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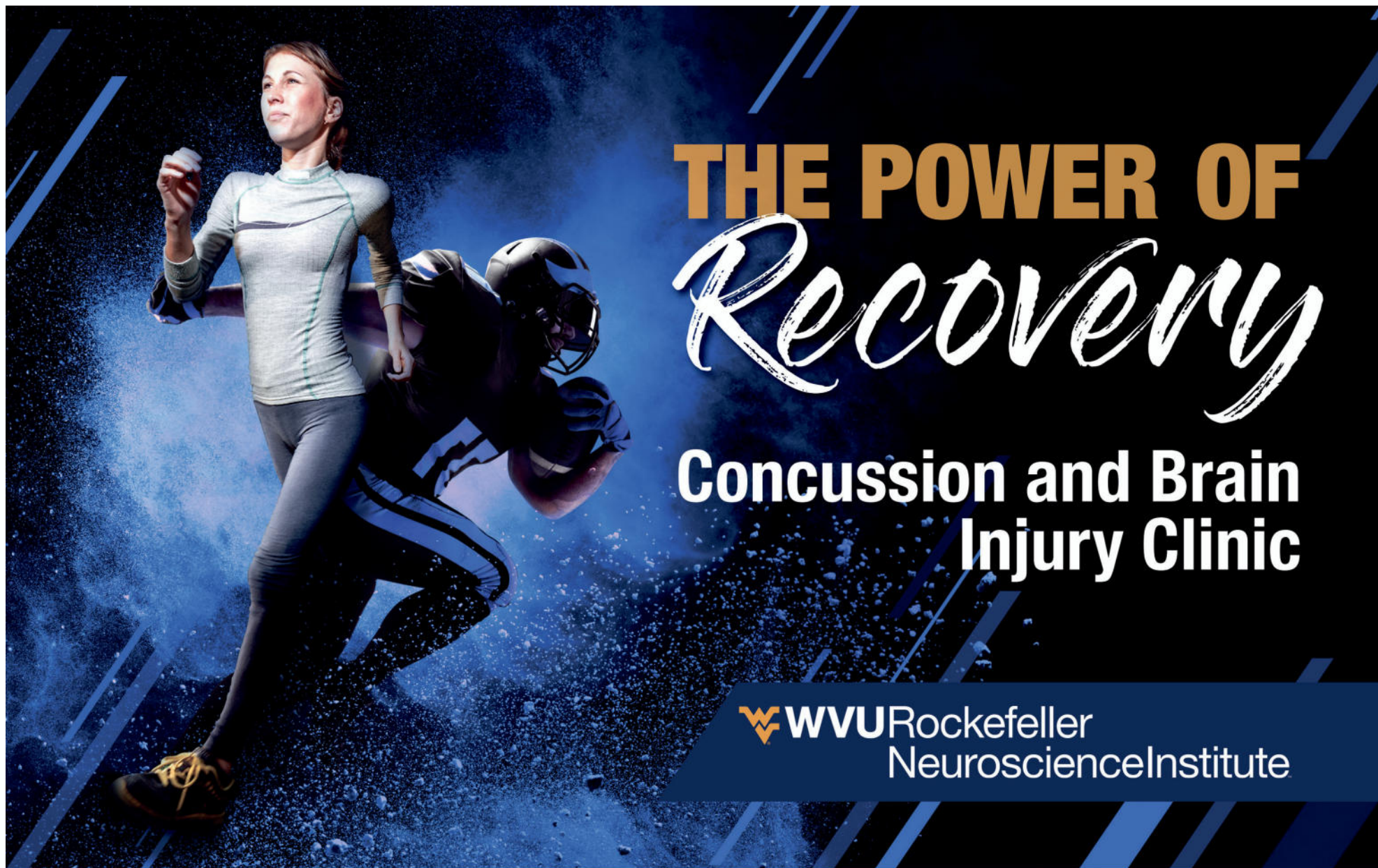
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4

MOUNTAINEERS RIVALRIES GUIDE

WVU fans need, not want, rivalry games



SEAN MANNING

While the scene was set on Pittsburgh's North Shore instead of the Blue Lot outside of Milan Puskar Stadium, last week's renewal of the Backyard Brawl between WVU and Pitt just felt ... right.

