

THE GEORGIA DOME: 4 DAYS, 3 GAMES

Sugar, Peach, Falcons' finale toast of town

By Leon Stafford



Think you had a lot to do to get ready for the family this holiday season?

Puh-leeese!

Try preparing to play host to six football teams, more than 200,000 fans and hundreds of reporters over for a few days.

That's the job ahead for the Georgia Dome staff this New Year's weekend. From Friday to Monday, the Dome plays host to back-to-back-to-back football games for the Chick-fil-A Peach Bowl, the Atlanta Falcons season-ender against the Carolina Panthers, and the Nokia Sugar Bowl, featuring the Georgia Bulldogs.

Here's what the Georgia Dome is up against: painting the field three times with team names, then scrubbing the paint right back off using a cleaning solution and water; changing five stories of banners about every 24 hours; putting down hashmarks for the Peach Bowl, taking them up for the Falcons, then putting them down again for the Sugar Bowl; and sorting out thousands of cups, seat cushions and T-shirts so no paraphernalia ends up at the wrong party.

And as soon as one game is over --- and at times even before --- the staff will start making changes for the next. For instance, at the Falcons kickoff, Sugar Bowl representatives will start dismantling "Falcons Landing," a pre-game fan festival, and putting up banners associated with the Sugar Bowl's Championship Series game.

For the three games combined, the dome's food services company, MGR, will cook about 12,000 pounds of hot dogs, 20,000 orders of nachos and serve 15,000 gallons of soda and 12,000 bottles of water. Since the Falcons game is on New Year's Day, patrons will get an extra treat of black-eyed peas and collard greens for good luck.

Then there's the housekeeping. Those workers will pick up tons of paper, empty hundreds of trash cans and --- even less pleasant --- clean more than 800 toilets each day.

They'll make it all look seamless, predicted Kevin Duvall, the Dome's assistant general manager. Fans should never know that the staff has been working around the clock to make the events happen.

"It's like moving across the ocean," he said. "It's smooth on the top, but underneath everybody is paddling."

Mike Shields knows what he means. He was almost hidden from view in his office Tuesday by boxes of beverages surrounding his desk.

Shields, MGR's beverage manager, is playing on the side of caution and overstocking, including adding Abita beer to the lineup. It's a Louisiana brew that should pleasantly surprise the Sugar Bowl crowd accustomed to going to the big game in New Orleans.



Once English and Mullgrav's Peach Bowl duties are done and the bowl complete, workers will turn their focus on getting the Dome ready for Sunday's Atlanta Falcons game.

"Our biggest issue is having enough product ready," Shields said.

To prepare, the staff at the Dome and Georgia World Congress Center, which oversees the Dome's operation, have had weekly planning meetings since October, when Sugar Bowl organizers announced they would move the game from the Crescent City because of damage from Hurricane Katrina. Clocks counting down to the start of the first game were placed strategically throughout the buildings as a reminder of what was ahead.

"We have been very disciplined," said GWCC spokeswoman Katy Pando.

Part of that planning has been keeping up with each team's rules. For instance, the Peach Bowl is more lenient in letting infants and small children in for free while the

Sugar Bowl says "no ticket, no entrance." Falcons fans will get the usual pat down, while frisking is not required during the bowl games.

The Dome also had to coordinate broadcasts by three networks --- ESPN for the Peach Bowl, Fox for the Falcons game and ABC for the Sugar Bowl. "When they first announced it, my nightmare was having to get three different networks to live in one finite space" --- the Dome's broadcast room --- said Ken Jefferson, event services manager.

But with the demise this week of Monday Night Football on ABC, the network and ESPN will collaborate on their broadcasts.

"I'm tired of talking about it," Jefferson said of the games. "Right now I am ready to do it."

BEHIND-THE-SCENES WORK AT 1 GEORGIA DOME DRIVE

The Georgia Dome staff will put in long hours this weekend to accommodate back-to-back-to-back football events. The "to-do" list includes:

<p>FRIDAY</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Welcome Peach Bowl fans with fanfest outside Dome. ➤ Supply food and beverages to 203 suites plus nearly 72,000 Peach Bowl fans, a record crowd. ➤ After each game, clean up more than 800 toilets, empty 1,500 trash cans. ➤ Reset 200 parking cones and more than 600 barricades. 	<p>SATURDAY</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Remove Peach Bowl logo from field, but temporarily leave hashmarks for Georgia-West Virginia practices. ➤ Replace five stories of Peach Bowl advertisers' banners with Falcons advertising. ➤ Repaint field for Falcons — six colors and 60 gallons — and remove college hashmarks. ➤ Set up more than 75 condiment stands. 	<p>SUNDAY</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Offer the fans in attendance black-eyed peas and collard greens. ➤ Dismantle "Falcons Landing" after kickoff and begin setting up Sugar Bowl signs. ➤ Begin repainting field after Falcons game ends — 12 colors and 125 gallons — and reinstall hashmarks. ➤ Put banners for Sugar Bowl advertisers over those of Falcons advertisers. 	<p>MONDAY</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Help the 72,000 or so Sugar Bowl fans, unfamiliar with the Dome, find their seats in the sold-out arena. ➤ Coordinate largest media group of the three days (BCS bowls command substantial media attention). ➤ Do final cleanup, including washing 900 towels and those 72,000 seats.
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