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*Saturdays*

*by*

*Jonathan Adams*

My grandfather introduced Saturdays to me. Pap and Grandma would take me to breakfast, usually McDonalds. We would order sausage biscuits and Grandma, always skeptical that the table was ever really clean, would pour part of her hot coffee on the table just to ensure that it was sanitary. I never really understood this part, but I knew it was a necessary reality to get me to the end goal: college football. After our breakfast of champions, we would go to the grocery store and buy chips and dip along with anything else Grandma felt we needed for this special day. Then we would go back to their house and watch football.

They didn't have cable, but it didn't matter. Keith Jackson was trapped inside my television for as long as I can remember. And, selfishly, I didn't dare let him out. Keith called the game better than anyone I knew. If he had done vegetable commercials, I would have eaten more broccoli.

Pap was a bit of an oddity in Florida... a Penn State fan from Pennsylvania who rooted for the Nittany Lions with every bit of vigor as SEC and ACC fans. Perhaps in Florida, he found people that loved football just as much as he did.

When Pap died, Saturdays continued, just as they will continue long after I am gone. Around these parts, all you need to say is Saturday and everyone knows what you are talking about. Saturdays are synonymous with football, so much so that the entire region is in mourning the other eight months of the year. People say that God rested on the seventh day so He could create football on the eighth. I don't know if I believe them, but I like the story.

Now, before someone from Alabama pops up and says that I don't know football or that Florida isn't really the south, I will pause here to reflect on two key facts. First, growing up in the nineties, the great era that gave us Hootie and the Blowfish, the Wallflowers and Hansen, the state of Florida accounted for 40% of the national championships, the highest of any state. Second, pull out a map of the United States. Please locate Florida. As you will notice, it is the southernmost state on the map.

For years, the south has endured the criticism of the entire country. Let me be the first to say, there is much to criticize... everything from Toby Keith to bad hunting t-shirts. Yet it is important to pause and reflect on a few things.

This is a region full of much shame and guilt. Our past is full of heinous ideas such as slavery and racism. In our present, we face a reality that our northern friends are quick to point as we do not always enjoy the cultural richness that they do in the Northeast or the West Coast for instance.

For decades, college football is the one thing the southerner could point to with pride. It doesn't matter your race, religion or gender. We may give each other grief for who they root for, but understand one thing: college football is better here better than anywhere else.

This is not just about wins and losses. Ole Miss is a university whose football program has endured as many ups and downs in the last 10 years as any program in the region. But Saturdays is an infamous event at The Grove and that isn't going to change even with another subpar year on the football field.

And this is the secret of the whole thing. College football is an event...the pageantry, tailgating, music and food. It's like having a holiday once a week.

Today, college football will kick off on select campuses much the way a limited release movie is unveiled in select theaters. It goes national on a more fitting day: Saturday. Soon the leaves will change, the air will become crisp (excluding Florida) and the bands will play reminding us all that autumn is officially here.

Whether you are from Brooklyn and didn't know college football even exists or you just can't go five minutes without uttering "Roll Tide," understand that for some people this is a special time of year for reasons that transcend football. This year, may you not be as quick to dismiss the whole thing to too much moonshine. Somewhere, a grandfather is teaching his granddaughter his alma mater starting the whole cycle all over.

It matters.

In some places, football allows us to hold our heads high, giving some hope that there are moments when we rise above our differences to celebrate together. For all that is wrong in this world, both present and past, may you enjoy a nice glass of sweet tea in your favorite mason jar while offering a toast to the best time of year.

Here's to the next generation of grandfathers and grandsons.

*For your listening pleasure*

If you enjoyed this article, there is some music that captures the essence of what is represented here along with this time of year. Shovels and Rope's album "O Be Joyful." Anything by The Avett Brothers, but "Country Was" is a good starting point. The Zac Brown Band's live album "Pass the Jar." The Civil Wars are also a real treat.