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## Riot escalates as night wears on

### Students march through streets, set fires in protest of alcohol ban

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By JOE BLOCK and  
GREG MULLIN  
State News Staff Writers

Lightning and heavy rain did not keep several hundred MSU students from gathering around Munn field at 9 p.m. to demonstrate against MSU's decision to ban alcohol during football tailgates. Entrances to the field were blocked by police, but students soon broke through.



The State News • CORY MORSE

**Protesters yell at MSU police on Munn field before rushing onto the field Friday night.**

Protesters began singing the MSU fight song and "Go Green! Go White!"

Several minutes later, beer bottles were thrown onto the field, some in the direction of the roughly six officers who patrolled it. People then began shaking the chain-link fences surrounding Munn field as one man ran across the field to the cheering of the masses.

He was followed by others, and almost immediately, part of the fence was knocked down as most of the crowd erupted onto the field at about 9:30 p.m.

Police, now wearing riot gear, issued tickets for trespassing to many of the students surrounding Munn field and those who broke through the fence.

"I just think it's unfair that they are making it a crime to have a beer with your buddies before a football game," junior Mark Bewernitz said while standing outside Munn field. "It's not like we are smoking crack or anything. We don't want any littering, just a peaceful protest."

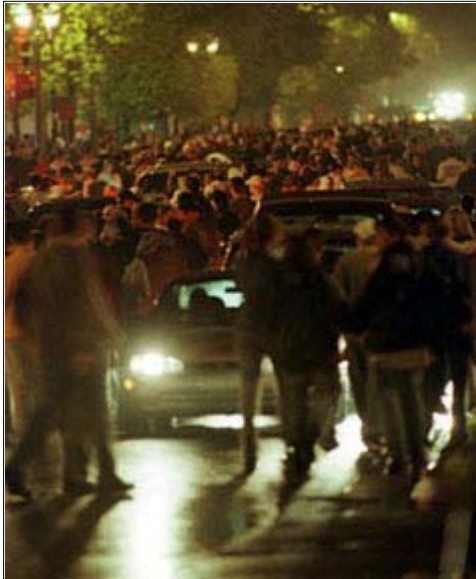
On the field, protesters dived into the mud, played football and threw flying disks.

"I am totally against the administration," said Bridget McGovern, a

communication senior who was standing on Munn field. “This is public property; we pay a lot of money to go to school here. There is no reason we should not be allowed to be here.”

The crowd vacated Munn field at about 10:15 p.m. and marched to Cowles House, One Abbott Road, home of MSU President M. Peter McPherson.

Chants of “We want Munn!” filled the air in front of McPherson’s home. MSU police Chief Bruce Benson silenced the crowd.



**The State News • CORY MORSE**  
**MSU students bring East Grand River Avenue’s traffic to a halt by crowding onto the street on Friday after protesting at Munn field and Cowles House, One Abbott Road.**

fracas that occurred there Sept. 7.

The protesters attempted to move down the second block of Gunson but were turned back by several officers in riot gear. The protesters instead marched down Short Street to Abbott Road as some residents cheered.

Pete Maziak, a telecommunication senior, carried a sign and the trespass ticket he’d received at Munn field.

“I went on Munn field and they gave me a trespassing ticket on my own university,” he said. “I showed ’em — this is my campus. This is my university.”

Maziak’s sign read: “1st Amendment rights: We have the right to peaceably assemble. Students have rights, too.”

Before midnight struck, a few hundred rioters resurfaced in front of the Sparty statue and pumped their fists in the air and screamed. In the darkness, the group traveled back to Munn field and joined the people who had overtaken the intersection of East Grand River Avenue and Abbott Road.

Benson said to the crowd, “What I would normally do is go in and ask the president to come out and talk to you as a group. ... I was going to go in and ask President McPherson to chat with you, but he’s gone. He’s out of town.”

As the rain subsided, several protesters thanked Benson for talking to the crowd.

