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The Big Concession

BY MAKALÉ FABER CULLEN

At Yankee Stadium, béisbol is as American as alcapurrias—those plump, golden-brown plantain patties stuffed with seasoned beef. It's so from the sunken rye and bluegrass sod field to the breeziest bleacher top.

With roughly thirty percent of United States baseball players now of foreign-born Hispanic heritage and the House that Ruth Built smack dab in one of the most established Puerto Rican communities in the nation, large, hungry, thirsty crowds have directed the market toward foods that reflect fans' cultural heritage. Inside the to-be-hallowed limestone walls of the new Yankee Stadium that opens this April

will be Salsa-on-the-Go concession stands sponsored by Goya, New York's fabled Hispanic food company, where plantain chips will supplant potato chips and guava juice—not root beer—will flow.

The franchise got its start in 2007. For an ethnic food manufacturer to have secured real estate, not just in a new, state-sponsored stadium, but in the nation's most deified ballfield, means American social identity has recalibrated itself, as it has done for centuries, acknowledging the economic power of a new group of residents. Food at the ballpark is certainly due for a change. Who has ever wanted

watery beer and a flavorless gray hot dog for twenty dollars?

Latin food concessions at Yankee Stadium are impressive as a high-profile corporate venture. Equally impressive is the economic and cultural potency of the family-run Latino concessions at weekend pick-up games around the state, notably the open-air marketplace at the Red Hook Soccer Fields in Brooklyn, which for thirty-three years has been serving up homemade homeland favorites, from tangy Guatemalan shrimp ceviche to crisp-skinned Salvadoran pupusas. Food, often presented through concession stands, remains a catalyst for immigrants' economic mobility and cultural recognition.

It's worth noting that—thanks to agricultural activists like Sue More and Larry Bain of Let's Be Frank grassfed hot dogs—parks and movie theater concession stands are also starting to mirror their farming communities. ▼

Carmen Pilar Santos de Curran's Alcapurrias

Masa (batter):

5 green plantains
1 pound yucca (also called taro root or yautía)
2 teaspoons salt
1 teaspoon vinegar
1 tablespoon vegetable oil
1 small envelope sazón with annatto (achiote) coloring
6–8 cups vegetable oil for deep frying

Filling:

½ pound chopped or ground meat (your choice of beef, pork, crab . . .)
1 cup tomato sauce
1 tablespoon sofrito
½ teaspoon salt
1 small envelope sazón
6–8 chopped brine- or oil-cured olives (Spanish green olives are a favorite)
1 teaspoon capers
1 medium garlic clove
1 teaspoon dried oregano
¼ teaspoon vinegar
Optional: 6–8 prunes, 2 teaspoons raisins

To prepare the masa: Peel the plantains and wash with salted water. Thoroughly wash the yucca, then peel. Grate the plantains and yucca, then add the salt, vinegar, oil, and sazón. Mix well and set aside.

To prepare the filling: In a deep pot, fry your meat until all red is gone. Drain most of the grease and add the tomato sauce, sofrito, salt, sazón, olives, capers, garlic, oregano, and vinegar. Bring to a boil, then reduce heat to low and cover the pot. Cook covered for 15 minutes; uncover and cook another 15 minutes, stirring occasionally.

To assemble the alcapurrias: On the palm of your hand or wax paper—or if you are lucky enough to have them, plantain leaves—spread about 1½ tablespoons of the mixture and make a shallow well. Add 1½ teaspoons of the filling (meat) mixture, and cover the filling with the plantain mixture all around. You may fry the alcapurria or store them in the freezer for later use.

To fry the alcapurrias: In a deep fryer or deep frying pan, heat enough vegetable oil to cover the alcapurrias. Fry until slightly crispy. Drain the alcapurrias on a paper towel, and let them cool.

Modern American concession stands have their origins with 1930s entertainment entrepreneurs. During the Depression, cash-distressed theater owners shifted from prohibiting snacks, drinks, and food vendors to welcoming it all. Most owners chose to concede—that is, lease—parts of their property to food vendors, rather than integrate culinary ventures into their operations.

Makalé Faber Cullen recently completed a three-and-a-half year fieldwork assignment, documenting North America's agricultural diversity and developing marketing campaigns in support of artisanal food producers, for the United States office of Slow Food. She currently directs the social ventures department for the Center for the Urban Environment in New York City.

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