
North Texas at center of college football universe

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By GARY JACOBSON / The Dallas Morning News
gjacobson@dallasnews.com

With the new Cowboys Stadium in Arlington and efforts to attract more big games to Fair Park, the Dallas-Fort Worth area is making a run at becoming the nation's capital of college football, both financially and on the field.

The five games in Arlington this coming season, including the Big 12 Conference championship game and the AT&T Cotton Bowl, should generate more than \$50 million in ticket, food, beverage, merchandise, parking and sponsorship revenue for the participating teams and the Cowboys, according to an analysis by The Dallas Morning News.

That's on par with annual revenue at football powers like Penn State and Louisiana State, according to Department of Education statistics.

Add four games at Fair Park in Dallas, the Bell Helicopter Armed Forces Bowl in Fort Worth and the area's three Bowl Subdivision teams – TCU, SMU and North Texas – and college football probably will account for well over \$100 million in revenue here this season.

That's roughly 40 percent to 50 percent more than for the top individual revenue-producing programs – Texas, Georgia, Florida and Ohio State.

And last week, Dallas officials said they were actively working to bring a new bowl game to Fair Park, as early as the 2010-11 bowl season.

"This market is just outstanding," said Dan Beebe, commissioner of the Big 12.

Area fans have an opportunity to see many storied teams this fall, all within an hour's drive or so.

Six teams that finished in the top 25 in the final Associated Press poll last season play regular-season games here, beginning with Oklahoma (No. 5) and Brigham Young (No. 25) at Cowboys Stadium on Sept. 5. Cowboys officials expect the game to be sold out.

OU returns Oct. 17 for its annual game against Texas (No. 4) at Fair Park. TCU (No. 7) has six home games, including Utah (No. 2) on Nov. 14. Texas Tech (No. 12) plays Baylor at Cowboys Stadium on Nov. 28.

In addition, Texas A&M meets Arkansas at Cowboys Stadium Oct. 3, the same day Grambling plays Prairie View at Fair Park.

Navy plays at SMU Oct. 17; Army plays at North Texas in Denton Nov. 21, and Texas Southern plays Arkansas Pine Bluff at Fair Park on Nov. 28.

More top-ranked teams will compete in Arlington in the Big 12 championship and AT&T Cotton Bowl.

"The new stadium is a game-changer for us," said Rick Baker, president of the Cotton Bowl Athletic Association, which moved its annual game from Fair Park to Cowboys Stadium. Baker's goal is for the Cotton Bowl eventually to be a national championship game. The new stadium is also a game-changer for team finances.

A&M and Arkansas each expect to earn at least \$4 million from their game. Because of the weak economy, that's down from an initial estimate of \$5 million apiece, but still better than their home games. In typical home-and-home schedule arrangements, the home team keeps the revenue, meaning one big payday every other year. Now, the payday can come every year.

"We net about \$3.5 million for a home game," said A&M athletic director Bill Byrne. The Aggies have sold 4,000 of their allotted 7,000 club seats, priced at \$300 apiece, Byrne said. That, alone, totals \$1.2 million.

The schools' agreement with Cowboys Stadium runs for 10 years and can be extended to 30 years. "We wanted a regular presence in the metroplex," Byrne said, adding that nearly a quarter of A&M alumni live in the area.

Games at the new stadium also should be revenue bonanzas for other teams. "We believe that it will be our best attended home game of the season and our biggest revenue-generating game," said Baylor AD Ian McCaw, who called Cowboys Stadium "a spectacular college football venue." He expects other Big 12 schools and possibly SEC teams to

seek to play games there in the future.

The Baylor-Tech game moves to the Cotton Bowl at Fair Park in 2010.

More to come

Cowboys vice president Stephen Jones, son of owner Jerry Jones, has said he would like to schedule 10 college games a season in the team's new stadium. Notre Dame will play Arizona State, from the Pacific 10 Conference, there in 2013.

"They'll get a great response from schools wanting to play in that fabulous stadium," said Dave Brown, an ESPN vice president who helped arrange the OU-BYU game. He called Dallas and Atlanta "two of the best" areas in the country for college football and said he wouldn't be surprised to see more Pac-10 teams playing here.

ESPN is also a partner in the Chick-fil-A Kickoff Game in the Georgia Dome in Atlanta on Sept. 5, featuring Alabama against Virginia Tech.

