

NCAA Football Championship Game to remain in Frisco

Deal announced Wednesday keeps game in city three more seasons



Damani Leech, NCAA director of championships and alliances, announces the Division I Football Championship Game will remain in Frisco for three more years at a press conference Wednesday. Photo by Kelsey Kruzich.

By Anthony Tosie

The NCAA Division I Football Championship Game will make its home in Frisco for three more years, the NCAA announced Wednesday.

At a press conference for this season's game, which will take place in the city for the third consecutive year, Damani Leech, NCAA director of championships and alliances, revealed the championship will remain at Frisco's FC Dallas Stadium.

Three factors were considered when deciding whether or not to come back to Frisco, Leech said: the atmosphere of the event, the quality of the facility and the experience of the student-athletes participating in the game.

"The city of Frisco and Team Frisco have delivered in spades on all three regards," Leech said. "For that reason, it gives me great pleasure to announce we'll be coming back here for the championship game for three more years – through the year 2016."

After the announcement, Leech said the decision to keep the game in Frisco was an easy one given the partnership the NCAA's had with the city and organizing committee.

"As we evaluated our criteria on whether to bid [the game] out or renegotiate with Frisco, we decided we really want to stay here," he said. "The stadium, for one, is absolutely fantastic."

Everything from the quality of the field to the stadium's size – which is really appropriate for our game – is great. The community is also big reason we're bringing the game back, too."

This season's game, which will take place noon Jan. 5 and be televised on ESPN2, is expected to draw a record crowd for a football game at FC Dallas Stadium.

Last season's championship game set the current record with an attendance of 20,586. Seats for this season's game has already sold out, although a limited number of standing-room-only tickets will go on sale 10 a.m. Thursday.

Prior to coming to Frisco in 2011, the game had spent the previous 13 years in Chattanooga, Tenn. Leech said the majority of Football Championship Subdivision programs are based in the eastern United States, which was the only concern the NCAA had about moving the game to Frisco.

When the NCAA changed the layoff from the semifinals to the championship from one week to three weeks, however, the choice to move the game to Frisco was made, Leech said.

"Once that structure was changed, we knew it was plenty of time for fans to schedule their travel arrangements," he said.

The game has proven to be an economic boon for local businesses. A consultant hired by event organizers estimated the game brought in about \$4 million for local businesses two seasons ago, the first time the city hosted the championship, and \$5.8 million last season.

This season's game is projected to have an economic impact of more than \$5.9 million on the region, the city announced Wednesday.

While a wide range of businesses benefit from the game, the companies impacted the most are retail and travel-related businesses such as hotels, restaurants, stores and car rental companies.

Mayor Maher Maso said the city's wanted to make the game a long-term arrangement with the NCAA since it first agreed to a deal with the organization four years ago.

"After we signed the first agreement, we started talking about what was next," he said. "Every step leading to this announcement has been very positive, and the NCAA has been a great partner. The negotiations never ended, and they won't end now – we want this to be the home of the [championship game] for a very, very long time."

While the game's return to Frisco is being celebrated by city officials, Maso emphasized the NCAA's decision will benefit more than just the city.

"I want to really stress that this is not just about Frisco – it's a regional thing. If you ask our neighboring cities like Plano, they'll tell you their hotels are full, too," he said. "We view this as a regional win; everyone benefits from it. This game means a lot to the Frisco community and our region."