

# eat & drink

**MINI-REVIEW**  
**Myron**  
**Mixon's**  
**Smoke Show**  
**Barbecue**  
 3801 N. Clark St.  
 773-360-1452  
 ★★★★★  
 Dead upon arrival



# Smoked out

LENNY GILMORE/REDEYE

## MYRON MIXON'S AWARD-WINNING BBQ FIZZLES IN CHICAGO

By Michael Nagrant | FOR REDEYE

**If Jesus smoked a perfect brisket and followed that up by walking on water,** he'd still have a lot of catching up to do to achieve the deity status of Myron Mixon. You see, Mixon is the Michael Jordan of barbecue. To be fair, Michael Jordan is more like the Myron Mixon of basketball. Jordan only won six NBA championships. Mixon has won over 200 grand championships in barbecue.

Part of Mixon's success comes from the fact that he, like Jimi Hendrix playing electric guitar with his teeth in an era when most people were still finger-picking acoustic guitars, is an iconoclast. The history of barbecue is root-

ed in a "low and slow" technique where pitmasters cook meat for hours at a low temp of about 225 degrees. Mixon certainly cooks low and slow from time to time: "That's the way it was originally done. There was no charcoal



as is manufactured today. You had to split whole wood and let it burn and wait for it to turn to ash," Mixon said. "That's how I grew up cooking, and my dad did it that way 'til the day he died. We do a cookout class called BBQ Memories where we do whole hogs like this. We go through six cords of wood." Mixon's primary M.O. at competitions and in his restaurant, though, is "hot and fast." For brisket,

he'll cook at around 300 degrees, and his meat might spend half as long on the smoker as a traditional low and slow smoked meat.

Mixon has three TV shows (he produces one and stars in two others) on the Discovery Destination America channel. He's written a New York Times best-seller. He sells a line of barbecue tools, rubs and sauces under the label Jack's Old South (named after his father) and has a line of custom smokers. When I heard he was opening a restaurant in Wrigleyville, appropriately called Myron Mixon's Smoke Show Barbe-

**RATINGS KEY**

- ★★★★ DEAD UPON ARRIVAL
- ★★★★ PROCEED WITH CAUTION
- ★★★★ GIVE IT SOME TIME
- ★★★★ TAKE IT OR LEAVE IT
- ★★★★ OFF TO A GOOD START
- ★★★★ HEATING UP
- ★★★★ ALREADY HOT

cue, it was as if Christmas came early. When I interviewed Mixon for this piece, I felt like a little kid meeting Santa Claus for the first time. Mixon has forgotten more about barbecue than I will ever learn. I could tell by the way he painstakingly described techniques and talked about “seeking perfection” that he’s fiercely competitive and intelligent.

### The food

The problem with Christmas, however, is that sometimes you’re hoping for an Xbox and your grandma gives you a pair of socks instead. Such is the case at Smoke Show. Though the restaurant was in full swing when I visited, they were out of burnt ends and jalapeno-cheddar hush puppies, two dishes I coveted. There was cupcake chicken (\$9.99 for 2), boneless chicken thighs smoked in a cupcake mold skin-side down in a moat of butter. When they emerge from the smoker, they look like thick mounds of cupcake frosting. “In competition, one of the judging categories is appearance. I got this idea to cook chicken thighs—and most guys use thighs because they have a lot of vessels and flavor—in a cupcake mold so they’d come out uniform,” Mixon said. The flesh was juicy and had a hint of smoke, but the skin was soggy and gelatinous. I asked Mixon if the skin should be like that. “In competition, the judges have to be able to bite through skin, and the way you make that happen is to either make the skin super crispy or soft with butter,” he said. “The fastest way to dry out meat is to cook the skin really crisp, and I’d rather have softer skin than dry out the meat.”

I had better luck with Mixon’s “World’s Greatest Ribs” (\$14.99 for a half slab, \$24.99 for a full). Here, the “fast and hot” technique shined. Meaty St. Louis-cut ribs from Hampshire-Duroc cross pigs had a satisfying bite and an apple and hickory perfume. The bark or crust wasn’t crackling, but it offered a firm textural contrast to the interior flesh. Still, the ribs weren’t even Chicago’s greatest, a title I reserve for Smoque BBQ’s.

