

Farewell to the Great Lady

Midnight in Atlanta. The city glows in holiday grandeur, the luster of its majestic skyline and frenzied freeways illuminating the nighttime sky. A football game has just concluded inside the Georgia Dome, a magnificent structure of impeccable, state-of-the-art architecture.

It affords its patrons all the creature comforts of a plush, climate-controlled living room. Action on the field is instantly replayed in close-up format on a screen that is larger than life. Undeniably, the Dome is a testament to the new, the modern, the "best" that sporting venues have to offer in the 21st century.

Two-hundred miles to the south, the Great Lady that is Bazemore-Hyder Stadium stands alone in the silence of pitch black darkness. A chilling swirl of mist shrouds the Lady, her silhouette barely visible to any who may pass at such an hour. Unfazed, the Lady stands tall, proud, content. Some way, some how, intuitively, she knows. Company's coming.

There's another state championship party to host. Her beloved Wildcats will return in seven days, and she will welcome them home again with the unabiding love, warmth and devotion she has shown her boys for decades on end. She, as her Wildcats, will be ready. She has graciously hosted this party before, and she will again. She's done it the most, and she does it the best.

The Great Lady is fully aware that she is scheduled for a makeover following this year's

party. No matter. Her concern is not for men with blueprints, budgets and bulldozers. Change this, move that, paint over there. She will remain who she is. Her sole regard is for the boys who, have been, and will be her Wildcats.

They pay her honor as they play their game upon her hallowed grounds. Through the years they pay her honor as they return as fathers of wide-eyed sons who dream of the day they, too, may honor the Lady. Call it tradition if you like, but the connection transcends words. **Only a Wildcat could ever understand and only a Wildcat should.** The Lady's magic is far too special to spread among the population at large.

Meanwhile, in Atlanta, the jubilant Wildcat faithful depart the cozy confines of the magnificent Georgia Dome. The state championship party is on, and all are making plans to attend. Some two-hundred plus miles to the south, the cold drizzle gives way to a frigid torrent of rain. The Great Lady simply shrugs and settles herself for the night.

From a darkened corner of the grounds a shadowy figure, a phantasm of sorts, emerges. Gliding swiftly and silently, it traverses down the field, then up, then across, then down again. As quickly appeared, it vanishes into the darkest recesses of the night. But Wildcats are assured, ever confident, it will reappear. After all, company's coming. The Great Lady and all her magic await.

~ Sam Herring



Cleveland Field 1922-2003