Although the game hadn't been played in over a decade, the familiar

SEE RIVALRY, C-5



WVU fans have a good time at the Backyard Brawl between WVU and Pitt on Sept. 1 at Acrisure Stadium in Pittsburgh. It's the first time the game was played since 2011.

William Wotring/The Dominion Post

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William Wotring/The Dominion Post

WVU athletic director Shane Lyons looks on during the Backyard Brawl. Lyons has played an important role in continuing the series vs. Pitt.

RIVALRY

FROM PAGE C-4

sounds and chants before, during and after the game made it seem neither fanbase forgot about why they hate the other so much in the first place.

The well-known chant Mountaineers fans like to yell any chance they get could be heard all over place, asking Pitt fans to consume something that rhymes with their school's name.

Pitt fans, of course, couldn't sit idly by and let that happen, so many pointed at their T-shirts that read "13-9," referencing the 2007 game in Morgantown that cost WVU a shot at the national championship game.

In the stadium, the rivalry was brought back with 70,622 fans at Acrisure Stadium, the largest-attended sporting in the city of Pittsburgh's history. That includes Steelers playoff games, World Series games, and when Penn State came to

town to face the Panthers.

In short, fans from both teams wanted this game played and were excited it was back.

For Mountaineers fans, who made up about 30% of the crowd, it's been a long time coming to play against a team where there are actual feelings of, "We need to beat these guys."

WVU played Virginia Tech at FedEx Field in Landover, Md., to start the 2017 season, and it whetted the appetite for fans to keep playing games against regional rivals.

Since WVU joined the Big 12 in 2012, a necessary move to stay afloat in the ever-changing landscape of college sports, the Mountaineers, especially the fans, lost that.

The closest conference opponent was Iowa State, but a road game to Ames, Iowa, is still over 800 miles away. That changes next season when Cincinnati joined the league, but even though the Bearcats are a former Big East member, they don't

SEE RIVALRY, C-6

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RIVALRY

FROM PAGE C-5

induce the same feeling Pitt and Virginia Tech do.

So with nine conference games, it leaves three nonconference foes a year to play, WVU athletic director Shane Lyons should be lauded for the work he's done to get these rivalry games back on the schedule.

The Maryland series, which can bring out some strong feelings for those from the Eastern Panhandle such as myself, was scheduled for a home-and-home from 2020-21, though the 2020 game was canceled due to COVID-19.

After the Mountaineers and Hokies played at a neutral site five years ago, a home-and-home is halfway done as WVU brought the Black Diamond Trophy back to Morgantown for the first time since 2003 after a 27-21 thriller at Milan Puskar Stadium last season.

It was one of the best atmospheres

the stadium has had since joining the Big 12 10 years ago.

Now, the return trip to Blacksburg is scheduled for Sept. 22, another primetime Thursday night slot like the season-opener at Pitt.

While no other VT games are scheduled at the moment, the original Pitt series was supposed to be four seasons, from 2022-25 with each school getting two home games.

However, in April, there was a four-year extension to the series, allowing both teams to play eight times out of the next 11 years. The only three seasons they won't play are 2026-28, but the Mountaineers will play powerhouse Alabama twice in that span.

For older fans, Penn State may have been considered the biggest rival of them all, but it hasn't been played since 1992.

That is until next season, when WVU travels to State College to play the Nittany Lions at Beaver Sta-

SEE RIVALRY, C-7



William Wotring/The Dominion Post

The 70,622 fans in attendance at Acrisure Stadium are the most ever at a Pittsburgh sporting event.



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William Wotring/The Dominion Post photos

WVU fans were excited to have the Backyard Brawl back, with the return game next season at Milan Puskar Stadium in Morgantown.

RIVALRY

FROM PAGE C-6

dium, followed by a return trip to Morgantown in 2024.

Conference realignment has stolen so much history and tradition all over the country. Texas and Texas A&M didn't play for a decade, but with the Longhorns moving to the SEC, it will likely resume.

Kansas and Missouri no longer play after the Tigers left for the SEC. Oklahoma and Oklahoma State probably won't play Bedlam when the Sooners head to the SEC.

Nebraska's move to the Big Ten ended a historic rivalry with OU, as well, until they resumed last season with the second game scheduled for Sept. 17.

Notice a trend here?

The Backyard Brawl was ended because Pitt left for the ACC, which left the Big East in a vulnerable position. It also forced WVU to make the move to the Big 12.



