

100 Bars in 100 Days

Hops MacBarley's 2012
Key West Bar Boondoggle
"The Peace, Love, and I.P.A. Tour"

BAR 48:

Jack Flats
509½ Duval Street
Wednesday 9/5, 8:00 pm

Harpoon IPA (draft) \$4.50

Ahhh, Jack Flats. #48 on your program, but Top Five in my heart. Best sports bar in Key West. Best bar food in Key West. Best bartenders in Key West. Tall claims all, but I believe what I believe.

I have a clear Top Five in KW bars. I hit four of them on the first night – Porch, Gecko, Krawl, Parrot – but Flats is probably my second-most frequented bar. That would rank it 4th on the list of buildings that I spend the most time in; only home, work, and Gecko are ahead of it. If Flats did Happy Hour, those stats just might change.

This was not my first stop in here since the Tour began. Far from it. I'm always popping in for a Poon-To-Go as part of my Duval strolling. Kind of like a pit stop; topping my system off with Harpoon IPA to get me to the next bar. I've been saving the Flats Hop for some kind of occasion, rather than just some late-night, half-empty, visit. This occasion was two-fold: the opening night of the NFL regular season (yay) and the bar's Grand Re-Opening after being closed for about a week's worth of renovating (YAY!).

Harpoon is the IPA that hooked me on IPA. We had it on tap in a Boston area bar that I tended at, and it was The Beer Of Choice of all the bar staff. While doing our after work tidy-ups, Lea and I would always have a few 23-ouncers to *settle our nerves*. Then settle onto a barstool and knock back a few more.

One night, it was closing in on 3:30 (the bar had been closed since midnight), and we had been settling our nerves for quite a while, when we heard the heavy step of our GM, Doug, coming down the steps. We had pretty much forgotten that he was upstairs wrestling with the night's paperwork. We grabbed our coats and were ready to give the old *We were*



just leaving bullshit, when he slowly growled, Do you mean to say that ... [pregnant pause]... you're not going to stay and have a beer with me??

Coats off, belly up, and off we went. Glug, glug, glug. That was a sunriser, I think.

The Poon is not the only worthy beer on JF's taps, though. No, no, no. For years, they have been on the front of the wave with new but popular beers. They don't stock many, but they always have a couple of good ones going: Brooklyn IPA, Bell's Two-Hearted Ale, and the like.



If you want to get a seat for any major sporting event – college football, pro football, MLB or NBA or NHL playoff, big soccer matches, any major *event* – then you better get there early. Flats fills up fast.

The wall of huge-screen TV's is sensory overload. On an NFL Sunday, there will be four different games going at the same time. The video seizes your brain and holds you captive. You find yourself leaning forward, beer held tightly, eyes locked open like Alex in *A Clockwork Orange*, attention darting from screen to screen, play-to-play, replay-to-replay, till you can hear your mind saying, *I need a fucking commercial!!!!*

And, then, of course, when they do break, they all break at the same time. Not one or two here, so you can watch the remaining games at a more relaxed pace. No, all the same, then **BAM** back at it.

I couldn't begin to count how many games I've watched at Flats. One very memorable moment, though, was Game 7 of the 2011 NHL east semis, Bruins vs. Lightning. The Tampa fans had suddenly come out of the woodwork, and the place was packed. It was three-deep at the bar, and I was the third of that three. This was probably the best pro hockey game I've ever seen: scoreless deep into the third period, and not a single penalty called the whole game. Not one penalty. Clean, fast, and hard hockey. With less than 7:00 to go, I ordered a Harpoon. As Doug handed it to me, he said, *You thinkin' that a little Boston beer might help?* I replied, *Can't hurt!* Less than minute later, the B's scored on a clever deflection and advanced to finals (which they won). And I take full credit for it. You're welcome.

Doug and Matt are the best barkeep combo in KW, and one of best I've ever seen – and I've seen a lot. They're even better than Lea and I were in our prime. They are not the flashiest -- I've never liked to see freaking jugglers showing off behind the bar anyway, just get me my drink, bozo – but these two get the job done smoothly, efficiently, and affably. Myself, I always got a liiiiittle bit short on the *affable* when my bar got packed. I just hated the feeling of being behind and I got a tad edgy. Probably goes back to my track days. It was like competing, me against the public, and the public was starting to kick my ass.

Jack Flats has a huge bar in a huge room, with lots of dining tables. These two guys cover bar customers *and* service bar. Most places would have *at least* three keeps on a bar this big, and probably a fourth devoted just to the servers' drinks. But Doug and Matt never look stressed, will always take a moment for a how-ya-doin', and keep the whole room happy.

They're not shy about their sports allegiances, and are willing to wear their colors even in the face of imminent derision. Fortunately for Matt, he's been riding the New England sports wave of the 21st century; that makes it a little easier.

Tolkien had *The Two Towers*, Flats has the Two Tony's. Often, on my final pass-through of the night, I'll encounter St.Louis Tony having an after-work cocktail or two. He's always good for some sports talk, Key West talk, and just general shooting the shit.

This particular night, I got the last available seat shortly before kickoff, and it was next to Talkin' Tony. There is no negative innuendo in that nickname,

nor is it an ironic name -- like Verbal Kint (aka Kaiser Soze) in *The Usual Suspects*. Tony is one of the nicest guys you'll ever meet (despite being a Pittsburgh fan), but is not shy about having a conversation with his bar neighbors. I always seem to catch him when he is *just about to leave*. In this case, his to-go order was already bagged in front of him, and his Lite bottle was almost empty, so it looked like he might be meaning it. At halftime -- a beer or two later -- he did hit the road.

The staff gave him a grace period, though. Instead of letting his seat go up for grabs, they held it for a while, unsure if Tony had just wandered to the rest room and would soon be wandering back. His to-go was to-gone, and his Lite was drained, but this must be one of the perks of being a Regular (with the royal R -- I'm just a regular) at Flats. Finally, the proclamation was given that *Tony has left the building*, and only then was his seat released for public use.

I could string out a lot of JF stories, but I'm only on Bar #48 writing-wise, and I actually just went to Bar #61, so I got some writin' to do!