Tom Starr, former director of the Armed Services Bowl in Fort Worth, said if another site for BCS championship games is ever added, it would come down to the Chick-fil-A Bowl in Atlanta and the AT&T Cotton Bowl at Cowboys Stadium.

Starr, who left the ESPN-owned game last month to start his own consulting business, is working with Dallas officials to bring a new bowl and more regular-season games to the renovated Cotton Bowl Stadium, which can seat 92,000 for football.

"There is room for more good college games in the area," Starr said.

The ESPN deal with Cowboys Stadium, aiming for a marquee game at the beginning of the each season, runs for five years.

OU's Texas windfall

OU receives \$2.25 million for its game, according to its contract, obtained through an open records request. Counting their split (about \$4.5 million) from the Red River Shootout with Texas, that means the Sooners will earn \$6.75 million for games in the Dallas area this year. And they could return again in December for the Big 12 championship.

OU and BYU already have sold out their ticket allotments (37,500 for OU and 10,000 for BYU), school officials said. Prices ranged up to \$150.

"If we had more tickets, we'd sell them," said BYU athletic director Tom Holmoe. The remainder will go on sale later this summer, said Cowboys spokesman Brett Daniels.

Holmoe said it would be tough for two college opponents without national status or strong area ties – Washington and Pittsburgh, for example – to draw well in Dallas for regular-season games. That's why he was attracted to Oklahoma.

A private institution, BYU is not subject to open records laws, and Holmoe wouldn't reveal BYU's specific monetary guarantee for the game. Asked if it were in the ballpark of \$1.5 million, he acknowledged that it was. "It's about the size of one of our home games," he said.

Solid foundation

The state of Texas has long been a football stronghold. It has more high school football players than any other state and is prime recruiting territory for colleges across the country. Ten Bowl Subdivision programs are in Texas, more than any other state. Ohio is second with eight. Two major conferences, the Big 12 and Conference USA, are based in Irving.

In addition, many major football corporate sponsors are based in the Dallas area: AT&T, Frito Lay, Dr Pepper. Recently, Advocare, the Carrollton-based dietary supplement company, became the name sponsor of the Independence Bowl in Shreveport, La.

And while coaches June Jones and Todd Dodge try to resurrect the on-field fortunes of SMU and North Texas, TCU keeps getting better – and its schedule stronger – under Gary Patterson. The Horned Frogs have non-conference home games against Texas Tech in 2011; Oklahoma, Virginia and Navy in 2012; LSU in 2014; and Arkansas in 2016.

There has been no talk of moving the annual TCU-SMU game to Cowboys Stadium, according to officials at both schools.

Big 12 Conference and Cotton Bowl association officials are being conservative with their attendance projections for their games at the new stadium, holding close to the base capacity of around 70,000. With standing room and temporary seating, the stadium can hold more than 80,000.

But even if attendance for the Big 12 championship game doesn't break the record of 80,031, set in 2006 at Arrowhead Stadium in Kansas City, the game could set a revenue record because of all the premium seats, Beebe said. Ticket prices will be set later this year.

In its deal with the stadium, Beebe said, the Big 12 gets the ticket revenue, and the stadium gets parking, food, beverage and some merchandise sales.

The Cotton Bowl association, which has priced club seats at \$250 each, has a similar deal, Baker said. Assuming a sellout and including sponsorship money – AT&T contributed \$1.9 million in the fiscal year ending April 2008, according to the association's public financial records – he estimates the association would gross about \$10.5 million, about the same amount as with the record crowd of 88,175 for the last Cotton Bowl at Fair Park.

"The new stadium is creating a whole new opportunity," Baker said.

BIG GAMES COMING TO D-FW THIS SEASON

At Cowboys Stadium, Arlington

Sept. 5 – Oklahoma vs. BYU

Oct. 3 – Texas A&M vs. Arkansas

Nov. 28 – Texas Tech vs. Baylor

Dec. 5 – Big 12 Conference championship

Jan. 2, 2010 – AT&T Cotton Bowl

At Cotton Bowl Stadium, Fair Park

Sept. 12 – Texas A&M-Commerce vs. Abilene Christian

Oct. 3 – Grambling vs. Prairie View A&M

Oct. 17 – Texas vs. Oklahoma

Nov. 28 – Texas Southern vs. Arkansas-Pine Bluff

Some others

Oct. 17 – Navy at SMU

Nov. 14 – Utah at TCU

Nov. 21 – Army at North Texas

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