

# SUMMERTIME BARBECUE & ONE-ON-ONE BASKETBALL



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Last weekend I decided to barbecue chicken over charcoal on the old Weber grill. One of my favorite pastimes and one of my very favorite foods. The smell of chicken sizzling over a bed of hardwood charcoal has a smell that stays with you a lifetime. You all know what I mean. What a delightful summertime aroma.

**B**rain scientists discovered long ago that our amazing frontal cortex plays a large part in determining what we remember. In regards to music, tastes and smells, this area of our brain evokes emotions and memories of days long past – a simple reminder that the human mind is one of our Creator’s most astonishing creations.

Getting back to my barbecue chicken, when I smell the aroma of an open pit charcoal barbecue I’m instantly transported back to those warm Saturday afternoons in my backyard on Delevan Drive in Bel-Nor. My Dad would typically sit next to his barbecue sipping on an ice cold Busch Bavarian beer while my brother Mark and I were usually gripped in a battle of a one-on-one game of basketball. And, if I was lucky, and the breeze was just right, the smell of the barbecue would overpower the sweaty smell of my brother as I would glide by him for another easy two-point layup.

I must have barbecued chicken a thousand times since those days in the late 60’s and early 70’s. And, to this day, I still barbecue those chickens the same way my Dad taught me and Grandpa Stewart must have taught my Dad.

By the way, my brother Mark, who happens to be less than a year younger than I, was by far, and without question, the superior natural athlete in our family. He and I have argued this point since our youth and we still have this debate today.

His superior athleticism came natural to him, with me it was work. I had to work harder than my brother to maintain a competitive edge. Mark could have played football or baseball at any level. He was that good. I have no doubt he would have made a great collegiate athlete in any of those two sports and could have turned pro.



Thinking about it, one-on-one basketball and traditional backyard barbecue chicken have a lot in common. Both are simple to “play” and execute. Basketball requires just a net and a ball. Grilling chicken requires little technique in terms of seasonings and smoke to enhance flavors. In basketball my brother brought the “heat”. Charcoal briquets should be the choice of heat in the chicken barbecue along with a traditional St. Louis style sauce to compliment the bird’s smoked flavor.



Since the 1940’s, preparing a chicken for barbecue in St. Louis was a very simple process. You would season your chicken with salt and pepper to taste. If you were from the “Hill” you may have added some oregano and sweet basil. If you were from South St. Louis, you would have added garlic and horseradish.

The technique has not changed. You still place chicken pieces over medium to hot coals, turning regularly. It should be done in approximately 30 to 40 minutes. One modern technique I now strongly believe in is the use of an instant read thermometer to determine doneness. It should be ready at 165 degrees.

Keep in mind that 15 or 20 minutes before pulling the chicken off the grill, you should begin applying your sauce. You can add your favorite beer to the sauce, a time-honored tradition in St. Louis. In the Stewart household we added a can of Busch Bavarian to a sauce pan of Maul’s BBQ sauce, the first commercially made BBQ sauce in the US in 1938. You can let it simmer for about twenty minutes and then let it cool.

The hours of playing one-on-one with my brother made me a better basketball player. I always played against older guys and better athletes. My brother was no exception. We battled most every time we played.

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Most days through the summer you would find my brother and I on the outdoor basketball courts at UMSL. Mark and I would play two-on-two against mostly college and college aged players, and usually beat them all. Those we did not beat usually had a battle on their hands. All of them were shocked when they found out our age.

If my brother and I weren’t playing against older guys we were playing against each other. I always seemed however, to have an advantage over my brother. Why? Because I knew his major weakness; HE WAS ALWAYS A CHUMP FOR A GOOD HEAD FAKE.