

Gridiron Griller

FORMER MIAMI DOLPHINS LINEBACKER GOES FROM THE GRIDIRON TO THE GRILL AND REVEALS SOME OF HIS COOKING SECRETS

TEXT BY BRYAN SULLIVAN
PHOTOS PROVIDED BY POWER IMAGES

As an All-Pro linebacker for the NFL's Miami Dolphins, John Offerdahl ruled the gridiron. Now this 45-year-old retired pro rules the grill, as he and his wife Lynn operate eight quick-casual restaurants in Florida, aptly named Offerdahl's Café Grill.

In the following interview, you'll score big, as Offerdahl takes us into the huddle and reveals some of his cooking magic.

QUESTION: WHAT GOT YOU INTERESTED IN GRILLING?

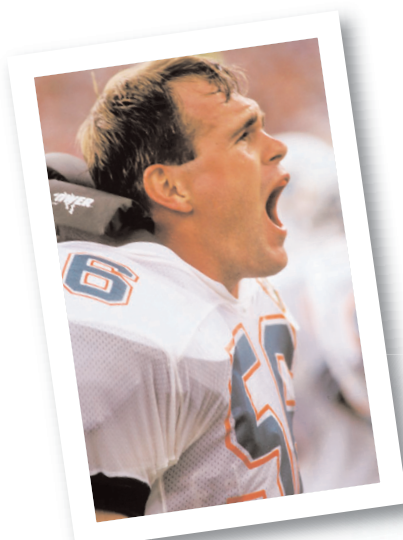
Answer: I grew up with a mom who was a great cook and a dad who could grill. My dad and I found an escape and common bond outside by the grill as the five women (mom and four older sisters) prepared the meal inside. We would often delay the grilling time needed just to capture a few extra moments alone. For us, grilling in our backyard was the precursor to the man-cave mentality and reclusiveness sought by the modern millennium man.

QUESTION: WHAT GRILL DO YOU USE AT HOME?

Answer: We have a mega Kitchen-Aid gas grill. Our most recent purchase was a Weber gas grill my family surprised me with just this past Father's Day. We have a cottage on Paw Paw Lake in Watervliet, Michigan, and our backyard is transforming into a piece of "man art." We are laying an expansive deck that perches out over a 60-foot drop to our sand beach lake frontage. The grill, community table and adjacent hammock will be the featured reminder to eat, enjoy company and relax.

QUESTION: HOW MANY TIMES A WEEK DO YOU GRILL?

Answer: Like a good exercise and conditioning program, I like to grill three to four times a week year-round. My wife (my Gridiron Girl) makes it really easy for me since she does most of the preparation. She gives me enough notice so when I return home from a hard day's work, she's got the food readied and prepped. All I have to do is, "Take it to the grill!" My three kids are the fans of the event and end up giving mom recipe scores and me grill scores. They have become very discriminating critics, and I've taken to calling them picnic table (or armchair) quarterbacks!



JOHN IN THE NFL



JOHN AS THE GRIDIRON GRILLER

QUESTION: PROPANE OR CHARCOAL, WHICH DO YOU PREFER?

Answer: I prefer charcoal, but I am honestly too busy to make that preference a part of my daily reality. My patience is used on raising three kids, not raising and regulating the temperature of my charcoal collection. Therefore, the gas grill is too often my default. The ideal weekend at the cottage will include a charcoal grill for a life of slow-motion reminiscence and leisure. Until ideology becomes reality, my South Florida life will definitely be more like the two-minute drills of life. Ready, prep...let's grill!

QUESTION: DO YOU TAILGATE?

Answer: I love tailgating! Tailgating and backyard barbecue in my lingo are like putting together a good grill team, both the offense and defense. The offense is tailgating: taking your show on the road and in the face of your fellow peers/opponents. I, however, am a defensive linebacker so my game is more often played in my backyard, where self-deprecating humor and humility are ingredients that fill the neighbors' palate. Don't be lulled; I love to find a petulant quarterback on the parking lot of any pre-game celebration who thinks his smoking coals don't stink! It's a perfect time for a blind-sided sack.

