

Tips for Tailgating

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Aside from the actual game, tailgating is one of the best parts of the football season. It's a time where you can meet fellow fans who share the same passion and enthusiasm for a team or single player, boast about beating rival team the previous week and enjoy what makes football one of the most popular sports in America.

Here are a few tips that you can use to make your tailgating experience something you want to retell and relive for following football seasons to come.

During tailgates—better yet, community gathering of sports fans—the amount of tradition is staggering. Some people that you may meet have been tailgating in the same spot for five years, cook the same thing each year and have ritualistic behaviors that of course, are responsible for their team winning on Saturday.

There are even people in some cases that thrive on exploring different college campuses each football season to immerse themselves in college culture. Nevertheless, no matter which category of people you fall into, the one thing that we look forward to is the tailgating and supporting our team. The long-standing tradition of tailgating brings us down to our most natural instinct of sharing food and conversation. It's the one place where groups of people can share face paint and an ice-cold beverage with state rival all in the same moment. No tailgate is the same, and the more you find yourself going to these tailgates, the more great stories about the people, sights, and tastes you accumulate.

In college, I remember heading to the stadium early on Saturday afternoon decked in school colors from head to toe with groups of people that ranged from classmates, people I knew from the dorms, and even complete strangers that I only recognized from football games. In a sense, game day was the biggest social event on campus, especially when we were winning. The tailgating and football game were igniters of connection because not only were both mentioned on Monday during class and throughout campus, but consisted of a type of excitement that was contagious. The camaraderie, the buzz from the game, and natural high that makes sports great to watch is what makes tailgating such a huge part in American culture.



Some of the most helpful tips in tailgating are as followed:

1. Stay hydrated: In most cases, if not all, the tailgating begins a few hours before kickoff. Regardless of whether the game is the pro or college level, the amount of beer that will be sold, smelled, and seen can be shocking. If you care to indulge, be sure not to forget water since football games last a few hours and are spread throughout the course of a day.

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2. Know the tailgating rules: In terms of college tailgating, each university has their own set of rules. For example, Texas A&M's Open Access Site Rules say, "the person(s) setting up tailgating sites are responsible for conduct of their Guests. Open Access Sites are any tailgating areas that are outside of the 15-ft distance from designated parking lots, while Arizona State rules say, "tailgating is allowed in all university parking lots and structures."

It's always best to look up these rules, especially if you're new to the area to make sure that isn't any problem and you will be able to enjoy the tailgating to the utmost.

3. Arrive early: Not all tailgates are the same. Some are close and in only designated areas, while others can be pretty far away from the stadium. By arriving early, destination won't matter and you'll give yourself enough time to see, but most importantly taste some great food.

4. Eat, eat, and eat: The measurement of a great tailgating experience is determined by the people and food. Unfortunately, most teams don't win week after week and can experience some agonizing defeats during the season. However, when you've gone to a fantastic tailgate, the burn from the loss just isn't as bad.

A great experience with memorable people can go a pretty long way-even if you're a diehard [insert team] fan. Some of the best food I've tasted has been from football games i.e. nachos, dips, BBQ and beans.

5. Expect the unexpected: This statement is the framework for both the good and bad that can occur at a tailgate. Because of the sports environment, testosterone and cortisol levels may be at such high levels that shouting and rudeness may occur and put a damper on festivities. But as for anything, there's another side that's full of hospitality and generousness that goes on at these events. Chris Coulson, Arizona State alum, recalls his own tailgating experience saying, "Tents were filled with formally dressed co-eds. Realizing a chance to mingle with beautiful southern bells was irresistible. We were welcomed with complete southern hospitality. My two friends and I ate and drank with the Ole Miss faithful all afternoon. The Ole Miss students took us in."

So though tailgating may be intimidating for some, especially when you've never done it before or in Coulson's case done completely in a new place, the comforting essence of the event can make it a refreshing experience.

Tailgating is something that should be enjoyed at all ages. It's a pre-game celebration to get you excited about the game and poses as an opportunity of supporting your team that everyone can participate in.

By following these simple tips, when Saturday or Sunday comes rolling along, you'll be prepared to take it head on.