

SIGNS OF FALL IN MICHIGAN: FACES OF MAIZE OR GREEN

By Isabel Wilkerson, Special To the New York Times

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Fall unofficially began here this weekend with people painting themselves either green and white or maize and blue, finding new ways to heckle the enemy, and hurling rolls of toilet paper after each field goal and touchdown.

It seemed that all of Michigan, much of Ohio, a smattering of Illinois and Indiana and a man who drove in from Buffalo the night before were packed into Michigan Stadium for one of the oldest and most passionate rivalries in college football.

The Spartans of Michigan State University in East Lansing, Mich., visited their well-to-do cousins, the Wolverines of the University of Michigan, 60 miles southeast, on Saturday in their 79th meeting since 1898.

There are other great rivalries and perhaps equally rabid fans, but there is no match for the crowds the Big Ten draws. More people come to see University of Michigan football than go to see that of any other school in the country, and, with a turnout of 106,141 on Saturday, this year's Michigan-Michigan State pairing drew more people than any other college football game so far this decade, officials said.

In the end, the Spartans would fall to the Wolverines, 27 to 6, but, as fans on either side would say, the game is, in many ways, secondary. From Dawn Till Night

People pull into campus just after dawn for a game that begins at 2:30 P.M. They set up the grills and potato salad for daylong tailgate parties, bicker over whose marching band is superior, and linger well into the night, drinking and playing touch football until they can no longer see the ball.

For 11 all-too-brief Saturdays, Big Ten football is a welcome distraction for people from small Middle Western towns and is an eagerly anticipated excuse for otherwise sane adults to act 12 years old again.

"It's much more than football," said Jan Rifkin, a 1963 Michigan graduate, who has tailgated in the same spot for the past 15 years. "It's the food, the partying, the people. It's like a cult."

Indeed, David Scheidemantel, an engineer who has never cracked a book or taken a test in a University of Michigan classroom and who is, after all, originally from Pennsylvania, cannot even remember the last time he missed a Michigan game.

Mr. Scheidemantel drove to Ann Arbor from Flushing, Mich., in a blue van with maize stripes that has a spare tire cover with a blue M, blue carpeting with a maize M, little M hubcaps and a horn that plays the Michigan fight song, just like his wrist watch.

Although at least one student was seen with his whole face painted blue and maize and "Go M!" on his biceps, most of the day's body painting seemed reserved for the Spartan fans who consider themselves less pretentious than their downstate rivals. A Study in Green

Karen Quigley, a 1976 Michigan State graduate from Saline, Mich., painted her blond hair green, drew a green S on her right cheek and served green food at her tailgate party: celery, green peppers, honeydew melon and sour cream dip with chives. "It's a good thing I'm not a Wolverine," she said. "There's not enough blue food around." In a region where everyone knows someone who went to Michigan or Michigan State, the crowds seem dominated by people from Michigan who attended neither school and by those who drove in from other states to root for their adopted teams.

James Wiltsie and his brother, Jeffrey, drove with several other relatives from Delphos, Ohio, in the heart of Ohio State Buckeye territory, where it is not easy being a Wolverine. To this day, neither family allows the children to wear Ohio State's colors, scarlet and gray, in combination. "I've always been a Michigan fan," James Wiltsie said. "I was brainwashed as a child."

For weeks, the schools' ticket offices and alumni clubs were entreated by callers around the country trying in vain to get a last-minute ticket. The game sold out in April. "We're already getting calls about tickets for next year," said Kathleen Kissman of the Michigan State Alumni Association. A Fan From New York

Thomas Frey, an accounting teacher and 1967 Michigan State graduate, drove in Friday night from Buffalo. "I'd rather be on edge here than watch at home, saying things I shouldn't say in front of children," he said.

But Donald Dyke, Michigan State '68, sat this one out on purpose. "I don't like being in Ann Arbor," he said, "That's where Michigan is."

Usually, the animosity is grudgingly pushed aside when the entire state rallies against the dreaded Buckeyes in the Wolverines' last game of the season. But Mr. Dyke said he roots for Ohio State. "If Michigan were playing the Russians, I'd root for the Russians," he said. "If it were for control of the free world as we know it, I wouldn't root for them."

The cool Wolverine confidence that infuriates Spartans like Mr. Dyke was apparent in the middle of the tailgating on Michigan's golf course. There, four Michigan fans were drinking Piesporter wine and eating creamed herring at a table draped in white linen with a centerpiece of carnations. "Oh, is there a game today?" David Stahl of Mount Clemens, Mich., asked, filling his goblet with more Piesporter.

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