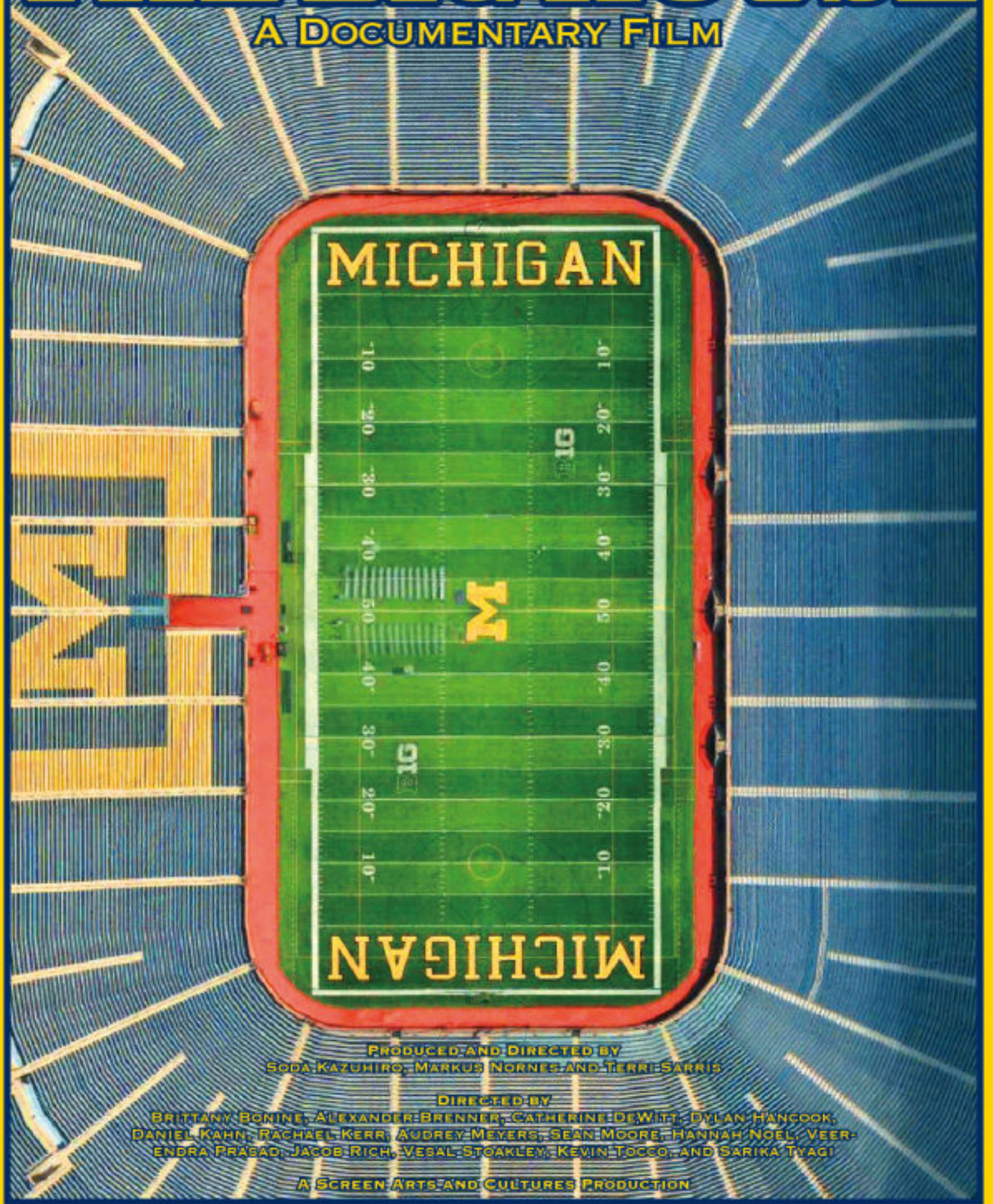
THE BIG HOUSE

A Documentary Film



Produced and Directed by
Soda Kazuhiro, Markus Nornes, and Terri Sarris

Directed by
Brittany Bonine, Alexander Brenner, Catherine DeWitt, Dylan Hancook, Daniel Kahn, Rachael Kerr, Audrey Meyers, Sean Moore, Hannah Noel, Veerendra Prasad, Jacob Rich, Vesal Stoakley, Kevin Tocco, and Sarika Tyagi