When it seemed as if the night might come to a close, the crowd moved down Grand River Avenue toward Gunson Street. Some of the protesters carried beer bottles and continued yelling. Gunson residents came out onto their porches and watched the protesters gather on their street, reminiscent of the

“What am I thinking about?” said Ryan Noel as he walked east on Grand River Avenue. “I’m thinking about how wonderful this university is and how great it is to see students unite for a common cause in a peaceful manner. I think if we’re going to get our message across, we gotta do this in a peaceful manner. I love this — this is beautiful for me.”

Witnesses said a fire at Grand River Avenue and Abbott Road was started after rioters started throwing T-shirts into a pile. The blaze turned into a 10-foot high fire. Some rioters began jumping through the flames. Others contributed chairs and other wood to the fire.

At about 1 a.m., police, wearing riot gear and carrying shields and batons, began launching tear gas to disperse the crowd. The effects of the tear gas spread as far east on Grand River Avenue as Charles Street. Many were coughing and had watering, bloodshot eyes. Some people began running at the police and more tear gas was launched.

Chants of “Burn, East Lansing, burn!” and “Gunson!” were heard throughout the streets.

On Grand River Avenue, in front of Berkey Hall, two people broke bottles on the side of a car. The incident occurred after the car nearly ran over a crowd of protesters.

People waiting to get into Rick’s American Cafe, 224 Abbott Road, were locked out of the bar around midnight, English junior Julia Wimberly said.

Police told the patrons to stand against the wall, Wimberly said, before people in the area were sprayed with pepper gas.

“The cops sprayed down the line,” Wimberly said. “It was awful. It hurt a lot. They just didn’t care.”

Wimberly said the gas was sprayed into the crowd of rioters in the street after they mooned police and threw bottles in their direction.

By 2:30 a.m., another bonfire had started in the Cedar Village Apartments complex. The rioters, who appeared to be mostly residents and numbered about 1,000, threw furniture — including a large couch and chair — and other items into the flames.



**The State News • JENNIFER JANKOWSKI**  
**Protesters run from the corner of Grand River Avenue and Abbott Road as police use gas earlier in the evening to disperse the crowd.**

Rioters cheered as each new item or firecracker was thrown into the flames. A number of people videotaped the incident, as the apartment

residents chanted “Cedar Fest.”

Cedar Fest was a riot in Cedar Village in 1989.

At about 3 a.m., approximately 50 police officers moved in to control the crowd and put out the fire. They fired tear gas from Bogue Street and dispersed the crowd. The fire was put out by the fire department, but the police left the area because they could not keep control of the situation.

East Lansing police Sgt. Mike Johnstone said at about 3:20 a.m. that the 50 officers were not enough and would wait for more officers to put out the fire that the residents were beginning to restart with the wooden fence timbers around the apartments.

Shortly after, as firefighters attempted to extinguish one fire, people around the bonfire also were sprayed with water in an attempt to disperse them.

At about 4:30 a.m., the fire was still going at Grand River Avenue and Abbott Road with about 75 people watching the dying blaze. A police car nearby monitored the gathering, but police forces were still busy elsewhere.

Many Cedar Village residents were forced out of their apartments by the tear gas. Rioters tore down a DTN Management sign in front of the complex. Two fires were still burning at 5 a.m. — seven fires in all, each at different times, were being set in the streets.

“The next thing I know, I was trying to do bills and then I couldn’t even breathe,” said Cedar Village resident Gretchen Vanheyeniagen.

*State News staff writers Andrew Benore, Adrian Rogers, Fred Woodhams and Charles Robinson contributed to this report.*

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#### **Related audio at statenews.com:**

- *State News Live!*, about the Munn field alcohol ban, Friday, April 17, 1998 on on WDBM (88.9-FM) The Impact. Download [Part 1](#), [Part 2](#), [Part 3](#) or [Part 4](#).

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