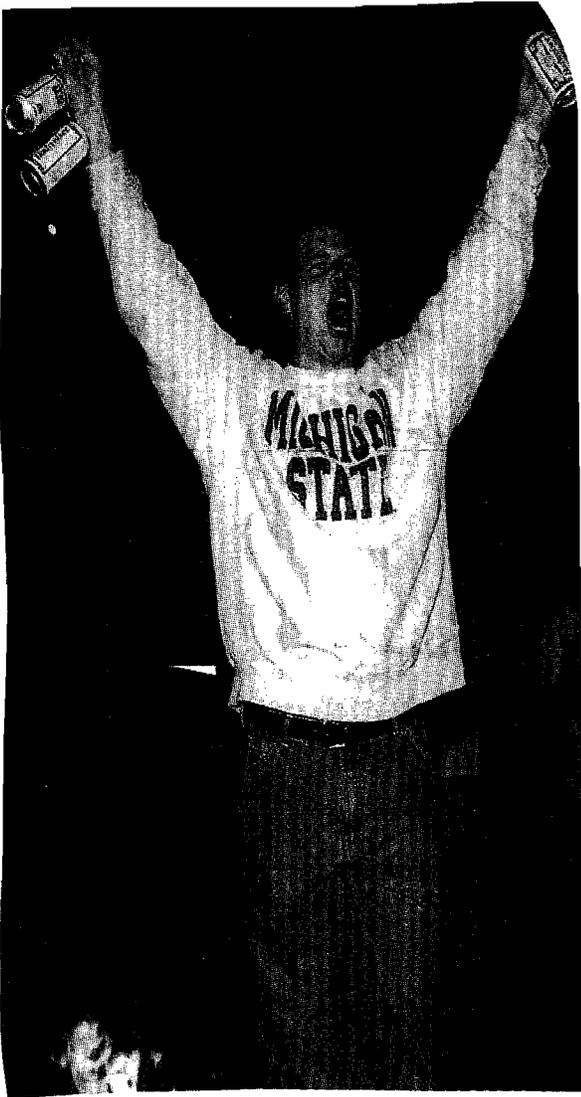




MICAP RECAP

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Tailgating turns ugly as 20 are sent to hospital emergency rooms with BACs in Excess of 0.30 percent



Under the influence

As an MSU Alum, this writer has pleasant memories of tailgate parties in days of long ago. With the changing color of the trees and the beautiful autumn weather, the Michigan State campus provides the ideal background for friendly gatherings before football games.

Although it has been more than a decade since we tailgated, friends still recall memories of Donna's "killer chili." Along with her secret recipe beef stew, these were the main attractions as we joined with others in K parking lot, leaving our spot only to watch the MSU marching band proceed from the practice field to Spartan Stadium.

Is it too old fashioned to think that tailgating should be more about burgers and brats and less about Budweiser and Jack Daniels?

Public service ads in *The State News*, MSU's student newspaper, emphasize that the majority of students who consume alcohol avoid drinking games, keep track of the number of drinks they have consumed and drink moderately.

What is unfortunately missing is information about what actually constitutes moderation. According to the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA), moderate drinking is no more than two standard drinks per day for males and one standard drink per day for females. That's enough alcohol to make a person feel mildly relaxed, even a bit lightheaded, but normally not enough to put anyone at risk for their health or safety.

Our guess is that most of those whose tailgating includes alcohol rarely exceed these guidelines. Opposition to the crackdown on tailgating likely comes from those whose primary interest is an excuse to party. The fact that a football game is involved is secondary to their need—not to socialize, but to get bombed. Research from the Harvard University School of Public Health indicates that 48% of the students on college campuses who consume alcoholic drinks do so with the expressed purpose of “getting drunk.”

Alcohol problems are not new to MSU, which has been among the leading institutions of higher learning in the nation in alcohol-related arrests for the past five years, according to *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. It is the only Big Ten school with an almost entirely wet campus on game days, according to MSU’s student newspaper.

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MSU police reported 127 alcohol-related arrests through the first two home games of the season. This compares with 432 incidents in seven games last season. But it was not only the increase in alcohol-related incidents; it was the severity of the problems that moved MSU officials to crack down on tailgating.

An MSU grounds official described sights around the campus on September 18, when MSU played Notre Dame: people urinating in plain view, students passed out on the edge of the streets, and litter that took 60 workers more than nine hours to clean up.

One student said tailgating has become so disruptive that she has to leave her dorm room and study across campus to avoid it. A more serious problem was noted with the rape of a 20-year-old female student in an alcohol-related incident, along with 20 people who ended up in area hospital emergency rooms with Blood Alcohol levels in excess

of 0.30%, a situation that physicians regarded as life-threatening.