Brisket (\$13.99, served, like all entrees, with coleslaw, hush puppies and white bread) was ropy and drier than Arizona in June. The crust had a nice blackened peppery finish, but the interior looked grayish, like the surface of the moon.

Sides (all \$3.49 each) were a mixed bag. Cajun corn had a slow, simmering heat but lacked salt. Loaded redskin baked potato



salad was creamy and featured bacon and scallion bits, but it too needed more salt. BBQ Georgia peach baked beans were pretty righteous. I generally loathe baked beans because they’re stuffed with cloying dollops of molasses or a silo of brown sugar, but Mixon strategically adds only a touch of sweetness and bright acidity in the form of peach bits. “We make this Brunswick stew down South with a bunch of vegetables and beans, and I didn’t want to load my beans down with brown sugar, so I got this idea to throw in some peaches.” I

asked Mixon if he made his Brunswick stew with squirrel as some old recipes call for. He blanching immediately, saying, “I ain’t eating no tree rat!” I told him some friends of mine had made it with squirrel once and it was delicious. “Well, I’ll tell you what, we got a lot of pecan trees down here on my compound,” he said. “I’ll give you all the pecan-fed squirrel you can use if you want.”

**BBQ deviled eggs** (\$7.99 for 6), featuring the trimmings of smoked brisket mixed into mayo-larded whipped egg yolk, belied their name and were downright angelic.

### The drinks

Unfortunately, like the menu, the drink list was limited. None of the signature cocktails were available, and they only had a handful of non-craft beer options including Blue Moon,

Bud, Bud Light and Heineken.

### The service and experience

Frankly, I was looking forward to The Myron Mixon cocktail, a mix of vodka, Wild Turkey Bourbon, cinnamon, clove, nutmeg, simple syrup, honey and lemon juice, but our server returned to tell us they didn’t have any simple syrup mixed up and weren’t serving cocktails as a result. Similarly, she breathlessly pushed the hush puppy basket only to return and tell us that they were out of those too. Mixon asked me if I’d told the staff about my dry brisket. I might have, but our server disappeared after dropping off our order. We had to ask a separate food runner for plates, silverware and condiments, all of which were missing from the table. Mixon acknowledged that the restaurant didn’t expect the rush they got, likely due to the Cubs World Series run, but also didn’t make any excuses. “It doesn’t matter if you have 1,000 people in line and 200 in the dining room. You gotta hit your marks and give those 200 people the best damn food they’ve ever had.”

### Bottom line

Ultimately, the barbecue here didn’t live up to the high expectations I had for it. Smoque is still the best barbecue restaurant in Chicago closely followed by Lillie’s Q, Smalls Smoque and a few others. Mixon said he plans on spending five to 12 days a month at the restaurant, with his first visit scheduled this month. “I want perfection,” he said. “We will get this right.” I have no reason to doubt Mixon; after all, he’s got over 1,800 competition trophies to back up his promises.

**MICHAEL NAGRANT IS A REDEYE CONTRIBUTOR. REPORTERS VISIT RESTAURANTS UNANNOUNCED, AND MEALS ARE PAID FOR BY REDEYE.**



LENNY GILMORE/REDEYE

## CONCORD

MUSIC • HALL

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**NOVEMBER 18TH**

**CASH CASH**

**NOVEMBER 19TH**

**SLANDER X (SOLD OUT)**

**NIGHTMRE: NIGHT ONE**

**NOVEMBER 20TH**

**SLANDER X**

**NIGHTMRE: NIGHT TWO**

**NOVEMBER 21ST**

**ATMOSPHERE:**

**(NIGHT ONE)**

**NOVEMBER 22ND**

**ATMOSPHERE:**

**(NIGHT TWO)**

**NOVEMBER 23RD**

**CASHMERE CAT**

**NOVEMBER 24TH**

**MILIGRAM**

**NOVEMBER 25<sup>TH</sup>-27<sup>TH</sup>**

**MARSHMELLOW**

**3 NIGHT RUN**

**DECEMBER 1ST**

**BOOKA SHADE**

**W/ DOORLY**

**DECEMBER 2ND**

**SEVEN LIONS**

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