QUESTION: WHAT ARE THE THREE TOOLS YOU MUST HAVE TO GRILL LIKE A PRO?

Answer: My signature spatula and tongs are the only tools I need. The spatula ranks above the tongs for the simple reason that I like to flip more than pick up my food. Obviously, you need both a picker and a flipper to do your work. The combination of the two just about allows you to do anything on the grill. There's a third apparatus big linebackers like me like to use, the cookie sheet.

QUESTION: WHAT'S YOUR FAVORITE ITEM TO GRILL?

Answer: Easy, the Ultimate Stuffed Inside LineBurger. It's the most fun and challenging recipe I've had to grill. It brings football and fun together around the grill. This masterpiece is a football-shaped burger as big as you can make it and necessitates the use of the third apparatus—the cookie sheet—to flip it! My ultimate goal is to someday vie for a Guinness World Record. (There's a bit of that 'offensive' ego coming out of me!)

Check it out on TV, Web

During football season, you can catch grilling footage of John Offerdahl with current and past sport celebrities, like the NFL's Don Shula, grilling up their family favorite recipes on local South Florida TV stations.

You can also find Offerdahl on the Web any time at www.gridirongriller.com.

Ultimate Stuffed Inside LineBurger

Serves 4-6

Prep Time: 15-30 minutes (at home)

Cook time: 12-15 minutes (on the road)

The end of the season is once again upon us, which calls for a showstopper to serve at your pre-game tailgate or backyard party. This weekend, bring back an old favorite that will impress your guests and delight their stomachs. You can assemble the burger in the morning and refrigerate it until grill time. To serve, just cut it into wedges, bun and all, and add some simple sides like potato salad, pickles and chips. The glaze on the outside of the meat seals in the juices and gives it a delicious, savory flavor.

MAIN INGREDIENTS

- 2 pounds ground chuck or sirloin
- ¾ cups taco chips, finely crushed (7 ounces)
- 1 egg
- 2 tablespoons mustard
- ½ teaspoon garlic salt
- ¼ teaspoon pepper

STUFFED INGREDIENTS

- Sliced cheddar or Monterey Jack cheese (half on top and half on bottom)
- 1 ripe tomato sliced and seasoned with lemon pepper
- ½ red onion, thinly sliced
- ½ cup sliced dill or sweet pickle
- ¼ cup sliced black or green olives

BASTE INGREDIENTS

- ¼ cup melted butter
- 1 tablespoon chili powder

Mix all of the Main Ingredients together and flatten to one 11-inch (bottom) and one 9-inch (top) circle on wax paper.

Layer the Stuffed Ingredients on the 11-inch (bottom) circle, with the cheese on both the top and bottom of the other ingredients. After the Stuffed Ingredients are layered, gently take the top circle and place it on top of the stack. Pinch and seal the edges carefully so that the Stuffed Ingredients will stay inside the LineBurger as it cooks.

Mix the Baste Ingredients together and brush onto the Lineburger before placing on the grill and again after the halftime flip.

Heat the grill to medium—350 F—and oil the grate well. Grill 6-8 minutes on each side, and then flip and remove from grill using a kitchen cookie sheet.

The seasoning and fresh ingredients really make the LineBurger special. You can cut it into wedges, and serve it alone or inside of a bun. Potato salad is a tasty complement.



A Little About John Offerdahl

From 1986 to 1994, Offerdahl was a five-time, All-Pro middle linebacker for the Miami Dolphins in the NFL. During his playing years, he captained the defense and received numerous accolades, including the NFL's Rookie of the Year in 1986, the NFL's Ed Block Courage Award and the Traveler's Man of the Year Award. He also started in the Pro Bowl his first five years.

John and Lynn live in Ft. Lauderdale, FL, with their three children, Alexandra (17), Drew (15) and Jameson (13).

Visit John Offerdahl a.k.a. Gridiron Griller online at

- www.offerdahls.com
- www.gridirongriller.com