Conference realignment has destroyed regional rivalries all over the country and it's only going to get worse with the idea of mega-conferences looming.

But in the meantime, and in a blurry future, the administrations at Pitt and WVU decided this game needs to be played. It's part of what makes college football special.

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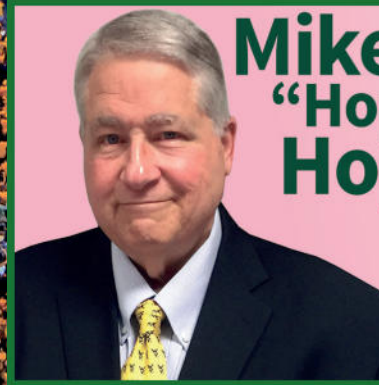
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A HOUSE DIVIDED: THE PEASLEES

BY MATTHEW PEASLEE

Sports@DominionPost.com

We're just a few days removed from the first official Backyard Brawl since 2011.

Since then, I've had my own version in the backyard — and front yard — as well as the side porch, living room, bedroom and basement.

I'm a proud graduate of West Virginia University, while my wife is an alumnus of the University of Pittsburgh.

And it was still love at first sight.

It's a Backyard Brawl every day in our house. She has a little bit of homefield advantage, though, because we currently live in the South Hills of Pittsburgh, a mere



Erin (left) and Matthew Peaslee (right) are on opposite sides of the Backyard Brawl, with Erin being a Pitt alum and Matthew graduating from WVU.

SEE PEASLEES, C-11

Photos courtesy of Matthew Peaslee

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PEASLEES

FROM PAGE C-10

five miles away from the Pitt campus in the Oakland neighborhood. But judging by the amount of Flying WV car magnets I see on a daily basis, this is also Mountaineers country.

I really am living out a dream scenario. Pittsburgh has always been a haven for my immediate family, despite me growing up in Ohio and my parents being locals to north central West Virginia. My father is from Preston County, a Kingwood Stag to be exact. My mother is a Marion County native, a coal miner's daughter from Monongah. They started their family and a business in Ohio in the early 1990s.

Quite often, as I was a youngster, we'd make the three-hour trip to visit aunts, uncles, cousins and grandparents back in West Virginia. That would mean several stops for a restroom break or quick bite to eat

in and around Pittsburgh.

Then, there'd be family meetups halfway in and around Pittsburgh. The area became a third home for me as I was more and more familiar with the lay of the land around the Steel City.

My father, an athletic training graduate from WVU, raised me to be a Mountaineer fan in Buckeye land, but also told me stories of when he and his father would drive from Kingwood to Pittsburgh — before I-79 was built — to see Pirates games at Forbes Field. I loved baseball and became a diehard Pirates fan.

I was always more than an hour away from my true happy place — PNC Park — when I was a kid in Ohio and then when I was a slightly more mature kid as a WVU student from 2007-11. My friends and I would take many weekend trips up from Morgantown — thank goodness for I-79 — to Pittsburgh to see the Pirates

SEE PEASLEES, C-12



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PEASLEES

FROM PAGE C-11

lose baseball games.

However, on one of those trips, I became a real winner, despite another Pirates loss. I met my now wife, Erin, at PNC Park. It was May 21, 2010, as the Pirates lost 7-0 to the Atlanta Braves. We were aware of each other through a mutual friend and scheduled to meet up above Section 121 on the main concourse of the ballpark.

She's a big baseball fan, too. She has a beautiful smile, she loves eating macaroni and cheese, decorating for Christmas, going to Disney World and is devoted to her faith.

What's not to like?

She is a Pittsburgh native and loves her hometown. We bonded over our familiarity of Pittsburgh and she would show me some of the cool spots I may have overlooked through the years.

The whole Pitt thing was a major red flag for me, even more major for her about my West Virginia thing. But we put our collegiate differences aside and began a dating relationship.

That may have come to an end a few months later.

It was the 2010 edition of the Backyard Brawl and WVU earned a dominant 35-10 win against Pitt at then-Heinz Field. I may have sent Erin some vulgar text messages rubbing it in.

I know I sent some vulgar text messages when WVU fell behind 14-0 in the 2011 Backyard Brawl. A strong second half lifted the Mountaineers to a

21-20 victory in what would be the final Backyard Brawl until Sept. 1, 2022.

