

UF's Homecoming is unlike any other

By **GARY KIRKLAND**

Sun staff writer

The Gators rank No. 9 among the top 25 college-football teams, but if homecoming celebrations were rated, the University of Florida would be national champs, hands down.

Ohio State may have a rich football history, but homecoming there isn't a mega-event. Notre Dame drips with the tradition of Knute Rockne, "winning one for the Gipper" and "Touchdown Jesus," but doesn't even have a game designated as homecoming.

"Just about every game is like a homecoming weekend," says Notre Dame spokesman Michael Garvey. "Our campus goes pretty insane on football weekends."

But do they ever shut down South Bend with a midday parade on the main thoroughfare? No. Does the student body get a day off before a game? No again.

At the University of Nebraska, there's no

parade. But students and the pep band gather at The Plaza

on campus the Friday before the homecoming game, according to Phyllis Larsen, director of public relations.

Larsen said Nebraska fraternity and sorority houses also do the chicken-wire and tissue-paper decorations, but the weather doesn't always cooperate.

"It seems like it always rains that weekend, so there's always a lot of tissue paper stuck all over campus," Larsen said.

Florida State finished its homecoming celebration last weekend. Spokeswoman Cindy Mooy says last Friday wasn't a student holiday, nor was it a day off for every kid in the Leon County school system — as UF Homecoming is in Alachua
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Photos by JOHN MURAN, The Gainesville Sun

A rowdy O'Connell Center crowd welcomed Gainesville's own Tom Petty back home Thursday night. Petty, shown here during pre-concert sound checks, played a variety of songs from his 17-year recording career.



Petty, Heartbreakers wow crowd

By **JAMES HELLEGAARD**

Sun staff writer

One of Gainesville's own came home Thursday night. And oh, what a welcome he received.

Natalie Cole packs 'em in. 6A.

With a near-capacity O'Connell Center crowd responding to every song like a game-winning touchdown, Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers presented an in-

spiring two-hour concert that had their fans dancing and shimmying with joyous abandon.

Playing a variety of songs from their 17-year recording career, including a half-dozen songs that have yet to be released, Petty and his favorite bandmates reveled in the warm reception. The

more than 9,000 fans sounded like a crowd twice that size, excited by the music of their hometown boys and keyed up about the show being broadcast live to a radio audience of almost 5 million listeners.

Opening with two of his more-recent songs, "Love is Long Road" and "Into the Great Wide Open," Petty ventured way back for a rare electric and impressive version of "Listen to Her Heart."

Three Heartbreakers displayed their individual talents with their own selections, highlighted by keyboardist Benmont Tench's "Death Ray Boogie."

Breaking away somewhat from their standard set, the band hit musical heights with an
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acoustic "Kings Highway" and a stirring rendition of "Southern Accents."

Most of the crowd was only beginning to file in when the lights turned down and country singer Carlene Carter and her five-man band took the stage to, as Carter put it, get everybody warmed up for "T.P. and the H.B.'s." And they did.

Dancing and switching from two-fisted tambourine playing to strumming her acoustic guitar, Carter delivered an energetic hourlong set. Backed by a pair of blistering electric guitars, keyboards, bass and drums, Carter swung easily from shaking rock 'n' roll to torchlit

country with such songs as "I Knew the Bride When She Used to Rock 'n' Roll" and "Unbreakable Heart," penned by Heartbreaker Benmont Tench.

But the homecoming night and hometown crowd definitely belonged to Petty and the Heartbreakers.

Surrounded by the familiar trappings of past tours — a treasure chest, stuffed polar bear, a cannon, and a knight in shining armor — Petty and the band made themselves the principal attractions with some inspired playing and interesting song selections.

They wanted to give the crowd, and the millions listening on the radio, something to remember. Petty even dedicated the Byrds' "Ballad of Easy Rider" to River Phoenix. Said Petty: "It's been an emotional day."

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County. FSU did hold an afternoon parade through campus, but it hardly brought traffic to a standstill in Tallahassee.

That evening in Seminole tradition, a Pow Wow was held at the Leon County Civic Center, where a chief and princess were named and comedian Howie Mandel entertained.

Pow Wow hasn't yet grown into a monster like Gator Growl.

Ohio State's homecoming parade is held on a Friday, says spokeswoman Ruth Gerstner, and it concludes with a pep rally at The Oval in the center of campus.

"It's a tradition that continues. It was a bigger deal in the '50s and '40s," Gerstner said. "The pep

rally held the evening before the Michigan game usually draws more people than the homecoming pep rally."

Last weekend at UCLA, fans were "Bruin to the Bone" as they celebrated a homecoming win over Arizona.

The Friday before, there was a parade through the neighboring Westwood community and the traditional Spirit Rally. But those homecoming festivities are mild compared to the end-of-the-year revelry surrounding the annual match with crosstown rival University of Southern California.

"That is far, far bigger than homecoming. That's a rivalry that splits the entire Los Angeles community and beyond," said public-information representative Karen Mack. "It splits homes in half; it splits offices in half."

But in Gainesville, it doesn't take a heated rivalry — even Southwestern Louisiana will do.