A Screen Arts and Cultures Production



An Observational Documentary About Everything But the Game

Synopsis

Ann Arbor, Michigan is the prototypical college town—a small city with a massive research university, a tradition of political radicalism and Michigan Stadium, the largest in the United States and the home of University of Michigan football. With a capacity of 107, 601 the entire population of Ann Arbor fits in the stadium, which fans affectionately call "The Big House." Michigan football goes back to 1879, and is known for its distinctive winged helmet and its fight song "The Victors." But this direct cinema documentary eschews gridiron grandeur to look closely at all the labor—from the cooks to the cops to the cleaners—that goes into hosting 100,000 people. Shot against the backdrop of the 2016 election and the rise of Donald Trump, it presents a microcosm of America by showing everything but the game.

Website: https://www.kazuhirosoda.com/thebighouse

Produced and Directed by
Kazuhiro Soda
Markus Nornes
Terri Sarris

Directed by
Vesal Stoakley
Sean Moore
Sarika Tyagi
V. Prasad
Britty Bonine
Alex Brenner
Catie DeWitt
Dylan Hancook
Daniel Kahn
Rachael Kerr
Audrey Meyers
Hannah Noel
Jacob Rich
Kevin Tocco

Edited by
Kazuhiro Soda

Assistant Editors
Sean Moore
Vesal Stoakley
Sarika Tyagi

Directors' Statement

The poster design for *The Big House* may seem cryptic upon first glance, but it says a lot about our project. Seen from space, Michigan Stadium would appear a board game—one where all manner of competitions come into play, with both winners and losers. Or an empty vessel waiting to be filled with a city's worth of humanity. At ground level, the gentle bowl of people—most wearing the same color combination (and skin color)—overwhelms with the visual and aural spectacle The Big House is famous for. That has to do with the immersion in sameness, the massive vibration that runs through the crowd as it tunes into the rhythms of the football competition. Our film offers moments of such immersion and its accompanying pleasures. But it also points the audience towards subtle and decisive moments of difference. Sometimes this is merely a visual pattern, or an aural punctuation; other times it has to do with the dynamic of the seen and unseen, celebrity and anonymity, haves and have-nots, cultures of war and of nationalism—and simultaneously the attraction to and escape from all of this. Put another way, The Big House is America.

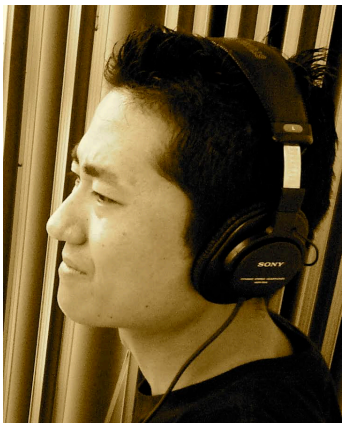
Background of the Project

The University of Michigan Department of Screen Arts and Cultures takes its position in one of the great liberal arts colleges. The presumption is that the best filmmakers know their history and the best historians have made films. To this end, some courses are team taught; this film emerged from one of these courses. The topic was "direct cinema," the style of documentary that eschews narration, interviews, screenwriting and non-diegetic music. It is an approach that minimizes preparatory research and maximizes and openness to discovering during photography and editing. While historian Markus Nornes led sessions on the history and ethical dimensions of direct cinema, filmmakers Terri Sarris and Kazuhiro Soda guided students on the production side. The three professors and 13 students watched the classics of direct cinema, and brought the lessons of this history to their own filmmaking practice.

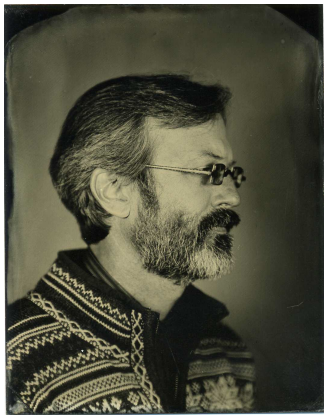
The Michigan Athletic Department embraced the project and gave each filmmaker a pass that allowed them to freely roam the stadium. The team scouted the first football game of the season, looking for all the stories unfolding over the course of game day. Individuals and small groups claimed individual themes and shot footage over the subsequent three games. After every game, the project members gathered to screen raw footage and rough edits, debating aesthetic and ethical problems to refine their sequences. How does race figure into the spectacle of the Big House? How can the complex issue of money be adequately explored in a style that rejects narration and interviews? The election loomed over the football season, but does it belong in the film?

