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College Football

College Football: 20 Best Tailgating Games for Week 1

By
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You can feel the excitement in the air. Game day number one, and the beginning of the college football season is upon us.

As anxious as the fans are to see what their teams will be able to do on the field, outside the stadiums there's a feast, with a plethora of food and drink to make even the most disinterested fan salivate and get completely absorbed into the college football mania. Yes, I can use the word plethora in a sports article.

This is a special weekend with the Kickoff Classic, College Gameday, a real matchup in Dallas and snoozer first games. Adding to the excitement, thousands of fans can now officially drink a beer at eight in the morning with a clear conscience, every Saturday for the rest of the season.

As we embark on the excitement of a new season beginning, let's look at what could easily be the 20 best tailgating venues for Week One.

20 - Louisiana-Monroe @ Florida State (6)



The Seminoles have to be thrilled with their AP Preseason ranking of No. 6. The team has the ability to live up to that placement with quarterback E.J. Manuel—the key to their success.

Therefore, the party wagons will be rolling into Tallahassee this weekend for the season opener.

But, why should this year be any different, other than having a better team than last year? FSU has consistently ranked in the top 20 tailgating schools in the country and the warm weather and friendly student body are some sure reasons why.

As with any southern event, there's plenty of barbeque, burgers and kegs to go around. But you can't beat a burger on your Bobby Bowden grill outside of Bobby Bowden Stadium. Can I get a tomahawk chop?



Eric Francis/Getty Images

19 – Chattanooga @ Nebraska (10)

The Cornhuskers have one of the best and most loyal fan bases in the country. In fact, to bring up Bobby Bowden again, he called them “the best fans in college football.”

This year, some are predicting a run for the BCS Title for Nebraska. The fans will be doing some running of their own—for corn on the cob, brisket, corn-fed beef, barbequed beef, sirloin sandwiches, all on the grill. Is there a cardiac surgeon in the house?

It's not your typical tailgating experience since alcohol is prohibited around or close to the stadium. But, close by, the faithful setup their grills and libations in designated areas at the other end of a pedestrian bridge or underneath the highway overpass for the underground griller.

You have to be sneaky, as plastic cups are the order of the day, but there are some elaborate setups, with TVs, full bars with taps and Bloody Mary's the norm up until about 11:00 am.

It's just about the most fun you can have with a giant plastic corn hat on your head.

18 – South Florida @ Notre Dame (16)



Jonathan Daniel/Getty Images

South Bend and Notre Dame may not seem like the kind of school that could muster a raucous tailgate experience—and, for the most part you're right. After all, it is a Catholic University, steeped in ceremonious tradition.

The school has some rigid rules when it comes to tailgating, but partying before a Notre Dame game could be considered a different sort of party.

People eat and drink in the parking lots just like anywhere else, but every now and then a Leprechaun will pass you by, handing out candy. Flower arrangements are everywhere and it is a bit more stoic than what you'll see down south.

But when Irish eyes are smiling, you might detect a bit of a glaze-over just before kickoff. While kegs are prohibited, there's no law against plastic cups and some discretion. Read the section on Nebraska for reference. After all, they are the Irish.

17 – Minnesota @ USC (25)



Stephen Dunn/Getty Images

Southern California...need I say more. The weather is great, fans are laid back, except after kickoff, and outside of the legendary Coliseum, you'll find just about everything under the sun.

USC fans have even organized and created the Trojan Tailgate Club, usually found at the southeast end of the Coliseum in the Sports Arena parking lot (lot 6).

They provide a setup complete with DirectTV, Sirius Satellite radio, barbeque grill, poker table, food and drink. It's open to any USC fan and visitors are welcome to stop by too.

When it comes to tipping back the glass, the USC fans may have some Bud Light on hand, but more often you'll see bottles of wine, premium or imported beers. And, when its time to do shots, its not the bar-brand tequila, it's Patron.

Due to the area's diverse ethnic population, the food is a smorgasbord of every flavor under the sun. You'll see lamb on spits, tacos, enchiladas and many exotic foods. You'll also get the usual chicken, ribs, burgers and dogs.

The great thing about a game in sunny Southern California is that when the rest of the country is freezing, as in Minnesota, they're not.



