

## Max's Tavern

■The Basketball Hall of Fame, 1000 West Columbus Boulevard, Springfield, Mass. , 413-746-6299

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Located at The Basketball Hall of Fame in Springfield, Mass., Max's Tavern's bustling bar offers an energetic atmosphere, while the dining room allows for more intimate conversation over appetizing cuisine.

**The Vibe Inside:** "Upscale tavern meets basketball game casual" is the fusion, first sensed when walking into Max's Tavern under its red-canopied entryway. Patrons are greeted by a hostess who inevitably announces that the dining room is full (regardless of whether a reservation was made) and directs new arrivals to the Tavern for a drink until a table becomes available.

The Tavern is typically hopping Thursday through Saturday, but with a little luck an empty barstool or a secluded corner can be found. To ensure easy drink ordering, proximate distance to the bar is recommended. But watch out for splashing martinis from the shifting crowd and passing wait staff.

The mahogany bar and urbane red leather bar stools and booths create a voguish and warm backdrop for an evening of conversation, food and drinks. Black and white photographs of basketball greats hang on the walls, accentuating the Tavern's location in the city of historic hoops. The Tavern is an ideal venue for the martini-swigging and social-drinking crowd.

**Crowd:** The patrons range from late 20s to a hipster 60s crew. Businessmen and women enjoy extended happy hour cocktails while married couples and singletons on dates enjoy a pre-dinner drink. Small groups of men in their late 20s to late 50s keep their eye on the door for ladies they can offer a drink. Overall, the crowd is sophisticated enough to gauge approachability and amicable enough to engage in friendly conversation. Two large-screen TVs provide game scores and prompts for conversation.

**What To Wear:** You'll find the after-work crowd with business attire, although the neckties are loosened and the sports coats removed. As the evening progresses, the dress code transitions to trendy casual - think Banana Republic, Brooks Brothers and J. Crew. Jeans are as prominent as black dress pants. Layers are suggested - the temperature in the Tavern tends to rise as the crowd fills-in.

**The Music:** Big band and jazz plays in the background, but on Thursday, Friday and Saturday nights you may have to strain your ears to hear it over the large and lively Tavern crowd.

**Drinks:** The Tavern offers a martini menu that includes many of the modern-day staples, including an Apple Martini and Espresso Martini. A "Maxarita" is one of the bar's specialty drinks - a combination of a Martini and Margarita. Cocktails cost \$6.75 each.

The wine list is extensive with bottles ranging from \$19.00-\$239.00 and wines by the glass ranging from \$5.00-\$9.00.

As expected from a tavern, the beer selection is wide-ranging with a pleasing assortment of draft options including Stella Artois, Guinness, Sam Adams Seasonal Brew, Spatan and the local BBC brand.

**Eats:** The bar menu features selections from the raw bar including Colossal Shrimp, Chilled Oysters, Little Neck Clams and Crab Claws. "Hall of Fame Garlic Bread," a toasted garlic rustique bread with warm gorgonzola fondue, is a Tavern specialty along with the smoked chicken quesadilla, Maryland style crab cakes, Max's chicken wings and a daily special flatbread.

If spicing up the evening is on the agenda, the Crispy Rhode Island Calamari is good choice with its roasted garlic butter, hot cherry peppers and spicy marinara dipping sauce. Another appetizer option is the seared yellow fin tuna, served with sesame crackers and a wasabi cream and san bai su.

The dining room offers an array of offerings, from Hilda's Meatloaf to chop house classics. The chow is consistently first-rate, albeit a bit pricey. Entrees run from \$12.95 (half rack of barbequed ribs) to \$28.95 (grilled filet mignon).

**Service:** The staff are professional and practiced, but can seem a bit haughty. By mid-evening you can sense the frustration as employees try to bump and weave through the crowd. But given the volume of customers, bartenders keep the drinks pouring and the dining waitstaff stay attentive and efficient.

**Bottom line:** It may seem a bit swanky for its location at The Basketball Hall of Fame, but once inside, you'll find the Tavern's casual-sophisticated atmosphere a pleasant alternative to the club-and-college crowd.

**Hours:** Monday-Thursday 11:00 a.m.-10:00 p.m.; Friday and Saturday 11:00 a.m.-11:00 p.m.; and Sunday 11:00 a.m.-9:00 p.m.

**Website:** [www.maxtavern.com](http://www.maxtavern.com)