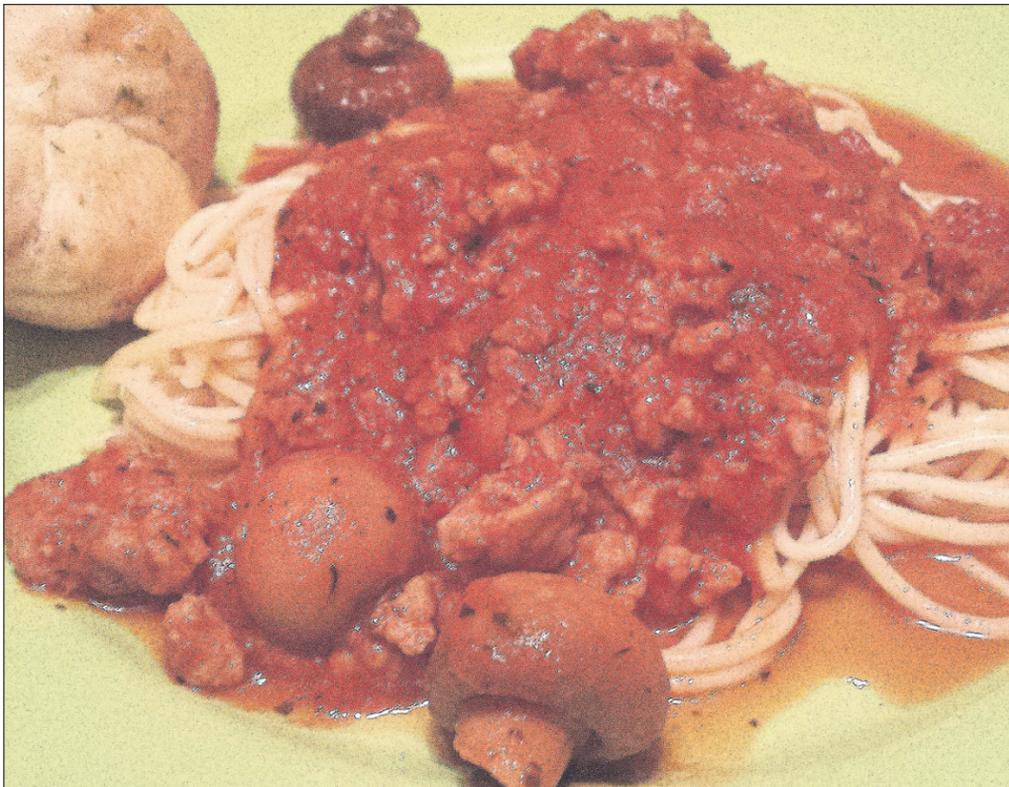
At any rate, since football started out with pigs, it seems only right that on this day, devoted to memorializing a game dating back more than 400 years, we pay homage to the humble hog.

Crossing The Pond

A journal located in the archives of the University of Alabama Press records that the army of Hernando de Soto arrived at the town of Quizqui — now known as Hopkinsville, Ky., on May 8, in the year 1541, just about the time that old football in Scotland was abandoned. At the time of de Soto's arrival, many of the Native Americans inhabiting the area were in the fields tending spring corn crops, so de Soto took advantage of this by capturing the women and children who stayed behind in the village. Because of the poor condition of his army, de Soto almost immediately ordered the release of the captives in an attempt to avoid an all out battle. The Indians fled, leaving their goods behind.

Donald E. Shepard's manuscript, "Native American Conquest: The Midwest" describes that while part of the army stayed and gathered what food remained in the freshly deserted settlement, most of de Soto's men continued northward and made camp at Chisca, or modern-day Madisonville. Not finding much in the way of resources, they stayed there for 6 days to rest the wounded and wait for the Hopkinsville contingent to join them. Once reunited, the entire army marched onward to Henderson, where they discovered a bountiful supply of corn.

De Soto's Kentucky journey was part of a larger exploration of North America begun in 1539 along Florida's gulf coast.



Meaty pork spaghetti from the kitchen of an authentic Italian Mama.

Shepard claims the first landing took place at Port Charlotte, Fla., while others believe the landing was at Tampa Bay. Regardless, this exploration resulted in the mapping of much of the southeastern United States.

About a year after his trek through Kentucky, de Soto died of fever near MacArthur, Ark., but one of the marks of his presence has survived to this day: pigs. De Soto left pigs at various places all along his route in order to provide sustenance for his men on their return trip, as well as for future settlements. At first, the pigs were devastating to Native American crops, but eventually area tribes domesticated them. Although many tribes such as the Chickasaw did not each much pork themselves, they began raising pigs to sell to white settlers. As white settlement expanded in the New World, pig farming became more prevalent — wild hogs continued to forage in forest and waste areas, too, but they were extensively hunted and soon their numbers diminished.

In recent years, wild and feral hogs have been making a comeback throughout the southeast, including Kentucky, with pockets ranging as far north as Michigan and as far west as California. Many of these wild and domesticated varieties still hail from de Soto's original cargo.

Some 400 Years Later ...