Each individual and small group edited their own sequence, and these were compiled to a first cut that was nearly four hours long. It was at this point that internationally celebrated director Kazuhiro Soda—who specializes in direct cinema documentaries—took over editing and brought the film to its present length.

Producer and Director Biographies



Kazuhiro Soda is a Peabody Award-winning filmmaker known for his observational filmmaking method and style. His films have been screened at such events as Berlin International Film Festival, Venice International Film Festival, Locarno International Film Festival, Busan International Film Festival, and Hong Kong International Film Festival, among others, winning numerous prestigious awards. His filmography includes *Campaign* (Berlinale 2007), *Mental* (Berlinale 2009), *Peace* (2010), *Theatre 1* (2012), *Theatre 2* (2012), *Campaign 2* (2013), *Oyster Factory* (2015), and *Inland Sea* (Berlinale 2018).He is also the author of seven books published in Japan. He joined the production of *The Big House* as the Toyota Professor in Residence at the Center for Japanese Studies, University of Michigan.



Markus Nornes is Professor of Asian Cinema at the University of Michigan, and specializes in documentary, Japanese film and translation theory. He has made personal films and a 5-screen video installation entitled The Player *Played*. Nornes has done extensive programming on the international film festival circuit, especially at the Yamagata International Documentary Film Festival. His research centers on the political and ethical complexities of the non-fiction form. He is author of *Japanese Documentary Film: From Meiji Era to Hiroshima* (2003), *Forest of Pressure: Ogawa Shinsuke and Postwar Japanese Documentary* (2007, *Cinema Babel: Translating Global Cinema* (2007), *A Research Guide to Japanese Cinema* (2009), among other books.



Terri Sarris teaches media production at the University of Michigan. Her experimental films have screened at the Ann Arbor Film Festival in 2017 (*Circular* and *Clowning Around*), 2016, (*Drive In* and *Our Last Hurrah)* and 2015 (*Ziegler*). Her film *Buzzards Steal Your Picnic* was awarded "Best Michigan Film" at both the 2008 AAFF and 2007 Detroit International Documentary Festival. Along with former student Sultan Sharrief, Sarris developed the "EFEX Project." Their feature film, *Bilal's Stand,* was one of eight films selected for the <NEXT> category at the Sundance Film Festival (2010), was awarded a "Crystal Heart" Award at the Heartland Film Festival (2011), and has screened widely at festivals and in connection with outreach events centered on media and higher education.

Director Biographies

Britty Bonine studies film production and screenwriting. Recently, she worked as a production assistant for Michael Ojeda's latest feature film *The Russian Bride* and served as videographer for Oaken Transformations Art Walk. On campus, she is preparing a film to raise sexual assault awareness through the Sexual Assault and Prevention and Awareness Center. In addition, Britty has directed and written multiple short films.

Alex Brenner was born and raised in Ann Arbor. His focus is on documentary and international cinema, but has a love for Tarantino films. He has worked on three short length documentaries and is currently studying film and journalism abroad at the University of Cape Town. Brenner aspires to travel internationally, exploring the world through the lens of his camera.

Catherine DeWitt is from Metro Detroit, where she grew up watching Michigan football. She is a graduating senior studying art history and film, having produced and art directed a number of short films during her time at Michigan. She is currently working as the production designer for a film titled *Chasing the GOAT,* which will screen at the Traverse City Film Festival in July 2017.

Dylan Hancook is a writer/director from Clarkston, Michigan working in commercial, music video, and short form narrative filmmaking. Hancook's recent projects include *Cheater,* which won 3rd place overall and the audience award at the YPSI 24 hour film competition, *Roll Call* which won 1st prize overall at the Spotlight Film competition, and *EchoMe Launchspot* which won best live action spot overall at the 2016 Boston Brandathon. He is currently shooting a 30-minute narrative film entitled *Chasing the GOAT,* which will premiere in the Traverse City Film Festival in July 2017.

Danny Kahn is a native of Baltimore, Maryland and studies film and entrepreneurship. His love for film production started at a young age and has developed into a more serious interest over time. Currently, Kahn is studying abroad for a semester in Copenhagen, Denmark. He is looking to pursue a career in media production after graduation.