Without the Brawl, our relationship grew stronger and we were married in Pittsburgh in the fall of 2015 — purposefully scheduled for a WVU bye week on Sept. 19. The TV at the bar in the fire hall displayed Pitt losing to Iowa on a last-second field goal.

She wouldn't let me play "Country Roads," as is tradition at the end of most West Virginia wedding receptions. And it wouldn't have been a good idea to play 'Sweet Caroline' as many children were present. We decided on a compromise and did a dueling fight song battle. Her family and friends, which largely outnumbered the WVU contingency, still weren't as loud as my crew.

The "Let's Go Mountaineers" cheers were certainly loud and proud in enemy territory.

We settled in the Pittsburgh suburbs and have been living here ever since.

At family gatherings in Allegheny and Beaver counties, I get a pretty good ribbing.

At family gatherings in Kingwood and Monongah, Erin gets a pretty good ribbing.

We've been able to attend three basketball versions of the Brawl together and I currently own a 2-1 advantage, with the Mountaineers winning both times at the Petersen Events Center and Pitt pulling off a win in the WVU Coliseum.

This was our first football Brawl together in-person and I get chills just thinking about the atmosphere in now-Acrisure Stadium. This



series means so much to me and many others who may be in a similar position. So much of Mountaineers Nation has ties to Pittsburgh and this is our chance to fully display our old gold and blue pride.

It was also a chance for both fanbases to dispel the unfounded stereotypes they have against each other.

Believe it or not, Mountaineers, Pitt does have many knowledgeable and supportive fans.

Believe it or not, Panthers, WVU is rich in academics and income.

With the entire nation watching in primetime, this Brawl was a special chapter in a classic series of games that should never cease

again.

The Peaslees were in Section 113 after we locked up our house that has a James Conner bobblehead on a bookshelf below an autographed photo of Noel Devine. A stitched Woodburn Hall blanket rests on one side of the couch with a Cathedral of Learning throw pillow on the other side.

And our dog faces a bit of an identity crisis as he wears a West Virginia bandana with a Pitt collar.

This game is college football and we are all so blessed that it's back.

For the first time in 3,932 days, we had the Backyard Brawl.

MATTHEW PEASLEE is a freelance writer for The Dominion Post.

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THE RIVALRY THAT'S NOT

BY JUSTIN JACKSON

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Depending on which part of West Virginia one resides, the thought of WVU and Marshall being rivals is either mocked or given a hefty thumbs up.

In either case, there is little denying the interesting history shared by the two schools, one that includes then-Gov. Joe Manchin playing politics to get the two football teams to play, as well as WVU men's basketball coach Bob Huggins getting accused of being too scared to play by his Marshall counterpart Dan D'Antoni.

More on those memories in a minute, but what we do know is the football teams haven't played since 2012, while the men's hoops teams haven't met since playing each other in the second round of the 2018 NCAA tournament.

It's been quiet ever since between the state's only two Division I schools, with WVU adjusting to life in the Big 12, while the Thundering Herd have packed their bags to begin play in the Sun Belt Conference after bolting Conference USA.

The only recent in-state action came this summer in Charleston, when WVU's alumni team (Best Virginia) defeated Marshall's alumni team (Herd That) in the second round of The Basketball Tournament.

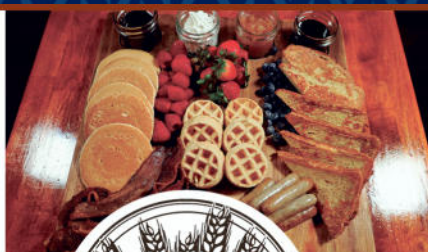
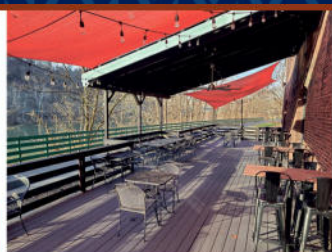
Might that matchup be the swan

SEE NOT, C-15



Photo courtesy of BlueGoldNews

Best Virginia's Kevin Jones goes up against Herd That players during the TBT this summer. It's the closest we've gotten to WVU vs. Marshall in football or basketball since 2018.



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NOT

FROM PAGE C-14

song for the fans of both schools?

"I don't know if you'll ever see the two schools play again," said Best Virginia forward John Flowers, a former WVU standout who was 3-1 against Marshall in his college days. "I probably shouldn't say 'never,' but I think there's a lot of stuff that has to happen first."

