

POKER'S ONE DRAW AT ROUND ROCK SPOT

MOIRA MULDOON

Publication Date: June 29, 2006 Page: 08 Section: XLEnt Edition: Final

Among the many jobs I have (you didn't think I just wrote this column, did you? Oh what a decadent life that would be!), one that I love is tutoring high school students for the PSAT/SAT. I love helping them take apart sentences for the writing section, love helping them become more critical readers for the reading and even love helping them figure out that when Bob leaves Goshen, Ind., at 10 a.m. and averages 42 mph, he'll get to Missoula, Mont., about 41 hours later.

I'll be the first to admit that my SAT test teaching (and taking) pleasure is a little warped, but it makes the tutoring fun. Even when I have to trek up Interstate 35 to Round Rock to meet with a student, as I did recently (24 miles, averaging 32 mph during rush hour, means a post-tutoring drink might be in order). On that trip I couldn't stop, but more recently, I did pop my head into Round Rock's Rhinos 'N Jocks, a cowboy-and-youngster-filled sports bar with TVs in every direction, Texas Hold 'Em to draw folks in and a name that's about to change.

OK, perhaps it's misleading to say the bar was cowboy-filled: Only two guys wore hats. But they were older and they looked like genuine Texas guys. (And they were funny and charming, in true old-Texas-guy style: When they caught me absentmindedly staring off in their general direction, they promptly gave me a hard time.)

Many of the other patrons were younger (mid-20s, perhaps) — drawn in by the Wednesday night poker game. (Poker's set up on Wednesdays and Saturdays, and live music plays Thursdays and Saturdays.) Baseball caps and spiked hair, men and women flipping chips and smoke rising through the air (the bar's in Round Rock, not Austin) dominated half the room. Poker players filled three or four tables, and another table or two lay in wait.

Though poker's hot, Rhinos 'N Jocks' main draw might well be the 40-inch TVs that line one full wall and decorate just about every corner. Games are visible from the poker tables and bar stools, from the tiny line at the bar to the chair in the corner. Ain't nowhere you can't see what's going on.

And speaking of the name, it's worth mentioning that it's going to change, though the new name hasn't been determined yet. Round Rock's Rhinos 'N Jocks changed ownership at the beginning of the month and is not affiliated with the Rhinos on U.S. 183. Pretty soon they won't share the same name, either.

Whatever the name, there's plenty of nibbles at the bar: chicken wings, ribs, chicken fingers. And beer. Happy hour runs from 2 to 7 p.m. Monday through Friday, with domestic bottles \$1.75 to \$2.25. About 24 beers come in bottles and 10 on tap, including Guinness and Shiner. Plus a full bar.

Rhinos feels more like a small-town bar than I would have thought. It's only a few miles from Austin, but it feels farther away. I think it has to do with the particular variety of people present the night I stopped in — the young and the old, the spiked hair and the cowboy hats. In bigger towns, we have so many bars that patrons often tend to self-select. In smaller towns, people have fewer choices, so patrons seem to end up more varied, at least in terms of age (and perhaps style). Perhaps I should drive from small town to small town, at an average speed of 51 mph, and see how long it takes me to figure it all out.

bargirl@covad.net

(box)

Rhinos 'N Jocks. 2120 N. Mays St., Round Rock. 246-9444.