

# Opinion

## Americans should take notes on a real rivalry

by Kyle Hamilton  
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Since coming to the U.S, I have had the opportunity to experience the sun of California, the excitement of Disneyland, and the nightmare that is the Atlanta airport, but there is one particular event that will forever stick in my mind: Thanksgiving break. On the two occasions I have enjoyed the warmth and happiness of Thanksgiving, I suddenly feel at home again, and for me this joyful occasion truly symbolizes the phenomena that is the American race. Furthermore, this past Thanksgiving break I experienced firsthand another American custom: Rivalry Weekend.

Over the past weekend, I had the fortunate experience of spending the day with some close friends following the build up to the clash between Georgia Tech and UGA football teams. Not sure what to expect, I sat in anticipation on the journey to the center of Atlanta, and as we moved closer to the stadium I was amazed with at atmosphere, Georgia Tech's campus, and the sheer volume of people. Seeing opposing fans mingle and laugh amongst themselves definitely puts a smile on my face, and also makes me feel slightly embarrassed. It was truly a great experience, one which I'm sincerely looking forward to next year. However, one aspect of the day and my experience in the U.S in general that significantly stands out is the American understanding of the term 'rivalry.' For me, it does not make sense when rival supporters mingle pre-game, or when people explain that they support Auburn, but to look out for Alabama, and when supporters concede defeat to their closest rivals before the game has even begun.

British sport is traditionally based around soccer rivalries which vary from Scotland's clash with England, Chelsea versus Millwall, and Manchester United against Liverpool, so I would like to say I am quite qualified to comment on the subject of rivalries. Like in the U.S, each

important match is eagerly anticipated, highly attended, and fiercely competitive. But I feel that the British games have undoubtedly more of an edge.

When either of these teams meet each other in battle, the whole country stops, wishes and prays that their team does not lose. Failure to any extent determines who wins the argument for the next six months, who signs the next Spanish wonder kid, but usually determines who starts the fight. In Britain, just like America, sport takes center stage, but with different consequences. However, the thought of mingling with opposing fans before the game, supporting your rival when your team is not playing, and particularly conceding defeat before a ball has been kicked, are all totally out of the question. But these cultural differences are just one of many variations in culture between these two great nations.

However, there is one particular rivalry that I have experienced firsthand on multiple occasions, which without a doubt dominates the world stage. This rivalry does not just divide one city, but two countries, and two faiths. You often hear sporting pundits describe a rivalry as a matter of life and death, and the Old Firm Derby between Rangers and Celtic certainly does.

Glasgow, Scotland's biggest city is famously divided by the two soccer teams Rangers and Celtic, the colors blue and green, and most significantly, the Protestant and Catholic faiths. Rangers F.C reside in the West-end of Glasgow and are historically associated with the Protestant faith, while Celtic dominates the East of Glasgow and enjoy a vast Catholic following. Over the past hundred years, the contrasting views from both clubs have left a trail of destruction which includes murders, bombings, and masses of vandalism and abuse. Due to the history of violence, this fixture is watched all around the world with anticipation and fear.

There are particular images that stick out in my mind that completely separate this rivalry from anything you will find

in the U.S. During Old Firm games I've witnessed referees being attacked, fans clashing in the stadium, players being physically and verbally abused, but most of all, it is possible taste the sectarian tension that boils throughout the arena. When you have to be wary of what color of clothing you wear, where you buy your house, what school you go to, and most shockingly what you say in public, this is why I call this a real rivalry.

On the day these two teams meet, there will have been months of build up, mountains of speculation, and a heavy level of security installed. It is now mandatory that these teams play no later than 12:30pm at weekends to prevent drunken supporters fighting before, during, and after the games. In the build up to the game, rival supporters are segregated to avoid conflict, no one dares mentioning the opposition, and there is only one thing on everyone's mind: winning. Sitting in the bus on the way to the game my stomach is constantly turning, I can't even think straight, and everyone can feel the nerves in the air. As both supporters try and get to the pub as quickly as possible to drink away the nerves, you can feel the optimism growing and at that point you just want to get to the stadium. When you reach the stadium the noise is deafening, it is almost hard to breathe. Walking through the turnstiles and out to the pitch, the air feels so thin I feel like I'm on top of Everest. As kick off looms, my heart begins to beat faster and faster, and as soon as the whistle blows I think – we can't lose.

I have never experienced a loss in my Old Firm career, and I never want to. The thought of loosing to Celtic hurts to even think about, and that is why this is the fiercest and greatest rivalry in the world. On January 2<sup>nd</sup> I will be making my way to the East End of Glasgow to take-in another Old Firm derby, so when you're enjoying your New Year celebrations, spare a thought for me and let's hope the world witnesses another great derby.