Flowers' explanation didn't deal with politics or even the Huggins-D'Antoni saga. For him, it's simply a matter of the rivalry never feeling like one.

"To be truthful, it was just another game back when I was in school," Flowers said. "That doesn't mean we overlooked them or didn't play hard, but it never felt like a real rivalry."

"Honestly, it was more like a no-win situation. If we lost, then it looked really bad. If we won, we were supposed to win, so it was like nothing was accomplished."

Flowers admits his view is only as a player. Former WVU standout Kevin Jones added the atmosphere at those games were different because of the fans.

"The game always seemed like it was more about the fans," Jones said. "The fans had a great time with it. You could always hear stuff being said back and forth in the crowd. That made things a little different."

It is here we begin to dab into the clashing wants and needs of both

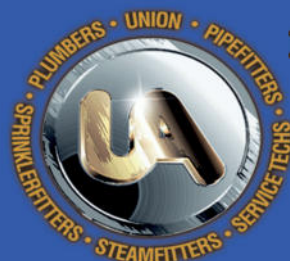
SEE NOT, C-16



AP file photo

Former WVU running back Shawne Alston carries the ball trying to stiff arm a Marshall defender during the last meeting in football between the Mountaineers and Thundering Herd in 2012.

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NOT

FROM PAGE C-15

schools.

In basketball, the Charleston Coliseum hosted the WVU-Marshall series for 25 years with both teams splitting the gate equally.

Why the series wasn't renewed after 2015 is told in two parts.

It begins with D'Antoni's postgame press conference in 2014. Following a close 69-66 WVU victory, D'Antoni exclaimed, "We're back," before suggesting that the two schools should play twice each season and Huggins would be "afraid" if it didn't happen.

Huggins responded to D'Antoni's claims on his radio show.

"And now they want to play twice in a year? Are you kidding me?" Huggins began. "It's like I said: Why don't we do what's best for West Virginia University and the state of West Virginia? I don't think it's my job to support them. I don't think that's part of my contract."

"He can say I'm afraid all he wants to say I'm afraid. I've probably coached 1,116 more games than he has. It's ridiculous to say something like that. We're afraid. Yeah, we're really afraid."

There is also a financial aspect, in that the crowds in Charleston were predominantly WVU fans, but WVU was forced to split the gate evenly, something the school became less thrilled about in the later years of the series.

SEE NOT, C-17



AP file photo

Former WVU center Sagaba Konate celebrates after dunking against Marshall in the second round of the 2018 NCAA tournament.

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NOT

FROM PAGE C-16

In football, it took a lot of closed-door meetings between Manchin and officials from both schools to agree on the creation of the Friends of Coal Bowl, the name given to a seven-game series played from 2006-2012.

WVU won all seven meetings.

Manchin stepped in after controversy arose after the two schools played in 1997. WVU claims Marshall backed out of three more scheduled games, while Marshall officials claimed no games were ever scheduled.

If there is any real rivalry between the two schools, it may be more at the administration level than on the field.

It is here where the two athletic departments may never see eye-to-eye, in that Marshall would like to see WVU visit Huntington in football and basketball a lot more than WVU wants to travel there.

It leaves us with a rivalry unplayed, if it can even be considered a rivalry to begin with.

Again, that notion depends on what side of the fence you sit.

"I don't know if there was ever any real hatred on the court back then," Jones said. "I never had anything against them. I wanted to win just so I wouldn't have to hear anything from their fans. I think the fans got into it more than the players."

TWEET @bigjax3211



AP file photo

The closest Marshall got to beating WVU on the gridiron was in Huntington in 2010, an overtime win for the Mountaineers after trailing 21-6 in the fourth quarter.



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William Wotring/The Dominion Post photos

Fans greet WVU players after the Mountaineers beat Virginia Tech in Morgantown last season. Offensive lineman Doug Nester, a VT transfer, holds the Black Diamond Trophy in the air.



