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## Bidders dream big, get reward

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Bowl from IC

INAUGURAL GAME IS DEC. 20

### Bowl bidders dream big, get their reward

*Charlotte organizers worked quietly to bring college game to town*

By GREGG DOYEL  
Raleigh Bureau

Where it all began, well, that's difficult to say.

Charlotte's debut into college football bowl society, with the 2002 Continental Tire Bowl in December, officially dates to May 3 when the NCAA gave the city its blessing. But that benediction capped an 11-month application process, a process set in motion by a June 2001 phone call to Raycom Sports executive Ken Haines.

Haines had been working in the shadows for more than a year in anticipation of that phone call. The man on the other end of the phone also had been working behind the scenes. Their phone call was also influenced by an N.C.

State-East Carolina game in 1996. And a Florida State-Penn State game in 1990.

So where it all began, again, that's hard to say.

Where it goes from here? Even harder to say. For sure, a team from the ACC will play Notre Dame or a team from the Big East in the inaugural Continental Tire Bowl on Dec. 28 at Ericsson Stadium.

Beyond that ...

Maybe one day the NFL will look to shake up its superdome-and-suntan rotation and put a Super Bowl in an outdoor stadium off the coast. When that day comes, Mayor Pat McCrory figures the Continental Tire Bowl gives Charlotte a Super shot.

"At this point in time (NFL officials) aren't considering us for a Super Bowl because they're not sure of the weather and facilities," McCrory says. "But if this goes well, and I know it will, it'll put Charlotte on the map."

A Super Bowl for Charlotte?  
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That's a dream, sure, but - eureka! - that's where this whole thing began: with a dream.

If you build it ...

Some dreams require infrastructure.

"Charlotte didn't have a facility worthy of a bowl game until 1996," Haines says. "We always wanted to bring college football to Charlotte, but didn't have the venue. Once the Panthers came here and built Ericsson Stadium, we got moving."

That fall, Raycom, the Charlotte-based company that broadcasts ACC basketball, lured N.C. State and East Carolina to Ericsson. In 1998 and '99, N.C. State and North Carolina played at Ericsson.

In 2000, even as the NCAA announced it had capped its number of bowls, Haines quietly began working city leaders. If Raycom was going to make a run at a bowl game for Charlotte - whenever - Haines had to know who was with him.

Turns out, everyone was.

In a series of one-on-one meetings, Haines gathered support from the Charlotte Sports Commission, Chamber of Commerce, Convention and Visitors Bureau, Charlotte Center City Partners and McCrory.

"We did it quietly," Haines says. "We did not want to have it in the marketplace where we were seeking a game for fear other cities would come in. About a half-dozen people in Charlotte knew what we were doing."

Plus one person in Greensboro.

While Haines was working his people, ACC Commissioner John Swofford had been lobbying the NCAA bowl certification committee on behalf of a Charlotte bowl.

"Charlotte was critical to us," Swofford says. "We had ongoing discussions with the certification committee about that."

Swofford's influence helped

When he was athletics director at North Carolina, Swofford chaired that NCAA committee. Those were his people. And on June 21, 2001, one of those people told Swofford about the dissolution of the two bowls in Hawaii, the Aloha and Oahu.

Swofford called Haines.

MOST ARE WITHIN REGION

### ACC takes 6 teams to bowl party

The ACC will have six bowl tie-ins for the 2002 college football season - and most likely the three years after that, too.

Although the league's slot in the Seattle Bowl was scheduled to expire after this season, the ACC has extended the deal through 2005, Commissioner John Swofford said.

"We're trying to put all of our bowl agreements in sync with the (Bowl Championship Series) for the next four years," he said. "I had some concern we'd lose the Seattle tie-in, but that's done for the next four years now."

After the ACC's slot in a BCS

bowl, the league's next four bowl tie-ins are within what Swofford calls "the ACC's geographic footprint" - Jacksonville, Fla.; Orlando, Fla.; Atlanta and Charlotte.

Add Seattle, and the league won't be scrambling for a sixth bowl spot as it did last year, when Clemson went to the Humanitarian Bowl in Boise, Idaho. Swofford doesn't expect to automatically slot teams to specific bowls based on regular-season standings, either.

"We're trying to focus more on what makes the most sense for the bowl and our schools," he said. — GREGG DOYEL

Within two days, the NCAA had a full-blown bowl proposal from Raycom. Although San Francisco was trying to get certified and Hawaii was hoping to get back into the bowl business, the NCAA was especially receptive to Charlotte for several reasons:

■ Friends in high places: Swofford's influence had grown even more since his days as chairman of the bowl certification committee. When Charlotte was making its bowl bid in 2001, Swofford was in a two-year term as director of the Bowl Championship Series.

■ Local pro teams in low places: With its NBA franchise looking to leave and the NFL franchise struggling on the field, the NCAA recognized Charlotte as a city ripe for a new adventure.

■ Raycom's background: Not only was the company into sports television - instant marketing - but Raycom also had run a bowl since 1990, keeping the postseason game in Fort Lauderdale, Fla., alive despite repeated changes in sponsors. The Blockbuster Bowl debuted in 1990, when Florida State defeated Penn State 24-17.

"You can't forget Continental Tire's role, too," Swofford said. "Financially you really need corporate help, and they stepped to the plate."

Presentation put on hold

In September 2001, Haines flew to Philadelphia to make Charlotte's presentation to the bowl certification committee. He was watching a television in the Phila-

delphia airport when terrorists rammed a plane into the World Trade Center. When he got to the hotel hosting the NCAA meetings, a second plane hit the World Trade Center.

Half-expecting to walk into an empty room, Haines arrived for his 10:45 a.m. meeting with the NCAA committee. Everyone was there.

"They hadn't heard," Haines says.

He told them.

Haines' meeting was cancelled as committee members, including North Carolina Athletics Director Dick Baddour, hurried home.

"The NCAA told me we'd be given another chance to make our presentation," Haines says.

Nearly eight months later, that chance came. On May 1, he met with the NCAA committee at a hotel in San Antonio. Two days later, the committee congratulated Haines on winning a bowl for Charlotte.

The game will have an estimated \$30 million impact annually on the Charlotte area.

"ACC basketball is our bread and butter, so recently renewing that contract for 10 years ranks at the top of Raycom's to-do list," Haines says. "But to be able to do an event in our hometown and bring major college football to Charlotte on an annual basis is very significant to us and our staff. It was the dream."

Gregg Doyel:  
gdoyel@charlotteobserver.com.