Streeter Lecka/Getty Images

16 – Eastern Carolina @ South Carolina (12) Charlotte, NC

This is the other USC, or as they would say in Columbia, South Carolina, this is THE USC.

Steve Spurrier's Gamecocks have a good chance of getting to the SEC Championship game again this year after an embarrassment by the Auburn Tigers last year, but their No. 12 preseason ranking bodes well for the Gamecocks.

Eastern Carolina is a bit of an unknown this year, coming off a disappointing 6-7 season in 2010. But, they've got a returning quarterback in Dominique Davis who threw for 3,967 yards, 37 touchdowns and 16 interceptions last year.

ECU fans are hoping he's matured enough to carry on the tradition of beating South Carolina since the Pirates have won 2 of the last 3 contests.

Oh yes, tailgating. The battle of the Carolinas is being played in Charlotte, NC and not Columbia, SC where some unique tailgating goes on.

You can bet the Gamecocks and the Pirates will bring the party with them, because it's the people that make it.

So, this will be a 2-college tailgating party, doubling the fun; just do it separately.

And, this is a city tailgate party, unlike that of the pastoral college campuses where there is plenty of room for your RV.

Around the Bank of America Stadium, you're lucky if all the cars will fit. But, a little imagination and a friend in Charlotte to show you how it's done is a good idea for both schools.

Get some advice from a Carolina Panthers' fan. It's a different proposition, but it really shouldn't matter to the serious fan and tailgater.

In Charlotte, most do their tailgating in parking garages nearby, or at hotels like the Westin or others around the stadium.

There are also several sponsored events, like the Battle of the Carolinas Tailgate Party that benefits the Back to Life Foundation. Its only 2 blocks from the stadium with a cash bar, ice cold beer, package prices and food from Wild Wing Cafe.

There are several others, so it would be a good idea to search the web using the words, “tailgating in Charlotte for Eastern Carolina vs. South Carolina.” That’s the one that worked for me.

15 – Missouri @ Arkansas (15)



Kevin C. Cox/Getty Images

Yet another SEC team with a very good preseason ranking, the Razorbacks take on a good, but not great Missouri team in Fayetteville.

As in most of the SEC towns, the Arkansas campus provides the usual parking lot style on a first come, first served basis. But there is also The Gardens, a beautiful park setting where you can bring your stuff and tailgate in comfort.

It’s located at the corner of US 62 and Razorback Road, fairly close to the stadium. And, as convenience would have it, it’s a short walk to the liquor store for liquor, beer and ice.

But, remember, there are strict open container laws in most of the south, except for New Orleans; just remember the plastic cup, opaque recommended and in Fayetteville, Arkansas I would recommend Hog Red.



14 – Akron @ Ohio State (18)

The Buckeyes are looking to make a statement after a tempestuous offseason. They have a new head coach, a new quarterback, and managed to attain a No. 18 preseason ranking. They shouldn't have any problem with Akron.

But if the offseason is still getting you down, drown your worries under your red tent in one of the many parking lots that are turned into giant outdoor bars.

Or, you could make friends with one of the many groups who have their own buckeye-fashioned school bus, or in one case a Buckeye-decorated ambulance.

It gets cold in Columbus, Ohio in the fall, so if you don't have a wrap-around for your tent, get in one of those; there are dozens of them around.

The best tailgating at Ohio State happens a little bit away from the stadium, across the river near the basketball and track stadiums. That's where you'll find the most variety, and probably some unique approaches to imbibing and eating.

Typically, they'll serve breakfast with your Bloody Mary, and then chili, brats, pork, hot wings and so on.

Where else can you tailgate, and watch people cheer for a poisonous nut, the Buckeye?



13 – Tulsa @ Oklahoma (1)

I don't think the Sooners have many worries against Tulsa on Saturday, but it is the season opener and being No. 1 going into that couldn't be too hard to bear.

So, let's party in Norman, OK and think about the Texas game. It's been a tradition and a big deal for Oklahoma folks, and, football is more like a religion in these parts.

The Texas/Oklahoma Red River Rivalry is a site to behold. But, I am getting ahead of myself.

Just like most schools, the parking lots and frat house lawns are fair game for setting up your tailgate party. But keep in mind, the enterprising frat boys will probably charge you a fee.