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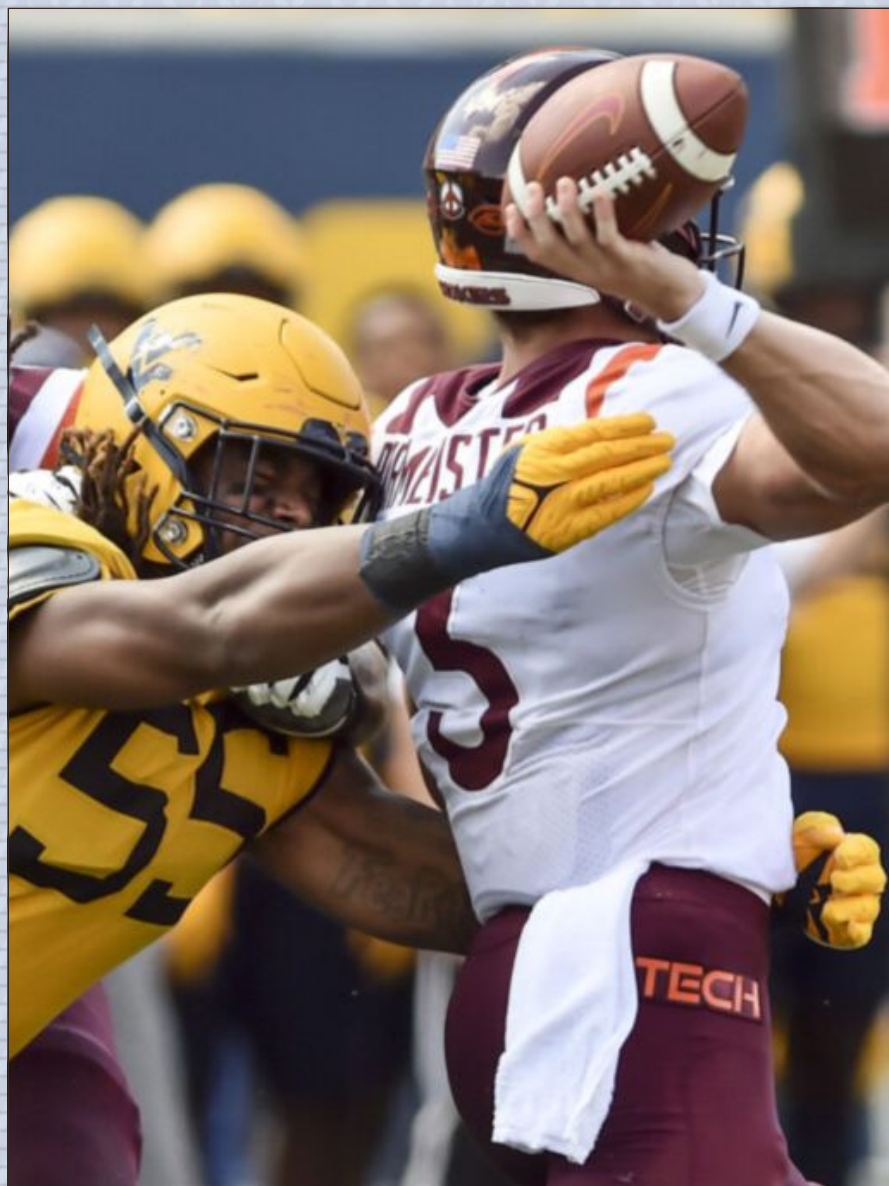
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WVU Athletics photos

WVU linebacker Grant Wiley (left) stops Virginia Tech running back Lee Suggs, while safety Brian King makes a critical interception in the 2002 game at Lane Stadium in Blacksburg.

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WVU Athletics photos

WVU quarterback Rasheed Marshall (left) and linebacker Grant Wiley each played a big role in the Mountaineers' upset of No. 3 Virginia Tech in 2003.

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What is the value of a rivalry game?

Associated Press

Being an Army football fan is a little like living in time capsule.

Home games kickoff at noon at Michie Stadium. The Black Knights will be running an offense that was groundbreaking in 1970. They have no conference affiliation, and no matter what happens throughout the season, success or failure will be defined by the result of the rivalry game against Navy.

"It's just exactly like it was in 1972," said Mark Beech, who is a West Point graduate, the son of a West Point graduate and author of "When Saturday Mattered Most: The Last Golden Season of Army Football."

The evolution of college football has gone into overdrive the past three decades, both on the field and off. What was once a regional sport has gone national. The powerhouse programs have nearly all consolidated in various conferences, often with little regard for geography or tradition.

The great debate was once, "Who's No. 1?" Now it's, "Eight-team playoff or 12?"

"The regular season to me was what college football was all about," Beech said. "And the rivalries were the showcase events of the regular season."