As an Ann Arbor native, the University of Michigan, the city's famous film culture, and Michigan football have all played a central role in **Rachael Kerr's** life since childhood. This is her first feature-length credit. She graduated with a degree in Screen Arts and Cultures in 2017 and is working in documentary filmmaking.

Audrey Meyers is from Kalamazoo, Michigan where she spent her time as a kid playing with cameras and making movies with her brother. She currently studies creative writing and communications at the University of Michigan.

Sean Moore is a student from Mount Pleasant, Michigan who became interested in working on film while making commercials for organizations and events while attending high school. He studies Anthropology and Screen Arts and Culture, and is interested in exploring the ethnographic capabilities of film through documentary filmmaking.

Hannah Noel is a cinematographer/editor from Lansing, Michigan who has done camera for films such as *Good Company,* as well as her own independent study film titled *Habits*. She was head producer on the short film, *The Dejects*, which went to a number of international festivals, and won best comedy, best director, best cinematography, best editing, best writer in the Women's Only Entertainment Film Festival. *The Big House* will be Noel's first feature-length film credit.

V. Prasad is a writer-director based in Michigan. Prasad has an MFA in Screenwriting from the American Film Institute and teaches the craft at the University of Michigan. Prasad's produced work includes the theatrical release *Ocean of Pearls*. He's currently developing *What We Know,* a feature about the investigation of a sexual assault on a college campus, as well as a ghost story set in India and based on Hindu scripture.

Jacob Rich, an Ann Arbor native, has directed and produced numerous documentaries and narrative shorts while studying film production, communication media and computer science at the University of Michigan. He is writing, directing and programming the upcoming role-playing video game *Postmodern Girls.* Harboring an intense passion for avant-garde interactive media, Jacob is dedicated to fostering a new, vibrant community of talented digital artists in Southeast Michigan.

Vesal Stoakley is a native of Chicago, home to the School of the Art Institute of Chicago's Siskel Film Center, where his love for international film and documentary began. He studies screenwriting, and has written three feature length works. Currently, Stoakley is finishing production on his short film screenplay, *My Galatea*, preparing a new feature documentary, and embarking on an honors thesis screenplay on domestic violence.

Kevin Tocco is from a suburb near Detroit called Woodhaven, where he learned the basics and beauty of pointing cameras at things in a class called Broadcasting. He studies screen arts and astronomy at Michigan, working with camera departments on countless shorts. His most recent production, called *Malignant Humor,* is about an improv group forced to make light of a traumatic event. *The Big House* documentary is his directing debut.

Credits

2018 *119 min.* *DCP/Blu-ray/DVD* *USA/Japan*

Produced and Directed By:
Kazuhiro Soda
Markus Nornes
Terri Sarris

Directed By:
Vesal Stoakley
Sean Moore
Sarika Tyagi
V. Prasad
Britty Bonine
Alex Brenner
Catie DeWitt
Dylan Hancook
Daniel Kahn
Rachael Kerr
Audrey Meyers
Hannah Noel
Jacob Rich
Kevin Tocco

Edited By:
Kazuhiro Soda

Assistant Editors
Sean Moore
Vesal Stoakley
Sarika Tyagi

Special Thanks:
University of Michigan
Athletic Department
UM Department of Screen Arts and Cultures
UM Instructional Support Services
Kurt Svoboda
Kurt Wisenbaugh
Paul Neidermire
Emily Ford
Raul Perdomo
Steve Raymond
President Mark S. Schlissel
Dean Andrew Martin
Tom Baird
Tom Szczepanski
Jack Bernard
Collin McCarty
Jon Collier
Coach James Harbaugh
Jon Pasquale
Michigan Marching Band
Michigan Cheerleaders
Michigan Wolverines football team
John U. Bacon
Diane Brown
Thomas R. Hannah
Ira Jaffe
Bentley Historical Library
Sodexo USA
Jarvis Antonie Hinson
Sonny Anderson, Kori Reblin, and the Wolverine locker room crew
U.S. Special Operations Command Para-Commandos
All of the Big House staff, workers, and volunteers
Center for Japanese Studies
Kiyoteru Tsutsui
Yuri Fukazawa
Leea Allerding
Toyota Motor Corporation
Johannes von Moltke
Caryl Flinn
James Burnstein

Screen Arts and Cultures Staff:
Mary Lou Chlipala
Philip Hallman
Carrie Moore
Lisa Rohde-Barbeau
Marga Schuhwerk-Hampel
Paul Sutherland
Alan Young

Poster Design:
Wang Wo

Notable Figures

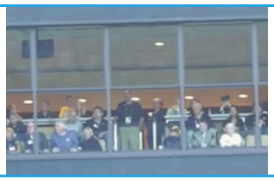
In order of appearance.



