

# STREET & SMITH'S **SportsBusiness** **JOURNAL**



**BREAKING  
GROUND**  
DON MURET

## **AFL not a big moneymaker, but arenas don't like open dates**

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The Arena Football League's decision to cancel the 2009 season means facilities in 16 cities lose prime dates in the summer when business is typically slow for those buildings.

The rent deals AFL teams made with arenas differed by market. Four arena managers indicated they were not getting rich off those agreements, in which, for the most part, their facilities kept concessions and parking revenue but did not share in ticket sales and sponsorship income. Food per caps in those cities — Dallas, Los Angeles, Orlando and Philadelphia — ranged from \$8 to \$12.

In Dallas, **American Airlines Center** broke even with arena football, said **Dave Brown**, general manager for **Center Operating Co.**, the facility operator. Booking two strong concerts next year could "wash out the financial loss" from the absence of eight Desperados games, where average attendance was about 12,000.

"The per-game financials were not the reason we wanted the AFL," Brown said. "It was diversity of programming for our suite holders and sponsors."

Losing eight dates is a concern in Los Angeles, where the AFL's Avengers played the last eight seasons, said **Staples Center** general manager **Lee Zeidman**. As it stands now, the concert market looks soft for arenas in 2009, so it could be tough to fill that void, Zeidman said.

"We are scrambling to fill those dates like everybody else," he said. "We love the sport from the family entertainment standpoint; we were getting 12,000 to 15,000 in the building for every game."

Because the AFL never confirmed its schedule, **Amway Arena** in Orlando has 20 dates to fill instead of eight after officials held multiple dates to give the Predators options, Executive Director **Allen Johnson** said, although the arena did not turn away events because of the holds. The Predators averaged 12,500 fans.

"Anybody who has a successful arena football team is not going to be pleased with this decision," Johnson said. "Those are eight dates when you really need them in soft times, when they are not competing with the NHL and NBA. No manager is looking to get rid of events."

➤ **SOUNDS GOOD:** The Seattle Sounders, Major League Soccer's newest team, will set up LED signs at field level inside **Qwest Field**.

The \$1 million-plus portable **ANC Sports/Mitsubishi** electronic boards will ring the sidelines and behind the nets, extending 460 feet around the field of play. The signs display multiple images or one synchronized message, real-time statistics and game updates.

The Sounders expect to recoup their investment in the first year of operation after sharing 75 percent of sponsorship inventory with MLS per league rules, said **Ron Jenkins**, vice president of corporate partnerships. The signs' TV-friendly location will enable the Sounders to charge three times the cost of a static stadium ad, helped by the fact that all home games will be on local television.

The Sounders are not the first in MLS to use LED signs on their stadium's most valuable real estate. **Home Depot Center** in Carson, Calif., home of the Los Angeles Galaxy and Chivas USA, has had on-field LED boards since 2005.

Seattle's first home game is in April.

➤ **IN MEMORIAM:** The New York Yankees have named the food commissary at their new ballpark in honor of **Jamie Hershowitz**, the concessions manager at old **Yankee Stadium**. He died in November 2007 after working 40 years for **Centerplate** and its predecessors.