It gets started pretty early at Gaylord Family-Oklahoma Memorial Stadium.

Plus you have a range of food from Oklahoma Chili (they couldn't call it Texas Chili now could they) to ribs, barbeque, hamburgers and the normal fair.

Also, beer is common, as are full bars, and tailgating trailers are a common fixture to the back of most cars coming to the stadium.

12 – Rice @ Texas



Brian Bahr/Getty Images

So, Texas didn't make the preseason rankings. That just makes a Longhorn steaming mad, I'm sure. But if you are able to wake up in Austin, Texas every morning, especially on a Saturday, just take each weekend one at a time and enjoy it.

These Texans take tailgating quite seriously, and they have several websites devoted to the subject. There could actually be a course in the art of tailgating at UT, I don't know.

On Longhornailgaters.com, their mission statement says 'Longhorn Tailgaters is a community open to all Longhorn-Loving, Orange-Blooded, Sooner-Hatin' Texas Fans. Come early, have a beer and watch ESPN GameDay!"

This group is actually a not-for-profit organization that helps out local charities from donations they receive.

They have a dedicated location right on campus, not too far from the stadium where you can stop by Saturday morning, get entertained, have a burger and a beer and see which head Lee Corso puts on.

This week, they're in Dallas, so it will be a Bengal Tiger head or a Duck.

Something to consider this Saturday, if you're in Austin, is staying cool.

Texas has been in triple digit heat for the last month or more.

That's not the kind of weather for Texas-hot chili, although I'm sure you'll find some in the parking lot. What it does mean is that there's more room for the LoneStar, the beer not the state.

11 – Eastern Washington @ Washington



Now here's a unique venue for tailgating. Imagine taking your boat to the game on Saturday morning?

Husky Stadium is located right on Lake Washington and there can be upwards of 12-thousand people on

the lake right next to the stadium. Some camp out there the entire weekend.

Just before kickoff, the University of Washington Crew Team offer shuttles between boats and the docks for fans to come to the game.

And, the food is unique as well. How about dining on Dungeness crab or other seafood delights?

You can tell these Husky fans are quite serious about tailgating on or off the water. An expansion of a state highway threatens to close the south parking lot to tailgating, which has the Washington fans in an uproar.

10 – Florida Atlantic @ Florida (22)



Sam Greenwood/Getty Images

You really can't beat the south for tailgating, no matter where you go—in the SEC or not.

Gainesville is the home of the Florida Gators and any opponent that comes into what is known as The Swamp, dreads this field.

The fans and the PA system are loud, with everyone doing the Gator Chomp. Their new head coach, Gus Muschamp, has earned the nickname Muschomp.

But before you get eaten alive in the swamp, you need to take advantage of some eats of your own out in the tailgating section.

This is Florida, so seafood is in abundance, with lots of shrimp, cooked in a variety of ways, the usual burger, dogs, steak and, of course, beer.

This is a hard-partying school, and nobody is safe from getting caught up in the revelry.

In fact, Gainesville, Florida was voted “best party school in the country” in 2008 by the Princeton Review. The Ivy League even recognizes it.

Here is another school that has a tailgating website dedicated to events, cooking, eating and drinking. Gatortailgating.com even travels with the team and sets up at the opponents tailgate venues.

You gotta love a school that asks the question, “Do ya’ll think 60 Jello shots is enough?”

9 – Marshall @ West Virginia (24) Sunday



You can probably find the best tailgating sites in places tucked away in the middle of nowhere. There's much less distraction and the focus is on football, food and drink.

Morgantown, West Virginia is one of those places. Here, Mountaineer fans have a blast and paint up their cars to show their support for the team.

This year, the team is ranked at No. 24 in the preseason poll, which gives the fans reason to be juiced, in more ways than one.

These are loyal, local fans for the most part, and Tailgate Larry is a fixture at these events. He hosts a website dedicated to Mountaineer tailgating and great recipes and tips for tailgating in Morgantown.

Dandy Man's Teriyaki Steak, Janet's Spinach Dip and Alisha's Tailgate Hamburger Dip, are only a few of the dishes on the menu.

But my favorite is Recipe for Success. "3-4 cases of Ice Cold Beer, 15-20 Good Ol' WV folk, a bunch of Larry's kick ass food, 1 Mountaineer Victory." Add in cross-state rival Marshall and this is a good opening day combination to watch.