Steve Levy: sports journalist, ESPN.

Brian Griese: sports journalist, ESPN; starting quarterback for UM; played for Denver Broncos, Tampa Bay Buccaneers, and the Chicago Bears.





Mark Schlissel: 14th President of the University of Michigan.

David Turnley: Pulitzer Prize-winning photojournalist, documentary filmmaker, UM faculty member; played football for UM.





Big Sean: Detroit-based rapper.

Jim Harbaugh: head football coach, University of Michigan; starting quarterback for UM; played with Chicago Bears, Indianapolis Colts, and others; coached SF 49ers and others.





Bongo Man (Nahru Lampkin): Detroit street performer and fixture of UM pregame festivities.

John U. Bacon: author, sports journalist and broadcaster; historian of The Big House and Michigan sports; UM alumnus.





Bill Muckalt: UM hockey player; NHL career with Vancouver Canucks, New York Islanders, Ottawa Senators and the Minnesota Wild.

THE BIG HOUSE

A Small History

"Victors"

Michigan's famous fight song was written by a student in 1898 and first performed by John Philip Sousa and his band. President Ford often had the Naval band play it instead of "Hail to the Chief" and asked that it be played at his funeral.

"Go Blue!"

"Go Blue" is all purpose call of the university. The team has entered under a "Go Blue" banner for over half a century.

Winged Helmet

College football's best known helmet was designed by Coach Fritz Crisler in 1932, replacing an all black helmet. He thought it would be easier for the quarterback to find his receivers. Indeed, he doubled his reception yards.

Slippery Rock

Slippery Rock is a small Pennsylvania college. Its score has been announced to great cheers in the Big House since 1959.

The Michigan Stadium Story

This is a short version of a lengthy history of the stadium compiled by the historical library at University of Michigan. For the original, see:
http://bentley.umich.edu/athdept/stadium/index.html

As early as 1923, Coach Yost began conceiving plans for a new and bigger stadium. One of the first to get a peek at Yost's vision was C. Joe Galloway, a 1925 graduate of the College of Engineering. In a letter to the Michigan Alumnus Galloway recalled:

> One day Prof. C.T. Johnson (head of the department) and Coach Yost came into the instrument room. Coach requested someone go with him to help determine if drainage could be made possible of a rather large sunken area not far from Ferry Field. I was selected and I drove to an old glaciated depression. Upon arriving and, having brought with me a transit and stadia board, we began taking elevation shots. Coach Yost was my rodman. Yost wanted to know if there was enough fall from the bottom of the depression to permit drainage to the storm sewer. Several shots were made, and after computing, I found there was sufficient gradient to drain the sunken area. We discussed the feasibility of making this natural bowl into a stadium. Coach Yost said, "Galloway, one day this will be the new Michigan Stadium."

There was some dispute over how big [the new stadium] should be. [A] report projected a stadium seating 70-75,000, while Yost argued for a much larger facility, foreseeing a day when crowds of 125,000 to

150,000 would need to be accommodated. After much argument over the university's obligation "to provide accommodation for all who wish to attend the games and are willing to pay a reasonable price of admission," the plan approved by the Regents accepted the Day Report's size recommendations, but incorporated Yost's proposal that the stadium's footings be constructed to permit future expansion to over 100,000 capacity.



The Miller family farm, ca. 1902 at the future site of Michigan Stadium. The buildings stand at the approximate site of section 23. John Miller, whose father built the house, was a ticket attendant at gate no. 6 on opening day and manned the post for fifty years.

The plan approved by the Regents called for a bowl-type stadium to take advantage of the natural characteristics of the site. Three sides of the stadium would be completely below grade, with the playing surface fifty feet below grade. On the west, north and south sides, entrance to the stadium at the top row of seats would be at street level. Though modeled in part on the Yale Bowl, Michigan Stadium would not be a true oval. Instead, the seating along the sidelines would be parallel to the playing field, bringing the fans as close as possible to the action. The stadium would consist of 44 sections with 72 rows seating 72,000. A cement concourse would ring the stadium.