“This has been the absolute worst year in terms of what we’ve witnessed,” said Tina Zimbalatti, an MSU alum who drives from Brighton (about 50 miles to the east of MSU) with her husband and about 20 friends to attend MSU games and tailgate.

After watching people urinate in public and others be carried away in ambulances, Zimbalatti said she is willing to put up with more restrictions. “We enjoy having fun with friends tailgating, but there is a limit to what we should be subjected to,” she said.

Provost Lou Anna Simon, who will become MSU president in January, called on student and administrative leaders to come up with recommendations to combat alcohol-related incidents on the campus. MSU spokesman Terry Denbow said, “We want, and we have promoted a Saturday on the banks of the Red Cedar River as a family-oriented day for the color and pageantry of Big Ten football. People should have an expectation of civility.”

The first steps taken by MSU have been to restrict parking lots from opening until five hours before game time and close two hours after game’s end, and to ban drinking games. The new guidelines restrict any object used for binge drinking, including beer bong, roulette wheels and the table-top tennis game “beer pong.”

Other restrictions under consideration include:

- 1) Banning distilled spirits from tailgating.
- 2) Restricting tailgate participation to those who have tickets to the game.
- 3) Provide more portable bathrooms to address the problem of excessive beer consumption that has resulted in public urinating.

The problem with binge drinking stems from more than MSU policies, though. In the opinion of many, it involves the East Lansing community, where local bars and taverns offer discounted drink specials, along with 25-ounce beers as the standard for the average drink. Then there is Crunchy’s, a popular local watering hole which features discounted 162-ounce “buckets of beer,” hardly an encouragement to moderate drinking.

The MSU “beer culture” is reflected in *The State*

CRUNCHY'S

\$5 off Buckets
 From 9 p.m. to 1 a.m.
 Tuesdays and Thursdays
 Now featuring 21 beers on tap with 13 microbrews
 Karaoke on Thursday, Friday & Saturday

Award Winning Burgers & Pizza

News, MSU's student newspaper, which carried a column by Angela Mitchell, the "beer gal," in which she points out that drinking beer isn't just a "guy thing." The gals should belly up to the bar and enjoy the products of Michigan's more than 60 microbreweries along with the guys.

The new rules banning drinking games and extended parking lot hours went into effect October 9, as MSU hosted the University of Illinois at Spartan Stadium. These changes, along with an increased police presence, resulted in a mere 15 arrests for drunkenness and disorderly conduct, quite a change from the 48 arrests at the previous game against Notre Dame.

Non-students expressed their appreciation for the crackdown, but MSU students were quoted in the press as protesting the new rules. "Banishing drinking games won't solve the problem," said Kate Huff. "We can find other ways to chug beer without drinking games," she told a reporter from the *Lansing State Journal*.

MSU student James Benton said the new rules would make the problem worse. Students may party more in East Lansing neighborhoods, or they may act out against the rules, as they did in 1998 when a ban on alcohol at a popular tailgate spot



sparked a student riot.

"Instead of people standing around playing drinking games and having fun, we'll have people just standing around in circles," he said. "Having college students who are drunk and bored at the same time isn't good."

We have no "silver bullet" to offer as a solution to tailgate problems at Michigan State, or elsewhere, but we agree with Lansing Medical Director Dr. Dean Sienko who implored MSU officials to take action against rowdy tailgaters, calling excessive drinking the greatest health threat facing the school's 44,000 students.

Sienko was particularly upset with the 20 people who were hospitalized with blood alcohol levels above 0.30% after the MSU-Notre Dame game, enough to kill a person, depending on their weight and other factors.

"We've already lost life here on this campus because of the direct effects of alcohol," he said, referring to MSU student Bradley McCue, who died after drinking 24 shots of liquor on his 21st birthday. "We need to eliminate activities that promote binge drinking," Sienko told the MSU Board of Trustees.

The MSU student body does not appear to be nearly as upset as the Lansing Medical Director about campus alcohol problems. The alcohol problem, as many of them seem to see it, is represented in a recent *State News* column titled "Drinking Buddies Debate the State of American Beer."

In the column, students Ryan Weltzer and Matt Gwynn decry the lack of alcohol education at MSU, arguing, "How can the U.S. stay competitive in an increasingly global beer society where the average drinker doesn't know the difference between an ale and a pilsner?"

In calling for increased alcohol education at MSU, the columnists concluded, "Universities will be pressed upon to develop a curriculum centered around fine beer appreciation."

Blame the current tailgate dilemma on students if you will, but the university should assume its share of the blame for contributing to a culture where alcohol often dominates behavior at athletic events.

Why is it that students seem to think they can't enjoy athletic events without alcohol? It may have something to do with the basketball and football coaches, both of whom host weekly radio shows which emanate from local sports bars. It may also result from the fact that major sponsors for broadcasts of athletic events are Labatt Blue and Smirnoff Ice.

