

AGGIELIFE

THE BATTALION

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The Domino Effect

Students use the game of dominoes to socialize and relax

By Lydia Stout
THE BATTALION

As legend has it, a young Baptist boy in east Texas created the dominoes game, Texas 42, because his parents wouldn't let him play cards. Today, along with yell practice, Muster and the Twelfth man, Texas 42 continues to thrive in Aggieland.

When Curtis Cook, class of '64, Squadron 10, came to Texas A&M, he was unaware that playing 42 in Dorm 12 four to five nights a week with his Corps buddies would become the next Aggie tradition.

He said the popularity of 42 has grown even more since he graduated.

"I am not surprised, and I would suspect Aggies played even before I got there," Cook said.

Back then, 42 wasn't just a game played for fun. To them, it was serious and sometimes even dangerous.

One of the players figured out how to cheat by sitting in the right place and gazing into the mirror. When another guy called his hand and accused him of cheating, a fistfight broke out, Cook said.

"There's nothing subtle about it when you're serious," Cook said. "This was no casual thing, it can get to be emotional."

One thing remains the same: students will always put off studying for a little game of dominoes.

"It's the biggest consumer of grade-points in the history of the school," Cook said. "It can cost you, it can detract from your focus."

Today, many students go to the Dixie Chicken weeknights and weekends, just as Aggies have done for years, to play dominoes.

"There's people from class of '78 and '80 that used to come play here," said Stephen Ratcliff, senior petroleum engineer major, as he played at the Dixie Chicken with friends.

With country music playing, a friendly atmosphere and tables set out and ready, the Dixie Chicken provides an environment where students feel comfortable playing a game of 42.

"I come play every day, pretty much," said LeAnn Jordan, graduate agricultural education major. "More



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Chad Camp and Ben Cobb play 42 at the Dixie Chicken Tuesday night with Jamie Snow and Stacey Riding.

people play it here than anywhere else."

The Dixie Chicken allows patrons to rent dominoes any day of the week in exchange for an I.D., but some people prefer to bring their own lucky set.

Tables are full on most Friday and Saturday nights, said Lance Gordon, a Dixie Chicken employee.

For more experienced players, the Dixie Chicken holds tournaments every Monday and Tuesday at 8 p.m. for \$5 per person and the winner takes the accumulated money home.

Brad Broadus, class of '01, plays every week in the tournaments held at the Dixie Chicken with his partner Scott Chamberlain, also class of '01.

"Everybody is pretty good at the tournaments," Broadus said. "It's pretty much what dominoes

you pick against what dominoes they pick."

Although Broadus and Chamberlain play in tournaments and often win a pot of money, they haven't forgotten that playing 42 is more for fun than anything else.

"We play at the house, we play everywhere," Broadus said. "Once you play it, you want to play all the time."

For some students, like Ratcliff, the culture of playing dominoes was first introduced to them in College Station, while others have been playing since childhood.

Scott Sinper, coming from Czech heritage, said 42 was a family tradition.

Broadus also grew up around old Ags who kept the tradition of 42 alive in their family gatherings.

"All my family are Aggies, that's how I learned to play," Broadus said.

"Each family gathering, Thanksgiving or a quick Saturday night get-together, is capped off by 42," said Karla Stone, Director of Strategic Communications at The Bush School and class of '97.

In a family of all Aggies, 42 can be a link that brings relatives together and gives them the opportunity to bond as a unit.

"I grew up sitting on my dad's knee while my parents and their siblings or friends played against each other," Stone said. "My mom and one of her friends were so bad about talking across the table. Actually, they played footsies and had coded touches. They still lost most of the time. My dad is just an awesome player."

For Stone, who plays with multiple generations of Aggies, "talking across the table" can do more than guarantee a winning game.

"The unique game has allowed me to bridge the gap and talk about issues otherwise never discussed," Stone said. "It is amazing how much 'table-talk' can bridge gaps between the years."

One thing is certain, for those who are regular players of the game 42, they all agree that once you catch on, you can't stop playing.

"It's one of those games you just get addicted to," Chamberlain said.

The challenge of the game may be what draws the interest of many of its players. The skill level and strategy involved takes time to master and of course, once you get the hang of it, winning is fun too.

"It's a lot more difficult than other games, it's something that takes a year to learn to play," Sinper said.

Although it is challenging, many students use 42 to relieve stress from their busy lives and make up lost time with friends.

"It's fun, relaxing, and it makes you think," Ratcliff said.

Playing dominoes may go on in other places, but here in College Station, it is another tradition amongst so many that makes Texas A&M such a unique place to go to school.

"It's definitely an Aggie tradition," Ratcliff said. "I don't know anyone from U.T. that plays 42."

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