The contract for excavating the stadium site was awarded to the R.C. Mercier company of Detroit in August 1926 and work was well underway by mid-September. Using steam shovels, trucks, and horses and wagons, 200 Mercier workers removed as much as 2,000 cubic yards of dirt a day. In October, lights were installed to permit around-the-clock work, raising daily excavation totals to as much as 3,500 yards. The high water table quickly posed problems for Mercier. In early October a pumper truck was borrowed from the Detroit Fire Department to remove water from the excavation site. In late November, Mercier's steam shovels unearthed a number of natural springs which threatened to bring work to a halt. Additional steam pumps were brought in, including one that could pump 60 gallons per second. *The Ann Arbor News* estimated enough water was being removed each day to supply the daily needs of all Ann Arborites. Eventually the water table problems became so severe, and expensive to remedy, that it was decided to raise the level of the playing surface about six feet. Legend holds that a Mercier Company steam shovel sank in the almost quicksand-like conditions created by one of the springs and remains buried under the stadium today.



Workers finish concrete in one section and prepare another for a pour.

The first concrete was poured in sections 22 and 23 on May 9. The last of over 11,000 yards of concrete were poured September 1 on the concourse surrounding the stadium. Some 440 tons of reinforcing steel and 31,000 square feet of wire mesh were used in the concrete bowl. In early June the first of more than 22 miles worth of redwood plank seats was installed. Sodding of the field began on June 3. One four leaf clover is supposed to have been planted in the 360x160 foot playing surface.

With completion of the press box and locker rooms and the painting and numbering of the seats, Michigan Stadium was ready for opening on October 1, 1927. A less than capacity crowd (officially listed as 17,483, but reported as over 30,00 in the newspapers) braved a heavy rainstorm to witness the Wolverines 33-0 victory over Ohio Wesleyan. If opening day was disappointing, it didn't shake Yost's faith. The Ohio State game had sold out by September 1.

In anticipation of that, Yost had secured approval for construction of wooden bleachers on the stadium concourse seating an additional 10,000 fans. Construction of the bleacher began after the Ohio Wesleyan game and was completed for the dedication game on October 22. A crowd of 84,401 packed the stadium for the dedication game against Ohio State, a 21-0 Michigan victory.



The dedication day crowd, note the wooden bleacher structure at lower left. General admission tickets sold for three dollars. The 11,114 student ticket purchaser had to pay a fifty cent surcharge on the normal $2.50 price for this and the other "big games" of the year. The box seats in the lower rows went for four and five dollars.

As a football spectacle, of course, the day wholly surpassed anything in Michigan history. As the Michigan Alumnus writer noted "Ann Arbor flung open its gates to a horde of visitors nearly triple the size of its own population—and the new stadium swallowed them by two o-clock in the afternoon."



Bennie and Biff the Wolverines at the inaugural game.

Among those in attendance on dedication day were "Bennie" and "Biff" the two live wolverine mascots Fielding Yost had acquired after a long search. For a number of years they were brought to the stadium for all the big games. The wolverines lived for a time at a small zoo near the Natural History Museum, but eventually became too vicious to remain on campus and were moved to the Detroit Zoo.

Michigan by the Numbers

One of the great research schools in the world, the University of Michigan is often called one of the "public ivies." It was founded 200 years ago, in 1817. Among its alumni are one U.S. President (Gerald Ford, who also played football), two dozen governors, three Supreme Court Justices and eight Nobel Laureates.

- 44,718 students from all 50 states and 118 countries
- 7,219 faculty
- 14,856 staff
- 117,025: population of Ann Arbor
- 575,000+ alumni, the most in the world
- $1.39 billion in research expenditures
- 265+ degree programs
- 65+ foreign languages taught
- 200+ study abroad programs on 6 continents
- 29 NCAA Division I teams
- More than 50 national championships in 12 sports
- More than 200 UM athletes and coaches are Olympic medalists
- In 2016, 6,689 undergraduate students were enrolled from 55,504 applicants, with an average GPA of 3.87.

