

# BURGER BRACKETOLOGY

The *Weekly* tells you where to find the Valley's best cheap burger and fries—just in time for that *other* March Madness

PHOTOGRAPHS BY BEVERLY POPPE

(1) **Quarter Pounder w/Cheese**  
**MCDONALD'S**

(8) **Double Chili Cheeseburger**  
**WIENERSCHNITZEL**

(4) **Sin City Smashburger**  
**SMASHBURGER**

(5) **Double Cheeseburger**  
**ORIGINAL TOMMY'S**

(3) **Cheeseburger**  
**SONIC**

(6) **Turkey Burger**  
**SIERRA GOLD**

(2) **Sourdough Jack**  
**JACK IN THE BOX**

(7) **Cheesy Cheese Burger**  
**RAMBO'S**

(1) **The Whopper**  
**BURGER KING**

(8) **Grillburger w/Cheese**  
**DAIRY QUEEN**

(4) **Cheeseburger**  
**FIVE GUYS**

(5) **The Classical**  
**CREATE**

(3) **Fudd's Prime 1/2 Pounder**  
**FUDDRUCKER'S**

(6) **Big Sky Western**  
**BBQ Burger TIMBERS**

(2) **Kingburger**  
**FATBURGER**

(7) **Cheeseburger**  
**TIFFANY'S CAFE**

(1) **Quarter Pounder w/Cheese**  
**MCDONALD'S**

A double chili burger with chili cheese fries might sound appetizing to some, but don't count us among that crowd. As for McDonald's—the only two-burger entry—the QPC is simply superior to the Big Mac, and the clown's fries are consistent.

(4) **Sin City Smashburger**  
**SMASHBURGER**

Easily the best matchup of the first round: upstart Smashburger against Tommy's, the legendary SoCal chili depot. It's a tight one, but bacon, egg and a better burger patty do the trick.

(6) **Turkey Burger**  
**SIERRA GOLD**

Southerners won't forgive us for ousting their beloved Sonic (yum, tots!) so early, but the local stalwarts' turkey burger with Ortega chiles added is a sure-fire late-night pleaser.

(7) **Cheesy Cheese Burger**  
**RAMBO'S**

"Stuffed with cheese." Is there any better phrase in the English language? Of course not. Jack isn't smiling after falling in this first-round upset.

(1) **The Whopper**  
**BURGER KING**

DQ gets KO'd by BK. For Midwesterners, Dairy Queen might invoke fond childhood memories, but those are no match for the Whopper's flame-broiled goodness. And don't forget, the King re-crisped his fries a few years back.

(4) **Cheeseburger**  
**FIVE GUYS**

There are 16.8 quadrillion options (yeah, we did actual math for this) for Create's "Create Your Own" burger ... none of which will be better than Five Guys' cheeseburger. Go the easy route.

(3) **Fudd's Prime 1/2 Pounder**  
**FUDDRUCKER'S**

Fuddrucker's never-frozen burgers and limitless cheese are enough for a narrow win against Timber's tasty Carl's Western Bacon Chee' doppelganger.

(2) **Kingburger**  
**FATBURGER**

The no-frills cheeseburger at Tiffany's inside White Cross Drugs benefits from the low-key vibe of its surroundings. Still, there's no denying the King its rightful throne, especially with Fatburger's signature steak fries riding shotgun.

(4) **Sin City Smashburger**  
**SMASHBURGER**

After getting through its first-round slugfest, Smashburger has too much momentum not to topple the weird wafer between McDonald's dry buns. This saucy, messy burger is ready to roll through the competition.

(7) **Cheesy Cheese Burger**  
**RAMBO'S**

Good turkey burgers are few and far between in the Valley—most are under-seasoned and overcooked—but Rambo's makes virtually everything it uses in-house, and that attention to detail comes through in the food. The decider: Rambo's fries are some of the best in the Valley.

