

# More Than a Game

By: Darcy Satkowiak

How traditions have made an impact on the sport of college football.

ANGOLA, IN- Imagine standing within a crowd of college football fans on a sunny Saturday morning just before the break of noon. The famous Lee Corso makes his headgear pick and the crowd cheers as they look forward to a thrilling day of football games. Corso's selection on the pre-game show, College Gameday, is just one of many traditions within college football.

I grew up in Lansing, Michigan with a family full of Michigan State Alumni. I have always had Spartan green coursing through my veins. I first realized how impactful traditions in college football were as just a little girl in a football jersey. Hours before kickoff on a Saturday in the fall, the entire MSU football team would march to the stadium and flip pennies onto the Spartan Statue as they passed. After watching this tradition take place countless times, I decided to participate in it. Now, each time I am on Michigan State's campus, the Spartan Statue becomes one cent richer.



*Lee Corso putting on TCU's Horned Frog mascot head on College Gameday*

American Football is one of the most popular sports in the United States to not just play but also to watch. Professional football is well admired, however, the atmosphere that college football provides is unmatched. Valuable traditions at the collegiate level have played a large role in its popularity. Not only do fans enjoy the fundamentals of the game of football, but also the stories that mean more than a touchdown. Traditions are stories passed down from school to school, team to team, coach to coach, player to player, and fan to fan.

A tradition is defined as the transmission of customs or beliefs passed down from generation to generation. The oldest tradition in college football that is still carried out to this day, dates all the way back to the 1960's. On the campus of Auburn University in the great state of Alabama, a small drug store was opened by former Auburn player, Shel Toomer in 1896. With the only telegraph line in the city near the store, each time the employees at Toomer's heard news of a Tiger win, they would toss the ticker tape onto the powerlines in celebration. But in 1972 after the Tigers defeated the Alabama Crimson Tide 17-16, instead of ticker tape draping the powerlines, rolls and rolls of toilet paper were tossed everywhere near the corner of Toomer's store. Now, after every Auburn Tiger win in football, the oak trees near Toomer's corner are decorated with white toilet paper. Even with a tradition beginning decades ago, numerous people care to participate in whatever the tradition is.



*Scene from Penn State vs Iowa on September 23, 2023*

As humans, we create traditions to find meaning in something that runs on a deeper level. Similarly, people yearn to belong with others or feel included by others. Both traditions and sports offer a sense of belonging and meaningfulness that cannot be found anywhere else. For example, the white out game at Penn State University is said to be one of the greatest atmospheres in not only college football but in all sports. Every season, Nittany Lion fans and students are all instructed to wear white for an evening conference game. Beaver Stadium seats 106,572 fans and all of them choose to participate in the white out. But why is that? Because the white out game is a

meaningful experience that fans go crazy for. In one recent season, Beaver Stadium was able to rack up so much noise during a whiteout game to force the opposing side to call a timeout because they could not communicate effectively with each other. It's safe to say that other Big Ten schools shake in their football cleats if the white out game falls on the day, they take a trip to Happy Valley.

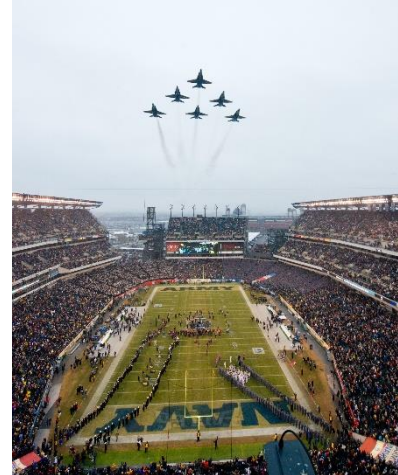
Although many traditions in college football involve the fans and supporters, some do not. Take the Fighting Irish for example. Prior to each home match up, the Irish team touches the "Play Like a Champion Today" sign as they exit the tunnel on the way to the field. This tradition began when former head coach, Lou Holtz discovered an old photograph in a Notre Dame book during the 1986 season. A photo had a sign in it that read, "Play Like a Champion Today." From that day forward, a new sign with those words was hung up in the stairwell that directs the players out to the field. Not only does a hand on the sign mean a lot for the team, but also for the fans who watch it on the big screen before the players run out of the tunnel. Even if fans do not play a large role in this tradition, the meaning of it plays within their hearts. John Clappitt is a student at Trine University studying communication. But before Clappitt supported the Thunder he was a diehard fan of the Fighting Irish. When asked about the Play Like a Champion Today tradition, Clappitt said, "I think that the Play Like a Champion Today tradition is a great symbol of Notre Dame football as a whole. It represents the history and the level of competition that is required each practice and game." The sign holds a nostalgic power for the entire Notre Dame Football program.