AP file photo

SEE VALUE, C-23 Michigan's win over Ohio State last season pushed them to the Big Ten title game and eventual playoff spot.

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VALUE

FROM PAGE C-22

The rivalry game is in many ways the purest form of college football. A game with built-in stakes regardless of circumstances. But rivalry games that used to be — should be — destinations unto themselves now feel like just another step on the road to a greater goal.

Take the two best college football rivalries, according to a new survey of writers and sportscasters taken by The Associated Press.

At the end of last season, Alabama faced Auburn in the Iron Bowl and Ohio State visited Michigan in the 117th edition of The Game.

Even if they had lost, the Crimson Tide still would have played the following Saturday against No. 1 Georgia for the Southeastern Conference title and a chance to go to the College Football Playoff.

The winner of Buckeyes-Wolverines (Michigan) move on to the Big Ten title game and also the play-off.

Sure, there are plenty of rivalry games that will be played that have only modest stakes attached beyond bragging rights. Still, the fact that it has now been branded Rivalry Week around Thanksgiving makes the whole thing feel less organic.

Has modern college football diminished the importance of rivalry games?

ESPN's Kirk Herbstreit, a former



AP file photo

SEE VALUE, C-24 Alabama and Auburn players get into it during the Iron Bowl.

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VALUE

FROM PAGE C-23

Buckeyes quarterback, doesn't think so.

"USC-UCLA is a great example," he said. "You have to be maybe a little bit older because that game's been off the radar, but those teams get on the field together, there's still people that think back to when that game decided everything."

Herbstreit's son Zak is a walk-on at Ohio State and is plenty familiar with the Ohio State-Michigan rivalry. Still, Kirk Herbstreit said his son only now is getting a true taste of the intensity.

"He texted me last night, this was a Sunday night, and his text was: 'Man, do I have a whole new appreciation for this rivalry,' " he said.

There is a lot going on, too, from conference realignment and playoff expansion to the red-hot transfer portal and the newfound OK for college athletes to earn money based on their fame.

"All this stuff that's out there, I think it's up to the coaches to still make these rivalries special," Herbstreit said.

Ohio State had dominated Michigan for the last decade and a half, winning 15 of 16 and the last eight before the Wolverines won last season. The Buckeyes are among a handful of programs, along with Alabama, Clemson, Georgia, Oklahoma and a few others, that annually operate under

SEE VALUE, C-25



AP file photo

Army wide receiver Michael Roberts (14) makes a catch while Navy linebacker Diego Fagot (54) tries to pull him down last season in East Rutherford, N.J.



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VALUE

FROM PAGE C-24

national-championship-or-bust expectations.

Is beating Michigan that important to Ohio State fans? Or are the spoils that come from beating Michigan what's really important?

"I just think you're one loss away from taking a rival for granted and getting a quick reminder about why this is what it is," Herbstreit said.

Which bring us back to Army-Navy, No. 3 in the AP ranking of best college football rivalries.

There was a time, back in the days of grainy newsreels, Army-Navy games could determine national championships. Those days are never coming back.

But that's OK.

While the importance of other rivalry games rises and falls with the fortunes of the programs that play in them — remember when Miami-Florida State was a bigger deal than the Iron Bowl? — Army-Navy is a constant.

The one rivalry game left in college football that still truly defines the season for each team.



AP file photo

Miami and Florida State's rivalry has fallen out of the national conversation, but it still matters to each fanbase.



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WVU Athletics

Like McKenzie, Tyler Bitancurt made a game-winning field goal against Pitt in 2009, pulling an upset of the No. 9 Panthers.



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WVU Athletics photos

WVU quarterback Jeff Hostetler looks to pass against Penn State in 1982, while Kerry Marbury returns a kickoff 100 yards for a touchdown against the Nittany Lions at Old Mountaineer Field.



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WVU Athletics photos

WVU's Jim Moss carries the ball against Penn State in 1961, while fans storm Mountaineer Field after WVU finally beat Penn State in 1984 after 28 straight losses.

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WVU Athletics photos

WVU running back Steve Slaton (left) and quarterback Pat White run past Marshall tacklers during the 2006 and 2007 games, respectfully.

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WVU Athletics photos

WVU tight end Will Johnson catches the game-tying touchdown against Marshall in 2010, while defensive lineman Will Clarke hits the Thundering Herd quarterback during the 2011 game.

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