When I was young, there was a hog farmer from eastern Kentucky who lived about a half-mile down the road from us. On certain days when the wind was just right, instead of being a half-mile away it smelled like the farm was in our front room. My father was good friends with the farmer and sometimes he

would take me down the road to gather wild honey from out of the farmer's woods. I can well remember my father and I running, laughing all the while and being chased out of those woods by a hoard of angry bees.

One of the farmer's older boys rode the school bus with me, and as was my usual disposition, I found him to be quite scary looking. I put it down to the fact that until then I'd never seen a school boy sporting a full beard.

One day my father brought home a couple of pigs he'd purchased from the farmer, which we named "Ham" and "Bone." Eventually they ended up on the dinner table, having been slaughtered by my grandfather and hung up on my swing set for butchering. Of course, my father took me up to the house before the dreaded moment, and I was too young to connect the hogs with the huge pink blobs hanging from my swing.

Fortunately, my grandfather at least had the good grace to carry the hog's heads down to my sister's house before cleaning them up for soups, or what he called head cheese. My father recalled walking down to check on him and seeing him "up to his elbows in hog."

The Three Little Pigs Who Traveled In Style

In the late 1970s, a brother-in-law decided to follow in my father's footsteps and raise some hogs himself. Having learned from my father where to get some piglets, he soon made arrangements with a farmer to purchase three of them, and planned to pick them up on his next day off.

On the appointed day my father was working, so my brother-in-law set out on his own to haul his

stock home. Later that afternoon he returned with three small pigs in tow. What no one realized until that moment was that he did not bring them home in a trailer, or even in the back of a truck. Much to the amusement of our family, he hauled them in the back seat of his 70s Dodge Colt. The old Colt was never the same, and it is a story that has become legend in our family.

The Recipes

Pork is just about the most reasonably priced meat in the market right now (which isn't saying much,) and there are myriad ways to prepare it depending on your mood and the cut of meat you choose. Globally, pork is very popular, and both of the following recipes were given to me our giant-sized half Samoan friend, Howard Padillo, when we lived in Hawaii. Howard was a professional dive instructor, but in his spare time he loved to cook and was very good at it. The first is a traditional Hawaiian dish, and the second is an authentic Italian recipe that Howard learned in a little Italian kitchen in the Abruzzo Provence. Both are sure to please.

Luau Style Pork

If you have a craving for moist and smokey pork but find that the weather is not suitable for outdoor cooking, this is an easy way to do it. Chuck and I loved the pork served at the traditional Hawaiian luau, called ka'lua pig, and one night Howard told me of this easy way to duplicate the flavor without having to dig an earthen oven and sit up all night to watch over the roasting process. I honestly cannot tell this version from the real deal.

Howard used a fresh pork

picnic shoulder, but I've made this with Boston roast and my favorite way is actually using boneless pork loin, which cuts the fat but still renders a moist flavorful result due to the low and slow cooking method. I recommend using only Wright's brand liquid smoke for this dish, which in my opinion is far superior to any other brand. Leftovers make delicious sandwiches served on Hawaiian sweet bread, with or without barbecue sauce, and would make great Super Bowl fare.

6-7 pounds pork roast
8 tablespoons coarse salt
6-8 tablespoons Wright's brand liquid smoke
1 cup water
Heavy duty foil
Large roaster pan

Place the pork in the roaster pan and sprinkle liberally with the salt, then douse it with the liquid smoke. Pour the water in the bottom of the pan, then cover it tightly with foil. Roast at 300 degrees for 6-8 hours. Check occasionally and add more water if needed, making sure to re-cover it tightly. Remove bones, if any, from roast and chunk into serving size pieces (it will fall apart) or shred. About 10 servings, more if served as sandwiches.

Hearty Pork Spaghetti Sauce

Howard made this for us one evening in our Army housing unit on Fort Shafter, near Honolulu. He was taught how to make it while visiting a friend's mother in Italy. It breaks a few stereotypes in that it does not contain fresh garlic or wine, and has very little olive oil. It is an everyday kind of recipe, well suited to country cooking, and is even better if made a day ahead of serving. Follow Howard's method of seasoning and you'll be singing Figaro in no time.

1 pound bulk sweet Italian sausage
2 pounds ground pork
Olive oil, about 2 tablespoons
1 medium onion, chopped
4 cloves garlic, minced
1 28-oz can tomatoes
2 15-oz cans tomato sauce
1 8-oz can tomato paste
2 teaspoons salt
3/4 teaspoon pepper
1/4 cup sugar or sugar substitute
1 cup water, plus more if needed
1 pounds fresh whole mushrooms
1/4 cup Italian seasoning, divided

In a large pot, brown the sausage and pork, drain if needed. Add the olive oil, onions and garlic and saute until onions are soft. Add the tomatoes, tomato sauce, tomato paste, sugar, water and half of the Italian seasoning. Add the whole mushrooms and stir well; cook on medium heat, uncovered, for 30 minutes; stir as necessary to prevent sticking. Pour the remaining half of Italian seasoning on top of the sauce but do not stir it in. Cover with a snug lid and simmer on very low heat, without peaking, for 20 minutes. Remove the lid and blend the seasonings added earlier into the sauce, adding more water if it seems too thick. Simmer for about 10 more minutes. Serve over hot cooked pasta, with parmesan cheese, if desired. I estimate this makes enough sauce for 14-16 big servings.