(4) **Cheeseburger**  
**FIVE GUYS**

There should be some penalty for that creepy BK mascot, though that's not even necessary for Five Guys to move on. More relevant: Five Guys don't have freezers—a claim Burger King can't touch.

(2) **Kingburger**  
**FATBURGER**

While Fuddrucker's burgers are substantial enough to be ordered medium rare, Fatburger is a West Coast favorite available as far as Macau. Besides, the Beastie Boys are fly at Fatburger when they're way out west. Who can argue with the geniuses behind "Sabotage"?

**THE GROUND RULES:** *Burger plus fries must come in under \$10 (sorry, Burger Bar, Grind and Bach!); full-sized burgers only (apologies, Slidin' Thru); seeds were awarded on the basis of popularity; winners chosen by the committee of Weekly food writers Jim Begley and Brock Radke (the authors of this piece), Managing Editor Spencer Patterson and some dude named Jace we found on the street covered in Carl's Jr. wrappers.*

(4) **Sin City Smashburger**  
**SMASHBURGER**

Rambo's is a laid-back spot with a lot of charm, while Smashburger is a quick-firing, play-it-loose franchise. A little-known bar stereotypically has better food, and Rambo's fries probably eke it out over Smash's, but there's a reason the new chain is making a lot of noise in Vegas. They do it right, quick and cheap, and then they pile fried and grilled onions on top.

(4) **Sin City Smashburger**  
**SMASHBURGER**

These two are prepared in a similar fashion on similar grills, so it's a very even matchup. Fatburger's chunky fat fries take the advantage in the potato throwdown, but the Sin City Smashburger takes the toppings up a notch with bacon, cheese, a fried egg, and a combo of fried and grilled onions. With those extras blending with the greasy-good smashed beef patty, the upstart Smashburger sneaks ahead of Southern California's other favorite.

(2) **Kingburger**  
**FATBURGER**

A classic rookie vs. veteran matchup. In this instance, the newbie has a lot to learn from the seasoned pro. Five Guys just opened its NV flagship in Henderson, and the good but unspectacular food has us wondering why crowds are lining up. Fatburger's delicious relish and bigger-than-the-bun patties easily carry it to the final four.



Smashburger's Sin City Smashburger

(5) **Fukuburger**  
**FUKUBURGER**

Can a cocky little Vegas food truck compete with a monster family chain? You've got it backwards. Both burgers come out great every time, but the Fuku fam does it much more creatively, in the tight confines of a mobile mini-kitchen. Creativity is the difference between a good burger and a final-four burger.

(1) **Double-Double**  
**IN-N-OUT**

The arrival of one-year-old Fukuburger to this final four is a big deal. Its signature burger stacks lettuce, tomato, onion, American cheese, special sauce and pickled ginger on beef marinated in sake, mirin and yuzu, creating a unique taste that might one day be considered Las Vegas' signature burger. But today still belongs to the Double-Double, armed with two all-American beef patties and equally fresh toppings on that perfect sponge dough bun. In-N-Out is just too powerful.



(1) **Double-Double**  
**IN-N-OUT**

Like an East Coast/West Coast hip-hop rivalry (minus the gunfire), this one's a battle of regional favorites. Both joints have diehard supporters, but In-N-Out's perfect meat/cheese/toppings/bun blend—it's the spread, stupid—should have even Midwestern loyalists admitting Steak 'N Shake simply got knocked out by a better team.

(5) **Fukuburger**  
**FUKUBURGER**

You could make a case that the old-school, flat top-grilled Binion's Burger is the primary force keeping that iconic casino alive. It's that tasty. It's also outdated, especially when placed next to the perfect balance of the Fuku patty and the zesty seasonings on the crisp Fuku fries.

(3) **Gourmet Cheeseburger**  
**RED ROBIN**

This one's a tough call, with two California classics slugging it out. Unfortunately for Sammy's, the premium offerings like the pastrami and chipotle burgers don't fit within this tournament's price restrictions. Red Robin is just consistently solid, and the ever-flowing fries push it over the top.



