

Chick-fil-A Peach Bowl Celebrates 50 Years

This season, the Chick-fil-A Peach Bowl is celebrating its 50th anniversary, its Golden Season, at the pinnacle of college football. Like many journeys to the top, the road was long — marked by the occasional challenge, but ultimately leading to success.

The Journey to the Top

For the bowl game founded in 1968, the road to the top was a slow and strategic path. It took the game from early success, through some lean and troubled years, and eventually landed it in a peer group of bowls with names like Rose, Sugar, Orange, Fiesta and Cotton. Now a member of the New Year's Six group of bowls who host the College Football Playoff, the Chick-fil-A Peach Bowl can look back on its ascension, pointing to specific milestones that helped pave the way.

In 1991, a new television contract was signed with ESPN, giving the game its first major broadcast partner and increasing its national visibility. The following year, long-term deals were inked to match the ACC and SEC every postseason, providing the bowl some big-time conference clout. This was the same year, 1992, that the Peach Bowl moved from Fulton County Stadium — where it was always weather-plagued — into the new Georgia Dome, where weather was never an issue. The final major piece of the puzzle fell into place in 1996 when Chick-fil-A came on as the bowl's first and only title sponsor — a relationship that has thrived ever since.

"It's been a great partnership of how a brand and a sporting event can simultaneously meet their objectives and grow and flourish together," Peach Bowl, Inc. CEO and President Gary Stokan said. "As Chick-fil-A has become one of the leaders in quick service restaurants, we've become one of the leaders in college football. It's been an absolute win-win."

Other factors also contributed to the bowl's rise including a swell of corporate support from Delta Air Lines and the local business community that literally saved the game in the mid-1980s, and a long history of sellouts thanks to passionate local ticket buyers drawn by the regional ACC-SEC matchups.

In 2014, when the bowl hosted No. 6 TCU and No. 9 Ole Miss in the first New Year's Six Bowl game, the Chick-fil-A



Peach Bowl had finally reached the 'big time.' Last season, the College Football Playoff Semifinal at the Chick-fil-A Peach Bowl between No. 1 Alabama and No. 4 Washington set the stage for what was the bowl organization's most notable year ... until now.

Celebrating the Golden Season

The Chick-fil-A Peach Bowl is preparing to enter its "Golden Season," a celebration of the bowl's 50th Anniversary. And what a celebration it will be.

It all starts with an historic weekend of Chick-fil-A Kickoff Games. Up first, in a game the sports world is calling 'The GOAT' (The Greatest Opener of All Time), Top 4-ranked teams Florida State and Alabama square off in a sold out game that could be a preview of the national championship at the end of the season. Two nights later, long-time ACC-SEC rivals Tennessee and Georgia Tech will compete in another sold out Chick-fil-A Kickoff Game Labor Day night in prime time.

"When we re-invented the kickoff game concept back in 2008, we did so to provide college football with a signature opening game to its season," Stokan said. "This year's games are exactly the type of quality match-ups we envisioned 10 years ago for our organization and city to take a leadership position in college football."

The Golden Season will also showcase another venue upgrade when the bowl moves into Mercedes-Benz Stadium, the Atlanta Falcons' spectacular new \$1.5 billion sports and entertainment mecca in the heart of downtown.

The Golden Season reaches its climax at the end of the regular season.

First, the 50th Chick-fil-A Peach Bowl will kick off on New Year's Day, featuring two of the country's top-ranked teams, leading in to both College Football Playoff Semifinals. And finally, the season concludes with Peach Bowl, Inc. assisting the Atlanta Football Host Committee and the College Football Playoff in hosting the College Football Playoff National Championship in Atlanta.

From humble beginnings to the top of the college football world, the Chick-fil-A Peach Bowl's 50th Anniversary celebration is an exclamation point on the organization's story. But it's the Bowl's impact on the city of Atlanta that will be its legacy.

A Leader in Charity

Most important to the Chick-fil-A Peach Bowl's legacy is its distinction as college football's most charitable bowl game. Community involvement and giving back has always been core to its vision as an organization.

"A bowl game that was originally created for charity by the Lions' Club back in 1968 has held that mission near and dear to its heart for 50 years and is now the leading bowl organization in the country in charitable and scholarship donations," said Percy Vaughn, Peach Bowl, Inc. chairman. "It's a part of who we are, and is crucial to our success to give back to the city that has supported us."

Since 2002, the Chick-fil-A Peach Bowl has distributed nearly \$22 million in charitable and scholarship contributions.

The biggest part of that goes to scholarship. The Chick-fil-A Peach Bowl operates an Endowed Scholarship Program with \$5.2 million in endowments

at 29 universities across the country.

In the Atlanta Public School System, the bowl created and runs an academic mentoring program to serve student-athletes in 11 inner-city high schools. Students in the program are the first beneficiaries of the scholarship money created by the endowments.

Stokan's vision is to create recurring success stories where students helped by the program can return to their high schools and be proof of a better life.

"They can say, 'Hey, I did it, you can do it, too.' And these kids who may have never had any family member attend college are now graduating with degrees," he said. "Our endowed scholarship program is truly making a difference in these students' and their family's lives."

The Epicenter of College Football

Another legacy of the game's success is the bowl's role in helping build Atlanta's reputation as the epicenter of college football — putting the city on a national stage on an annual basis.

The elevation of the Chick-fil-A Peach Bowl, the transformative creation of the Chick-fil-A Kickoff Game on opening weekend and the bowl's role in leading efforts to recruit and relocate the College Football Hall of Fame to Atlanta are the reasons why. But one of its greatest achievements might be its ability to turn college football into a major economic driving force for the city and participating universities.

Since 1999, games hosted by Peach Bowl, Inc. have delivered an astounding \$933.4 million in total economic impact and \$51.3 million in combined direct state and local tax revenue generated within the metro area while paying out \$161 million to the universities who have competed in the Bowl.

Mission Accomplished

Looking back, there's no doubt the Chick-fil-A Peach Bowl has completed an improbable journey.

"I remember my first Board meeting when I presented what seemed like an impossible goal ... a vision to be considered among the very best in the bowl industry," Stokan said. "Now, to our entire bowl family, our sponsors and partners, I humbly say, 'we've made it.' I hope you enjoyed the journey."



As a member of the New Year's Six, the Chick-fil-A Peach Bowl hosted its first College Football Playoff Semifinal with No. 1 Alabama and No. 4 Washington in 2016.



The Chick-fil-A Peach Bowl is college football's most charitable bowl game with more than \$21 million in donations since 2002.