

FOOD + DRINK



OPENINGS: Five Points Bar & Grill is taking Patrick's spot in downtown Sarasota. Other restaurants are opening up in former New York New York, Da Giorogio and Waffle House spaces. Read all the restaurant news here: <http://goo.gl/EHu89>.

And the winner is ... Gecko's

By **BRIAN RIES**
brian.ries@heraldtribune.com

The Sports Bar Showdown began with 32 bars, all worthy in their own ways, each with loyal fans and devoted supporters. Some serve steak and seafood, while others focus on deep-fried finger food. Some feature dozens of massive flat-screens, while others go for a more intimate viewing experience. One thing is certain, however: They all serve beer.

Only one of the Showdown competitors had the drive and chutzpah necessary to become champion, overcoming voting problems and ballot stuffing, clawing

through slow websites and complaining fans. Even though many bars experienced victory and defeat through the five rounds of voting over the past four weeks, there's only room for one bar at the top.

Gecko's Grill & Pub is Ticket's Sports Bar Showdown champion.

This local chain had a few advantages, starting with its five locations scattered around the area. Despite that, Gecko's

SPORTS BAR



SHOWDOWN

didn't rest on its prodigious fan base. It set up voting stations in all of the bars and encouraged customers to cast votes on cell phones. It networked with local organizations to get the word out, mobilizing groups the restaurant sponsors like Venice's Shark's Tooth 10k, and companies like Tropicana.

It was a prodigious effort, but it paid off, with Gecko's managing to rack up more than 7,500 votes in its championship match versus Bogey's Sports Pub.

Even though only one bar can take home the Showdown crown, let's not forget the other winners along the way. In the north region, Clancy's Irish Sports Pub fought its way to the Final Four, past bars



The staff of the Gecko's Grill & Pub at Palmer Crossing (Clark Road and Honore Avenue) in Sarasota.

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like Ellenton Suds, Wings N Things and Lee Roy Selmon's. In the west region, dark-horse competitor Legacy Grille toppled challenges by Monk's Steamer Bar, big-timers Evie's Taverns and the ever-popular Sports Page — a match that ended in a surprise tie and had to be settled in an emergency day of voting. And in the south, Bogey's Sports Pub muscled through the End Zone, Faull Inn, Outlook

Pub and Clancy's to compete for the title.

Kudos to the Final Four, along with the other 28 bars in the showdown, for showing that even if they didn't make it to the top, devoted fans still showed up to cast votes and support their favorite places to down beer and watch a game.

And, most of all, congratulations to Sports Bar Showdown champion Gecko's Grille & Pub.

Brian Ries knows the Sarasota/Bradenton culinary scene like few people do. Have a dining idea for him? You can reach him at brian.ries@gmail.com.