

## BULLDOGS-EXTRA

# 'It's deafening': How the noise in Sanford Stadium helped Georgia football beat Tennessee

**McClain Baxley**

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Garrett Cribbs arrived at the student gate at Sanford Stadium at 7 p.m. Thursday night with some of his friends — more than 45 hours before Georgia-Tennessee.

Over the course of the ensuing days, Cribbs, a junior applied biotechnology major, switched out with other members of the Spike Squad to go to class, get food, check out College GameDay and SEC Nation and perhaps even get some sleep.

But the group wasn't going to give up their spot in line to get into Sanford for what was marketed as the biggest game in stadium history.

"Had to make sure our spots were safe," Cribbs said. "The gate line really started at like 9, so if we didn't have anyone there, we definitely would have missed out."

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**Georgia football final:** Georgia football takes down top-ranked Tennessee in Sanford Stadium

The gate that Cribbs and several thousand other UGA students were waiting at finally opened with two hours before the 3:30 kickoff Saturday.

Within 30 minutes, the student section behind the west end zone and the section next to the marching band was full.

Red pom poms were distributed and from the moment the Tennessee team managers took the field before warmups through the final whistle of Georgia's 27-13 victory, they made their presence felt.

"You can't really expect that," said sophomore inside linebacker Smael Mondon. "You hope for it, but for how crazy the atmosphere was, how lit the fans were, just a great environment to be in."

It was a sold out game for weeks, with some students selling tickets for more than \$500 a pop. As both teams continued winning, the excitement and prices rose, with the game serving as a de facto SEC East championship.

Fortunately for Hunter Johnson, who was on the front row with a painted letter on his chest, he bought his ticket long ago for just \$10.

"This was a must-see game. I had to be here," said Johnson, who lined up at the gates around 6 a.m. Saturday. "Before the season started, the Auburn game (was the must-see game). Everybody thought it was going to be the Auburn game, but we see how that played out."

**Dennis:** If there's one thing we've learned in the Kirby Smart era it's to let a sleeping Dawg lie

With Georgia ranked No. 1 in the AP and Coaches polls and Tennessee ranked No. 1 in the College Football Playoff rankings, this was just the third time in history that two teams ranked No. 1 met in the regular season. Two undefeated teams in the same division brought ESPN college football pregame shows College GameDay and SEC Nation to town.

In the stadium, SEC Commissioner Greg Sankey walked in front of the army of recruits standing on the home sideline in pregame. Peyton Manning made an appearance, as did a

slew of former Georgia players now competing in the NFL.

As the Red Coat Marching Band filed into the stadium, the contingent of fans in orange and white yelled at them, boosting the spirit and noise to a low roar with an hour until kickoff.

Fans were standing on the Sanford Street Bridge, eyeing a glimpse of the pregame festivities.

And then the actual game began, with each Bulldog first down earning a louder response than the one before.

“Probably when we first came out, I always do it every game, but I always admire the crowd because there’s very few chances,” said wide receiver Marcus Rosemy-Jacksaint. “They definitely came out for the occasion.”

After a fumble ended Georgia’s first offensive drive, the crowd really kicked in and went into game mode – making each Tennessee play impossible to hear.

The first false start came on the Volunteers’ third play of the game. By the end of the night, there were seven false starts. Part of that was due to the punishing defense that Georgia rolled out, but it was also a credit to the deafening performance from the nearly 93,000 fans.

“They couldn’t snap the ball, communicating to each other and the quarterback struggled communicating with his linemen,” said cornerback Kelee Ringo.

Tennessee head coach Josh Heupel agreed with Ringo’s diagnosis of what caused the penalties.

“I didn’t think all in all we handled the noise very well,” Heupel said. “That’s false starts. Getting safety. Getting communication upfront. At the end of the day, that hurt us at times throughout the course of tonight.”

To Georgia’s credit, their defensive pass rush had its best game of the season. They had eight tackles for loss, six sacks and forced a fumble.

The crowd most certainly also had an impact on the outcome of the game. Unlike past games this season in which Georgia had a comfortable lead so fans headed to the exits, no one left their seats until the final buzzer.

“I’ve never seen our fans not leave the stadium like that, even when it rained,” Georgia coach Kirby Smart said. “Our fans were elite today. We asked them to be. They responded.”

Asked how Saturday’s game compared to other loud, hostile environments Sanford Stadium has presented over the years, the head coach was dumbfounded. He threw around last year’s Arkansas and Kentucky games, as well as the 2019 Notre Dame.

But he said that when it’s loud, it’s loud and it made a difference in his team’s outcome — again.

“There comes a point where you can not hear,” Smart said. “It’s deafening. What’s more deafening than deafening?”

*McClain Baxley is a recruiting reporter for the Athens Banner-Herald and the USA TODAY Network. Reach him by email at [mbaxley@onlineathens.com](mailto:mbaxley@onlineathens.com) or on Twitter at @mcclainbaxley. [Subscribe today to support local journalism.](#)*