Fukuburger's Fukuburger

(1) **Double-Double**  
**IN-N-OUT**

Tangy red sauce? That's your weapon of choice against a burger East Coasters make pilgrimages to eat? Come on, Johnny, this is the Sweet 16, and in burger bracketology, In-N-Out is Duke and Kansas rolled into one.

(3) **Cheesy Cheddar**  
**STEAK 'N SHAKE**

Carl makes a damn addictive burger, but his fries are totally forgettable. Steak 'N Shake, meanwhile, is augmented by glorious ultra-thin shoestrings that will still have you salivating hours after leaving the South Point.

(3) **Cheesy Cheddar**  
**STEAK 'N SHAKE**

The Midwestern classic avoids an upset against a Steiner's burger boasting Chipotle mayo. Chipotle overcomes almost all odds.

(2) **Western Bacon**  
**Cheeseburger**  
**CARL'S JR.**

Carl's practically invented the barbecue sauce, bacon and onion ring combo. A&W should stick to root beer floats. This fast food-off is a no-brainer.

(8) **Binion's Burger**  
**BINION'S CAFE**

It might be the most famous hamburger in the world—and a No. 1 seed in our tournament—but we're judging on taste. In other words, the Big Mac has no chance against a never-frozen Downtown casino classic.

(1) **Big Mac**  
**MCDONALD'S**

(8) **Binion's Burger**  
**BINION'S CAFE**

(4) **Double Del Cheeseburger**  
**DEL TACO**

(5) **Fukuburger**  
**FUKUBURGER**

(3) **Gourmet Cheeseburger**  
**RED ROBIN**

The SoCal-based Farmer grows a tasty sandwich topped with bacon and avocado, but the Robin hasn't flown to the top of Zagat's surveys solely on the strength of its bottomless fries.

(6) **The Farmer's Burger**  
**FARMER BOYS**

(7) **Back Yard Classic**  
**SAMMY'S L.A.**

The commercials claim the pigtailed menace's square greasburgers have improved. The double-pattied meator from the little shack on Trop doesn't need commercials—or improvement.

(2) **Half-Pound Double**  
**WENDY'S**

(7) **Back Yard Classic**  
**SAMMY'S L.A.**  
**PASTRAMI & BURGERS**

(1) **Double-Double**  
**IN-N-OUT**

While we love the Curbside truck's creativity, there's just no denying the reign of In-N-Out and its not-so-secret secret menu. Maybe Curbside can get a better draw in 2012.

(8) **Baja Burger**  
**CURBSIDE CAFE**

(4) **The No. 12**  
**JOHNNY ROCKETS**

LBS has some awesome offerings ... but you can't get those with fries for under \$10. The diner favorite's No. 12, meanwhile, has tangy red sauce to kick things up a notch.

(5) **Plain Jane**  
**LBS BURGER JOINT**

(3) **Cheesy Cheddar**  
**STEAK 'N SHAKE**

(6) **Caesars Trojan Burger**  
**STEINER'S**

(2) **Western Bacon**  
**Cheeseburger**  
**CARL'S JR.**

(7) **Papa Burger**  
**A&W**

And the winner is ... **Double-Double IN-N-OUT**

This ferocious final features an old favorite—actually the epitome of American burgerdom—against a fast-rising star. We have to wonder if Smashburger pursued this burger rivalry, since there are three different spots in Vegas where Smash has set up right next door to In-N-Out. If so, be careful what you wish for. Both have unique flavors, and both have interesting twists, but we prefer the fresh cut, all-natural fries

at In-N-Out to Smash's assorted offerings. How do you compare two tremendous burger tastes, both a bargain for under 10 bucks? It comes down to consistency, and the advantage has to go to the Double-Double. It's always the same perfect combination of fresh beef, melty cheese, crisp veggies and the tasty spread that brings it all together. People have been raving about this burger for more than 60 years, and In-N-Out isn't ready to give up the throne.