8 – BYU @ Ole Miss

Some of the folks from BYU may never have seen anything like tailgating in the SEC, and Ole Miss is a great place to get indoctrinated—Mormons included.

The Grove is legendary in tailgating lore. The tiny Mississippi town of Oxford is right out of a John Grisham novel. It's what you picture when you think of the south, but not what you'd expect on a Saturday game day.

Ten acres of green space, used by students during the week, transforms into a tent city over night for 24 hours of tailgating. No cars are allowed, but thousands of fans from all over the southeast show up in their best attire.

Yes, no cutoffs and tee-shirts. This is the social event of the fall for every Rebel home game, where people go from tent to tent socializing as only southerners do.

No open flame is allowed, so this changes the menu somewhat. But, it is a cocktail party atmosphere, so bar food, picnic-style sandwiches, okra, southern style is the food of the day. The University even offers a catering service where you can call ahead to order.

And a couple of hours before game time, everyone lines a brick sidewalk for The Walk of Champions, where the team makes its way to the stadium, with fist bumps, chest bumps and rootin' for the Rebs. Are you ready for the Hotty Toddy yell?

Hell yes! Damn Right! Hotty Toddy, Gosh almighty, Who the hell are we, Hey! Flim Flam, Bim Bam OLE MISS BY DAMN!



7 – Troy @ Clemson

The saying goes at Clemson, “There’s something in these hills.” On gameday in Clemson, South Carolina, it's acres and acres of tents, tables, southern hospitality and a sea of orange with Tiger paw prints in them hills.

Like Oxford, the dress code calls for sundresses, kakis, polo shirts, and rarely do you see jeans.

And the food is dressed up too, with table clothes, platter of wings, shrimp, fried chicken, silverware and not the typical tailgating plastic.

Early on Saturday morning, its screwdrivers, mimosas and Yuengling or Bud Light. But, this is a college campus, so beer pong tables are everywhere.

Because the fraternities are all together on the quad this gathering quickly becomes a frat party, with live bands and Tiger yell being done repeatedly. But, I’ll be quick to mention, *Animal House* it is not.



6 – Montana @ Tennessee

Neyland stadium, on the campus of the University of Tennessee, is located in the foothills of the Smoky Mountains, and the scenery is spectacular, if you can get a view that doesn't have a sea of orange surrounding it.

This is the other stadium with water access, and on gameday the Tennessee River is crowded with boaters having their own floating tailgate in front of the stadium.

While singing *Rocky Top*, so much that it permeates the brain by the end of the day, the morning starts with Bloody Marys, but very soon migrates to Bourbon.

This is Tennessee, and your visit wouldn't be complete without some Tennessee sippin' whiskey. Every now and then you'll come across a drink called Calvados, although it is also referred to as apple moonshine, homemade of course.

Now, if I could only get *Rocky Top* out of my head.

5 – Indiana State @ Penn State



Brian Bahr/Getty Images

Pennstatetailgate.com posts their menu for each Saturday. This week, help yourself to bacon egg and cheese sandwiches, hash browns, sausages, Baileys and coffee, and Mimosas.

This is a great way to start a Saturday morning for the game opener in Happy Valley.

This is a friendly crowd of Penn State fans, nestled in College Station, Pennsylvania.

Beaver Stadium is the second largest stadium in the country and 100-thousand fans is typical.

Tailgating in this crowd can seem a little overwhelming, but because of the rural location, there's plenty of room. Every acre around the stadium is used for parking.

Like some other schools, the Nittany Lion fan base is heavy into RVs, so you'll see plenty of them. Just wandering around, you'll probably get invited to join folks in their RV, complete with satellite TV, kegs and open bar.

What to wear? You can't go wrong at Penn State just wearing white.

4 – Kent State @ Alabama (2)



Tuscaloosa, Alabama has gone through a rough few months following the tornadoes that ravaged that area back in April. A lot of the area is still showing that damage and recovery has been slow.

But, the Alabama folks intend to make the most of their season opener. The game itself should see the No. 2 ranked Crimson Tide on top of Kent State, so more concentration will be placed on the tailgating before and after the game.

