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Administrators decided to stop University sponsorship of Tailgate over the summer, but students continued the tradition.

Fumble recovered

Tailgate may be back for good, but what does that mean for Dukies?

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Across the vast blacktop expanse, heat emanates from the sun-soaked asphalt. Bright rays shimmer off the black, polarized lenses of moist, foggy aviator sunglasses. Screams and cackles echo from the pastel and neon crowd like an incoherent Gregorian chant.

It's Tailgate time.

An ephemeral vision of normality briefly returned to Duke University's West Campus on September 2nd. In the wake of scandal and intensely probing public scrutiny, die-hard day drinkers once again assembled in their pit of debauchery--the Blue Zone parking lot--before Duke Football's loss at the hands of Division I-AA Richmond.

Although no life-sized-stuffed-animal costumes or keg-hauling, horse-and-buggy charioteers were present (some might say regrettably), the terror of the imminent death of fun lately sweeping the Gothic Wonderland culminated in a feeble, bottle-rocket finale, rather than a mushroom cloud of communal disaster.

"Tailgate's been broken up, a lot more spread out," senior Annie Shinn says of the new and reformed Tailgate

But it's back, despite the withdrawal of University support and rumors of ALE crackdowns that have diminished the grandeur of the spectacle.

By last year, the seeds of Tailgate, planted in a small and sloppy gathering on the grassy slopes behind Wallace Wade Stadium, had grown into an all-encompassing staple of Duke life.

But recently, Tailgate-with a capital "T"-has become a symbol of the conflict with which students and faculty are wrestling: How should Duke go about repairing its battered image without destroying some of its more unique qualities?

On one hand, many students see the disorganized mass as the single most unifying and special event on campus, a place where any student can mingle with costume-clad frat stars, Pratt stars, special interest group members, athletes, sorority sisters and 70-year-old Durham locals-regardless of social status, GPA, or funneling ability.

From the other end, the pre-football celebration has another goal: to approach a level of drunken delirium that one can only fathom in the dark recesses of the inebriated mind. It is this that the administration sees as dangerous-and justifiably so. Instances of hospitalizations due to binge drinking as well as arrests increased as the tradition began to settle in.

And it is this dual perception that forced the Duke administration to take steps toward revising Tailgate, to cease trying to control it, to let it be-consequences and all.

Human nature cannot go unmonitored, though, or else chaos will reign. So it seems the time has come for the golden age of Tailgate to cease. It is time for the students to accept responsibility for their freedom and privileges.

Tailgate is the flash point for Duke's complex identity crisis. While the University strives to be an academically elite center of higher education, it also aims to compete at the highest level in a world-class athletic conference, and to allow its students a traditional collegiate social experience. Dukies yearn for the best of both worlds, while simultaneously double-fisting forties of Olde English.

In the Greek philosophers' understanding of humanity, balance results from a cultivated mind, body and spirit. Duke, it seems, is caught between the virtues of Hellenism and hedonism.

It is this balance that explains 4.0-GPA biomedical engineers-the future leaders and healers of the world-clad in blue-and-white body paint, checking their e-mail in-between Beirut games in K-ville.

The unofficial motto- "work hard, play hard"-has been called into question. Have the social and academic goals of the student body become mutually exclusive?

Dukies are confronted with issues that have become a broad-sided target for the national media, a maelstrom of prejudged historical stereotypes and a gaping wound of self-inquiry.

Has the student body learned how to balance? It's still a bit too early to tell.

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