

## **Green Wave students bring passion and energy to college football's biggest stage**

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Tulane students will bring school spirit and excitement to Oxford, Mississippi, Saturday, Dec. 20, when the Green Wave faces Ole Miss in the first round of the College Football Playoff. (Photo by Kenny Lass)

There may not be any more diehard Green Wave fans than Tulane University seniors Luke Kirchner and Lindsay Ruhl. They travel to away games, they attend all home games and, when the team won the American Conference championship on Dec. 5 at Yulman Stadium, they were front and center cheering in the raucous student section.

"I came with friends right when the gates opened to snag a front-row spot," Kirchner said.

"It was electric," Ruhl said of the post-game atmosphere. "Everyone was hugging, celebrating and dancing. There were families and fans all just beaming. It was such a special moment."

Ruhl, Kirchner and other Tulane students will take that same spirit and excitement to Oxford, Mississippi, Saturday, Dec. 20, when the Green Wave faces Ole Miss in the first round of the College Football Playoff (CFP). Students are already envisioning victory and the possibility of a Jan. 1 matchup against the Georgia Bulldogs in the Sugar Bowl in New Orleans.

But for now, they want to savor the moment and enjoy the thrill of being one of 12 teams competing in the CFP.

"I'm super excited to be going to Oxford," said Kirchner, who was in Vaught Hemingway Stadium when Tulane played Ole Miss earlier this season. "I'm assembling a group to make lots of noise at the game. We're looking for a good rematch."

That kind of student energy is exactly what members of the Tulane University Marching Band (TUMB) love to see, especially in hostile territory. And they are thrilled that so many of the Green Wave faithful, from students to alumni, will be in the stands in Oxford, as Tulane quickly sold out its allotment of tickets for the game. TUMB intends to do their part in pumping up the Tulane crowd.

"Our sole purpose is to get excited and to get our fans as excited as we are," said senior band member Damien Cameron.

For the band, the action begins Friday, Dec. 19, when it will send off the football team at 1:30 at the Wilson Center. The band's more than 100 members will board buses to Memphis, where they will spend the night before the game. They'll perform at a Tulane pep rally prior to the game and will perform a tribute to the 1980s band Boston during halftime.

"We're going to try to cultivate as much of a home atmosphere as possible," said Dylan Parrilla-Koester, the band's interim director.

Students who aren't in the stands plan to cheer from afar, attending watch parties or viewing the game with their families.

"I'll be there in spirit," said Camille Sullivan, a first-year student from Brooklyn. "I'm just so excited for what this means to Tulane and the community. I think the buildup is exciting."

"It's our comeback time," said Ruby Nelms, a first-year student from Atlanta. "We can't lose to them again." She said if Tulane wins, she'd like to go to the Sugar Bowl. "A lot of my best friends go to Georgia. Having a chance to play them would be out of this world," she said. "Never in my years at Tulane would I ever have imagined that."

But first, there's business to take care of in Oxford.

"As a senior, this game in Oxford is extra special to me," Ruhl said. "It'll be my first big SEC football experience. It feels like such an incredible and special opportunity to put our names on the big national screen."

Cameron agreed. "We're building on something really impressive and going to bigger and bigger stages," he said. "We may be from a smaller conference, but we deserve to be included."