Fraternities are abundant on campus, and it's a vibrant society that parties hard and mingles into the tailgating area of Bryant Denny stadium near Fraternity Row.

These people take tailgating seriously. There is a sea of crimson and white tents, but a cooler and a tent won't get it. Most have their own generators, satellite dishes, big screen TVs, and a banquet lavish enough for Thanksgiving dinner.

There is the requisite case of beer and the occasion keg, hidden in the RV, but the dress is much like I described about Ole Miss, and other places in the south. There are no jeans, as the dress code lends itself more to dressing up like it was a covered dish supper—but church it ain't.

3 – Utah State @ Auburn (23)



The first thing that hits you about the “Loveliest Village on the Plains” is the number of RVs that permeate the landscape on gameday, one more lavish than the other.

Some have an LCD large-screen TV embedded in the side, and they all have amenities that make you wonder why you would ever go home.

These folks get to Tiger Town on Monday for a Saturday game, parking on campus and living the college life vicariously all week. It is a beautiful southern campus as well, and everyone makes you feel like you are part of the AU Family.

Auburn and Alabama have a fierce competitive relationship, although "relationship" is probably not a good word for it. They even compete in who has the best tailgate.

Thevoodoochicken.com is a website dedicated to Auburn tailgating and they don't miss a chance to make fun of Alabama Head Coach Nick Saban at every turn.

Fans call on the Voodoo Chicken to jinx opposing field goal kickers. The Chicken even has his own tent at the tailgating venue.

Because the season opening has a 12:00 noon Eastern Time start, that means 11:00 Central time, so the Auburn fans will be out early. Tiger Juice is the drink of the day, and is a mystical concoction for gameday Saturdays.

When Auburn wins, you have to go to Toomer's Corner to toilet paper the trees, which were poisoned by an Alabama fan a few months ago. They've been there for a hundred years, so you'll want to take part in this tradition while you can.



Kevin C. Cox/Getty Images

2 – Boise State (5) @ Georgia (19)

The Chick-fil-a Kickoff Classic is one of those "neutral site" games. It will symbolically open the season, although many games will have already played from Thursday up to this game's kickoff, Saturday night at 8:00pm.

That just gives the Bulldog fans even more time to party at the Georgia Dome in Atlanta, the site of this year's Kickoff Classic.

One Georgia fan I know has a son in school at Georgia, and they plan a pre-tailgating party Saturday morning, at their Atlanta home, before heading off to the Georgia Dome to continue the tailgating.

Georgia is known as one of the top party schools in the country, and you can bet they'll bring that tailgating spirit from Athens, GA to Atlanta. Boise State fans have probably never seen anything like it.

Red and black tents, grills, life-size replicas of UGA, the real English Bulldog mascot, face and body painting and many other unique touches make a Georgia tailgate an experience to behold.

The University website even states that tailgating is one of the "factors used to attract future freshmen and transfer students from all over the country."

The game itself is probably one of the best matchups as well, with No. 5 Boise State battling a much-improved No. 19 Georgia Bulldog team. You can bet the Georgia fans will be at a fever pitch by kick-off and the roof of the Georgia Dome could be in jeopardy.



1 – Oregon (3) @ LSU (4): Dallas

Probably the best game of the weekend, this matchup will be played at the neutral site of Texas Stadium in Dallas, the home of the Dallas Cowboys.

It's a reasonable drive from Baton Rouge for the LSU fans, but a long plane ride for the Ducks.

But, Oregon fans can take advantage of some of the delicacies of Louisiana cooking that will definitely be imported by the Tiger fans.

Pots of crawfish boiling on the grill, crawfish etouffee and other unique dishes that only the Bayou Bengals can concoct, will add up to create one lavish tailgate experience.

The cooking in Louisiana is the best around and sets the LSU tailgate parties apart from any you've ever experienced.

Also, ESPN Gameday will be in Dallas for the game, which only adds to the frenzy, along with the most vocal fan base in the country.

The LSU stadium in Baton Rouge is called "Death Valley" and the noise created by the fans even registered on the Richter scale in one Auburn game. You can bet they'll bring that spirit to Dallas.

When you put the best game of the Saturday kickoff weekend along with LSU fans on a September Saturday night, there's no doubt this is the No. 1 tailgating experience of the weekend, and maybe the season.

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