Earlier this year, the Center for Science in the Public Interest launched a "Campaign for Alcohol-Free Sports TV," asking college presidents and athletic directors not to accept alcohol advertising for television broadcasts of their football, basketball and hockey games. CSPI's national survey of parents and adults showed widespread support for the campaign:

- ▶ 63% believe that beer companies use sports to reach persons under the legal drinking age and that companies know their ads appeal to underage persons.
- ▶ 73% say it is wrong for colleges to take money from beer advertisers while at the same time trying to discourage underage and binge drinking among their students.
- ▶ 71% support a ban on all alcohol ads on college sports TV.

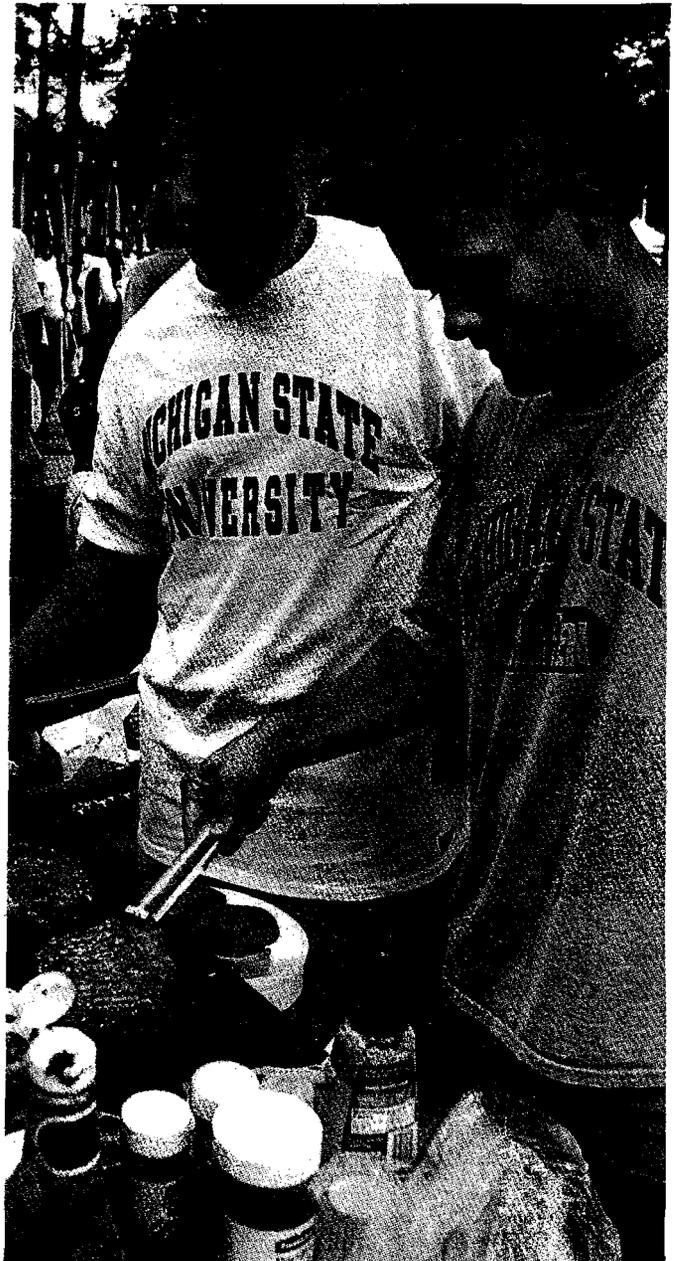
An early response to the CSPI campaign came from University of Michigan Athletic Director Bill Martin who said, "We at Michigan have never had any media partners who aired alcohol-related advertisements and do not plan to do so in the future. Alcohol-related demonstrations are a nationwide problem and one that athletic administrators worry about constantly. We, at the University of Michigan, are trying to do everything we can to diffuse the problem."

More than 150 NCAA major university sports programs have now signed on for the CSPI initiative, refusing to accept alcohol industry sponsorship of their sports programs.

Unfortunately, Michigan State is not among those who support the Campaign for Alcohol-Free Sports TV. Instead, Smirnoff Ice and Labatt Blue are major sponsors of programming for football and basketball TV games. Most of the time, their ads include the advice to "drink responsibly." Of

course there are no guidelines or definitions of "responsibly," but the message is clear . . . be sure to drink!

Until MSU is willing to make a statement to students and alums that alcohol revenue is not as important as protection against the problems of tailgating and binge drinking on campus, the public will question the commitment of the university to prevent future alcohol problems both on and off the campus.



Responsible tailgating will focus on burgers and brats, not Budweiser and Jack Daniels