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## ACC coming to town in 2010

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Charlotte will get its long-awaited chance to host the ACC football championship game, but will watch from the sidelines as the game visits another Florida site in 2008 and 2009.

ACC Commissioner John Swofford announced Wednesday the game will be in Tampa the next two years before coming to Charlotte's Bank of America Stadium on Dec. 4, 2010 and Dec. 3, 2011.

After the ACC expanded to the 12 teams the NCAA requires to hold a championship game, Jacksonville, Fla., outbid Charlotte as the first host. The ACC looked elsewhere after Jacksonville experienced declining attendance, from 72,749 in 2005 to 62,850 in 2006 to 53,212 in 2007.

With those attendance challenges in mind, Charlotte's location within 275 miles of eight ACC schools was a key element in a bid local business leaders expect to stimulate the economy.

"We think the economic impact will be at least \$20 million based on the success of the Meineke Car Care Bowl," said Charlotte Regional Visitors Authority CEO Tim Newman, who handled Charlotte's bid. "We think we can make this Charlotte's Super Bowl from a collegiate football standpoint."

ACC athletics directors and faculty athletics representatives unanimously approved the plans.

Swofford said the sequencing of the bids was affected by the Association for Career and Technical Education's convention on Dec. 4-6, 2008 in Charlotte. Newman said 3,600 of uptown Charlotte's 3,700 hotel rooms are booked for that event, which also will occupy the Charlotte Convention Center, where officials plan to hold the fan festival for the ACC game.

Officials from both cities preferred to host in consecutive years, so the ACC decided to go to Tampa for two years first. Jon Richardson, Carolina Panthers stadium LLC president, said having more than two years to prepare will help Charlotte put on a "fantastic" event.

Newman said with construction on a number of attractions scheduled to be finished in 2010, the city will have more entertainment options and 3,500 additional parking spaces then.

"We'll have the NASCAR Hall of Fame, the Wachovia Cultural Complex, which is being built, and all that will add to a great experience for ACC fans," Newman said.

He said the Panthers' support has been instrumental in bringing the game to Charlotte. Richardson said the Panthers will ask the NFL to schedule road games for them on the days immediately after the ACC championship games, but he said there are no guarantees.

He dismissed the perception that the Panthers didn't want the championship game in Charlotte in the past.

"I guarantee you nobody wanted it here worse than we did," Richardson said. "I was fortunate enough to play on North Carolina's last ACC championship team in 1980. I want it to do well. I want all the seats filled. We supported it all along and we were disappointed we didn't get it the first time."

To build local support for the game, Charlotte will use a strategy that helped the Panthers build their home stadium. Newman said Charlotte officials plan to sell personal seat licenses for club seats in a package that will include the ACC championship game and the Meineke Car Care Bowl, held annually in Charlotte at the end of December.

Developer Johnny Harris, who helped grow the Wachovia Championship golf tournament, will help market the ACC games. Despite attendance struggles in Jacksonville, Harris said he isn't worried about filling Bank of America Stadium.

He said the ACC games will enhance the Meineke Car Care Bowl rather than detract from it, and said Charlotte officials should look to Atlanta for counsel because of that city's consistent success selling more than 70,000 tickets a year for the SEC championship.

"Charlotte is the best place for this football game," Harris said.

City officials will get a chance to prove it, but they will have to wait almost three more years.

-- Staff writer Ron Green Jr. contributed

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