

Trouble on Rocky Top

On October 15th, 2022, the Tennessee Volunteers defeated the Alabama Crimson Tide in football when Chase McGrath kicked a 40-yard field goal as time expired, ending the game 52-49 in Tennessee's favor. It was the first time in 15 years that Tennessee had beaten Alabama. Fans celebrated the win, immediately storming the field. They ended the celebrations by tearing down one of the goalposts and throwing it in the Tennessee River.

These types of celebrations by fans after historic wins are not isolated events, nor are they anything new. Storming the field has happened countless times in the 2022 College Football season alone, with teams such as LSU, Florida State, and South Carolina all storming the field after big rivalry wins. Kansas, a school known for a less-than-stellar football team, stormed the field after beating their first-ranked team since 2010. They also tore down a goalpost and threw it in Potter Lake on campus.

These types of celebrations don't come without repercussions to schools, players, or fans. After any Southeastern Conference team (such as Tennessee, LSU, or South Carolina) sees fans storm the field, it must pay a fine of \$50,000 at the first incident, \$100,000 at the second, and \$250,000 every time after the second. This season, Tennessee received the \$100,000 fine, and LSU received the \$250,000 fine. This can not only be costly for schools, but also places players, coaching staff, and the fans themselves in danger. Players on the losing team are on the field as fans storm it, placing them in difficult situations, and leading to altercations between winning fans and losing players, such as when an Oregon State fan was punched by an Oregon player after Oregon lost to its rivals. Fans themselves bear much of the risk when storming the field, as there have been countless examples of injury, with some fans even needing hospitalization.

Even with the high costs and risk associated with these events, many support the act. When University of Tennessee President Randy Boyd was asked about the costs of rushing the field and tearing down the goalposts, he responded, "It doesn't matter. We'll do this every year."¹ Tennessee students described rushing the field as a "dream come true."² A similar storming of Franklin Street in Chapel Hill after UNC's Final Four game victory ending the career of Duke Basketball Coach Mike Krzyzewski, no hero to Tar Heel fans, brought nearly 40,000 people to the streets to celebrate what many fans deemed to be the end of a long standing rivalry. With these types of celebrations being so supported by the fans, it is unlikely they will stop occurring any time soon.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. To what extent do university administrations have an obligation to prevent raucous celebrations like rushing a football field?
2. Is it wrong for individual sports fans to participate in these types of celebrations? Why or why not?
3. What values, if any, are fans tracking when defending their celebratory practices?

¹ <https://atozsports.com/nashville/watch-tennessee-president-randy-boyd-voils-posts/>

² https://www.utdailybeacon.com/campus_news/campus_events/pandemonium-reigned-again-in-knoxville-as-fans-celebrated-alabama-victory/article_cd44c544-4e6a-11ed-8358-030400e064b2.html

