I'll never be able to listen to "Seven Nation Army" the same again. There are a lot of things that won't be the same about most college football Saturdays for the rest of my life. Once you watch a game live at Ohio Stadium, surrounded by 105,000 people, not a whole lot compares.

That's what I did on September 15 when the Ohio State Buckeyes defeated California 35-28. The week before, my father called me with the excellent news that a guy he works with had two tickets available for the game. I had previous chances to attend games with this guy's tickets, but the calendar never worked in my favor. Needless to say, even at my age, I was excited, like a kid who was just told that the next family vacation will be at Disney World.

I had only been to one college football game up to that point. Akron played Western Michigan in 2005, during my first semester at Akron. I remember next to nothing about the game. I didn't tailgate. I don't remember anything about the Rubber Bowl except that "hole in the ground" was about the best way to describe it. The crowd resembled that of your average Ohio High School football game. Hell, I don't even know who won.

But, there's something special about leaving Cleveland before the sun comes up to make that drive down Interstate 71. Three-fourths of the cars you pass or the cars that pass you are heading for the same destination that you are. Every truck has a Brutus magnet on the tailgate. Every sedan has an Ohio State vanity license plate or a Buckeyes license plate frame.

Surprisingly, everything worked in my favor on the trip there. The weather was flawless for driving, I got to park in the garage I had planned on when doing my research, and I had gotten there in time to attend the Skull Session. The Skull Session takes place in St. John's Arena, the

old home of the Ohio State Buckeyes basketball team. The arena was, to put it nicely, underwhelming. It looked like a bad minor league hockey arena. Old wooden chairs. Very steep upper bowl. Grade school gym lighting. Yet, something about it seemed quaint and it felt like a place of nostalgia.

I can't say that I have ever had an affinity for marching bands or their music. My high school marching band was nothing special, and my fiancée will tell you how much different marching bands in the southeastern United States are. Apparently, we get short-changed in this part of the country. The Best Damn Band in the Land, to my untrained ear, is appropriately named. It quickly became obvious why college marching bands are synonymous with college football. I can't really explain it, but, there's something adrenaline-pumping about a marching band inciting excitement before a college football game.

Urban Meyer led the shirt-and-tie clad Buckeyes into the gym, much to the appreciation of the 8,000 or so people on hand for the Skull Session. I have no basis for comparison regarding what the Skull Session was like when Jim Tressel was the coach at Ohio State, but Meyer was a man of few words, seeming to want to get out of there as quickly as possible. I think the cheer that he received when he stepped onto the makeshift wooden box podium was longer than his address to the crowd. Like everything else on a college football Saturday in Columbus, Meyer's presence, alone, emanated power. Prestige. Dominance. But, there was no aura of arrogance. This is a program and a fan base that expects its standards to be met. A Pac-12 school was in town and it wasn't Oregon or USC. By default, that puts this game on the backburner because the big picture is the conference schedule, even in a year of sanctions.

So, in that regard, it's hard to accurately gauge the Skull Session. I imagine the place is overflowing during a big night game and probably shakes violently with raucous chanting and cheering prior to the Michigan game. Even still, seeing the band up close and getting a feel for some of the traditions that I had never experienced were well worth getting up at 6:30 a.m.

Making the longer-than-it-appears walk from St. John's Arena to Ohio Stadium, it was a subdued atmosphere. The difference between college football and the pros is that some games are just taken for granted. Ohio State isn't going to lose to a team like Cal. The Alabamas and Oregons of the world aren't going to lose to Sun Belt programs or FCS teams. The festival and party-like atmosphere just isn't present for games like that. The expectation is to win without incident. There weren't any large mobs of tailgaters. The occasional spiraling football could be seen. Students were drinking on their front porches along High Street when I rolled through at 8:30 and had just kept on going. Frankly, it just seemed like a giant cookout just feet from where a football game was about to take place. Quiet confidence. An excuse to spend a late summer

Saturday with a beer in one hand, grill tongs in the other, and three hours of watching business taken care of.

My first impression of Ohio Stadium was that it felt small. I'm sure that sounds ridiculous, seeing how it can hold almost 110,000 people if crammed to the point where the fire marshal wants to run away screaming. It was when I walked around the outer concourse to midfield that I truly realized where I was. The field was pristine. The giant block O made it sink in. I was at Ohio Stadium. A place I put on a pedestal as it pertains to sports venues. Some of college football's greatest players have run wild on this field. I did the 360-degree rotation, looking all the way up at the press box. Looking at the student section slowly filling up. Watching pre-game drills going on in each end zone. Woody Hayes images scrolling through on the scoreboard video. I didn't go to Ohio State, but yet I felt proud of what had happened in this stadium.

My father asked 26 different times if I was hungry, since we hadn't gotten anything since hitting up a McDonalds for breakfast at 6:30 a.m. I wasn't, but I couldn't pass on the Urban Meyer souvenir cup. How could I? This is the man that I, and Buckeyes fans everywhere, have put their entire trust in to bring a national championship back to Columbus.

After a long hour of sitting on a backless bleacher, it was finally game time. The hour-long discomfort in my back dissipated as the first riffs of The White Stripes' "Seven Nation Army" blared through the stadium sound system. The student section, clear across the field from where I was seated, did what the scoreboard described as the "Buckeye Bounce", jumping up

and down while chanting “O-OOOOOO-O, O-OOOOOO-O” (it sounds better than it looks in text). Just like the environment outside, except for the student section, the mood was pretty subdued. Ohio State was a 16.5-point favorite, which more people in the stadium probably knew than those who didn’t, so this wasn’t expected to be much of a game.

Both teams failed on their first two possessions, with three punts, and a turnover on downs from the Cal offense. Unrest was growing in the stadium. The playcalling had been pretty vanilla from the Buckeyes and the gameplan was clear – don’t get Braxton Miller hit. Then, Braxton Miller brought 105,000 people to their feet. On a 55-yard scamper which featured a dirty cutback that made a Cal’s Alex Logan break both ankles, his spirit, and possibly even some of his manhood, the Buckeyes struck first. The collective “Ohhh” from the crowd, following by full-fledged cheering, knowing that Miller was not going to be caught in the open field had the crowd envisioning a rout.

The game was anything but a rout, as it was a game of highs and lows and one where the Buckeyes received a much stiffer test than they anticipated. There were a lot of big plays, some horrid tackling from the Buckeyes, and a lot of fans who took Cal for granted. Ohio State eventually prevailed, surviving on a 72-yard Devin Smith TD reception on a blown coverage. The crowd roared, but something about the roar sounded unsatisfied. This was far too close for comfort.

What stood out to me the most is the collective confidence of those in attendance for an Ohio State game. It was unlike anything I have ever experienced. Obviously, part of that is because I live in Cleveland, am a Cleveland fan, and we are never confident of anything. The lasting impressions of that day won’t be the final score, the opponent, or the individual plays that happened. Going to a Buckeyes game is about the experience, first and foremost. It’s something that everybody should experience, particularly for a big game. The noise that can be generated by 105,000 people is impressive and I experienced it for a game against a non-conference opponent in a game that was anything but what the fans expected.

College football has taken on a new meaning for me now. I spend my Saturdays watching college football on TV. Previously, I had no idea what attending a game was like. I used to be content with just sitting in front of the TV with a beer and some snacks. From now on, part of me will always feel like something is missing on Saturdays. Unless I can find a way to fit that many scarlet and grey clad people in my living room.