The Wolverines drew 297,641 fans during Michigan Stadium's initial season, including 84,401 for the dedication game against Ohio State. Total attendance dropped slightly in 1928 and 1929 but the "big" games continued to fill the stadium. Crowds for Ohio State, Wisconsin, Illinois, Iowa, and Harvard averaged almost 70,000. The 1929 Ohio State game drew 85,088 spectators, a record that would stand until 1943.

In 1930, the University took advantage of new technology and installed electronic scoreboards at both ends of the stadium. In doing so, Michigan Stadium became the first to use electronic scoreboards. The scoreboards, estimated to cost $15,000, had been planned for in the stadium design, but the technology was not perfected until 1930. The new scoreboards were expected to make their debut at the Michigan State game. The game program described the operation of the boards and offered a caution.

> Both boards are designed to be operated simultaneously from a centrally located switchboard in the press box. Downs, yards to go, runner and other information is relayed to



A New Scoreboard

> the switchboard by means of telephone, a terminal for which is located every ten yards along the west side-lines. A further check on runner, down, and yards is made by means of a "signal cross" operated by a man who follows the teams up and down the field. If the new boards do not operate quite perfectly today, we ask that you bear in mind its operators have never manipulated it before. Long before the second half, however, operating errors should have been corrected and the information show made accurate.

Alas, technical difficulties prevented use of the scoreboards at the Michigan State game. That may not have been too much of a calamity for the fans, however, since the game ended in a scoreless tie. By the following week the bugs were worked out and the scoreboards recorded a 14 to 13 Michigan win over Purdue. They would report many more Wolverine victories over the next 38 years before being replaced in 1968.



13 rows of steel bleachers were added in 1949

Post-War Expansion

In the post-war years, the return of veterans to campus, economic prosperity and some very good teams once again brought capacity crowds to Michigan Stadium. With sellout crowds again the norm, plans were drawn up to increase the size of the stadium in 1949. The most ambitious of the plans called for the addition of a top deck entirely around the stadium, increasing capacity to 125,300. A more modest plan

was adopted to install permanent steel stands around the stadium concourse, where Yost's temporary bleachers still stood. The thirteen rows of additional seats increased stadium seating to 97,239. In its first game in the enlarged stadium, Michigan drew a then-record capacity crowd to the contest against Michigan State. In the first season of official NCAA attendance records (1949), the final tally showed Michigan leading the nation in average home attendance with 93,894.

Breaking the 100,000 Barrier

Seven years would pass before the capacity of Michigan Stadium was raised again with the building of the Michigan Sports Communications Center (press box). Built at a cost of $700,000, the new structure provided a host of resources, including a press area, a photo deck, darkrooms and various other amenities. Dedicated on September 22, 1956, the press box and the additional seating constructed along with it raised the capacity of Michigan Stadium from 97,239 to 101,001.

During the 1960s, major changes and renovations to the stadium continued. In 1965, the wooden benches were covered in blue fiberglass to prevent weathering and discoloration of the seats. It was then that the yellow "Block M" was created on the east bleachers of the stadium, a design done by former U-M player Dan Dworsky. In the summer of 1973, renovation plans called for the removal of many of the rails in the stadium and replacement of the box seats in the first three rows with bleacher seats. This change allowed for six hundred more seats in the stadium, and capacity was now 101,701. In 1974, Michigan led the nation in average attendance, as it has done every season since.

As Michigan closed out the 1993 regular season against Ohio State, 106,867 fans filed into the stadium, breaking both the Michigan Stadium and NCAA single game attendance records. The number of people in Michigan Stadium that day exceeded the population of all but 185 cities in the United States and increased the Wolverine season tally to 739,560, another NCAA record.

Just as Michigan was a pioneer when electric scoreboards were first installed in 1930, the renovated stadium included new, state-of-the-art scoreboards and advanced sound and video systems. The scoreboards at the north and south ends of the stadium measure 40' by 78' each and weigh about 50,000 pounds a piece. The scoreboards contain color video screens of approximately 24' by 32'. These video screens have better resolution than a home TV set. There is no commercial advertising on the scoreboards in Michigan Stadium, a unique stance within the Big Ten. When completed, the final expansion added 5,000 seats for an official capacity of 107,501, making Michigan Stadium once again the largest college-owned stadium in the nation. On September 12, the Wolverines inaugurated the Big House before 111,012 fans in a game against Syracuse University.