As a student attending a small division three school, I have learned that college football traditions do not only take place on a big stage in front of millions of people. No matter how large or small they are, college football rituals take place in every corner of the country. For example, the football team for the Trine University Thunder in Angola, Indiana, has a tradition of their own. Before the Thunder exit the tunnel, a Thunderstorm Warning graphic appears on the big screen with a blaring siren. The team takes the field and the song, "Thunderstruck" by AC/DC sounds through the speakers. Trine University has utilized "Thunderstruck," as almost a second anthem for most of their sporting events. Pre-game songs to put the fans on their feet and motivate the team are simple but effective traditions.



*The Trine Thunder Football Team Enters the Field at Zollner Athletic Stadium*

Rivalries in college football can also be regarded as traditions, but in the most ruthless way. The biggest rivalry games take place in the last week of the college football regular season. The Ohio State vs Michigan matchup is regarded as the biggest rivalry game but there are countless more. The purpose of a rivalry varies from school to school. There are historical rivalries, in state rivalries, out of conference rivalries, trophy rivalries, and so many more. But the most patriotic rivalry in all of sports comes after the conference championship games. On every second Saturday of December, the interservice rivalry of the United States Armed Forces takes place between the Army and Navy football teams. Traditionally, both teams engage in a proper “prisoner exchange.” Students studying a semester at the opposite school trade sides for the game and join their fellow comrades. Kevin Satkowiak, a United States Air Force veteran, loves watching the rivalry game every December. He said, “the rivalry between the Black Knights and the Midshipmen is a tradition of respect and bravery. To both teams, it is their championship game or their bowl game.” The Army vs Navy game is a respectful competition. Even former U.S Commander in Chiefs seem to think so as several of them have been in attendance for the matchup.



*The Annual Pre-game Flyover Before Army and Navy Kickoff*

Of course, traditions can only become traditions if they are carried out on a routine basis. The most notable traditions in college football tend to date back a significant number of years ago. However, young rituals can be just as loved. In 2017, just outside of Kinnick Stadium at the University of Iowa, the UI Stead Family Children’s hospital was opened. It is a 14-story building that provides professional care for every patient and an excellent overlooking view of all the home Hawkeye football games. When football season rolled around in Iowa City in 2017, the small gesture of waving grew a whole new meaning. As soon as the first quarter of a Hawkeye game concludes, every fan, coach, and player in the stadium turns their attention to the children’s hospital standing tall above them. Each of them puts on a friendly smile and waves to the families in the windows as they return the gesture. Regardless of whether Iowa’s football team just got done playing the worst quarter in football history, the Hawkeye Wave is done genuinely



*The Hawkeye Wave at Kinnick Stadium*

with and warmth. Six years later, the Iowa Women’s basketball team hosted an exhibition basketball game in Kinnick Stadium. And just because it was a different sport, did not mean the tradition could not be carried out. That day, 55, 646 fans participated in the Hawkeye Wave. Traditions are one of the most elegant things in sports. Despite the grueling competition of college football, traditions represent the true beauty of the game.

In the United States, college football is the third most popular sport to watch behind professional football and baseball. However, in other countries this is not the case. Most countries value soccer or futbol, cricket, basketball, or tennis. This brings up the question of whether football would be as popular in the United States if traditions in the sport did not exist. Every sport has its rituals, but college football embraces the energy within the fan base more than any other sport does. But what if the tune, "Enter Sandman" was not blasted throughout the stadium each time the Virginia Tech Hokies stormed out of the tunnel? Or if the Oregon University mascot named Puddles, did not do a push up for every point the Ducks scored? Or imagine a Florida State University game without Chief Osceola spiking a flaming spear into the center of the field? It is fair to say that although these traditions are not the main reason for the popularity of college football, they do add an aspect to the game like no other.

Traditions can only be carried on by people who are deeply passionate about continuing a legacy. College football fans are some of the most spirited fans in the world and because of that, the numerous traditions created will persevere into the future. Without traditions, the little girl who waited for the Spartans to toss their pennies on a statue, may never have fallen in love with college football or even be currently writing this article. Without traditions, college football would just be another sport that people watch without reason. Each historical habit has allowed college football to morph into something more than just a game.

Pitch

More Than a Game

Dear ESPN Magazine Editor in Chief, Allison Overholt,

Traditions are a fairly common thing in all types of sports, however the role they play when it comes to college football is unmatched.

American football has been beloved by this country for countless years, and that may be because of its competitive ambience and entertainment. But the impact traditions have on the sport is much greater than 22 players tackling each other on a field.

The direction of this story will discuss how traditions in college football are so near and dear to every fan and their experience. No matter how old, new, big or small a tradition is in college football, it affects the dynamic of the game.

While growing up within a 15-mile radius of Michigan State University, I became aware of how sentimental traditions are in sports. I would not be such a college football follower if school rituals did not exist. A fan's love for a team or school revolves around the emotion they have for its traditions.

This story will be a written feature article with approximately 2000 words. It will include a handful of photos that provide the overall sense of specific traditions. Additionally, there will be interviews with college football fans who grew up supporting different schools. The article will be completed by December 8<sup>th</sup>, 2023.

Thank you for considering,

Darcy Satkowiak