

BOWL NEWS

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Ringler Issued “State of the Bell Helicopter Armed Forces Bowl” Address

By Troy Phillips, www.armedforcesbowl.com

Fort Worth, Texas, December 30, 2009 - Bell Helicopter Armed Forces Bowl officials expect record attendance on New Year’s Eve day for the game’s seventh edition, as well as continued robust growth despite difficult economic times.

BHAFB executive director Brant Ringler touched several issues during his “state of the bowl” address on Wednesday, starting with his prediction Thursday’s game will surpass last year’s record crowd of 41,127. Houston (10-3) and Air Force (7-5), both in their third BHAFB and a rematch of last year’s game, are scheduled to kick off at 11 a.m. at TCU’s Amon Carter Stadium.

Bowl officials expect a crowd in excess of 42,000, based on tickets sold or distributed so far.

“We still have tickets available, but it’s the upper-deck seats at this point,” Ringler said. “I think we can push it to past a sellout. Sellouts breed sellouts. If we continue to do these numbers each year, it continues to grow and it’s the event to go to on New Year’s Eve, these numbers shouldn’t change.”



The bowl’s current and future well-being and special guests at the annual Kickoff Luncheon at the Omni Hotel were center stage on Wednesday. Also discussed:

- BHAFB sponsors have purchased 12,000 game tickets for active-duty military and their families for Thursday’s game. This year, the bowl pulled in a record 37 sponsors at the top four (six total) sponsorship levels.
- Title sponsor Bell Helicopter has signed on through 2011, with an option for two more years. Bell’s new CEO, John Garrison, is a West Point graduate and former Army football player who recognized the advantage of continuing Bell’s tie to the bowl. “It’s perfect for Bell,” Garrison said. “It gives us the opportunity to join with ESPN to honor and give back to the men and women of our Armed Forces.”

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- Starting next year, the Independence Bowl in Shreveport, La., will move the BHAFB down in the Mountain West Conference selection order. The BHAFB and the New Mexico Bowl will share a “geographic” fourth pick, sending two bowl-eligible teams to either destination based on favorable geography, fan base access and other factors. The BHAFB still will receive the second or third pick from Conference USA as the MWC’s opponent.
- Navy has agreed to play in the 2013 BHAFB against a Mountain West team, provided the Midshipmen are bowl-eligible. Ringler said talks continue with Army about a similar contract in an undetermined year.
- In BHAFB military-related news, Admiral Michael G. Mullen, U.S. Navy, is this year’s recipient of the bowl’s Great American Patriot Award. Mullen, 17th Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, is the award’s fourth recipient. He agreed only to accept the award on behalf of the entire U.S. armed forces. Mullen will see one half of the BHAFB before attending Navy’s game against Missouri hours later in Houston at the Texas Bowl.
- The BHAFB will honor wounded military personnel in a special partitioned Wounded Warriors area behind in the south end zone. These service men and women will have space heaters, food, drinks and other amenities from pre-game to game’s end, as well as being honored during the game.
- The game’s Most Valuable Player Award, starting this year, will be named the Tom Starr Most Valuable Player after the BHAFB’s former executive director. Succeeded by Ringler, Starr ran the event from 2003-2008 before leaving in early-2009 to head a new bowl in Dallas at the Cotton Bowl, which awaits approval this April.

U.S. Army Sgt. First Class (Ret.) Dana Bowman, a skydiver who lost both legs after a 1994 mid-air collision with his diving partner, was the Kickoff Luncheon’s keynote speaker. Bowman has made more than 1,000 jumps since his accident, including before a previous BHAFB and this week’s EagleBank Bowl in Washington D.C. He’ll dive into the stadium on Thursday with the American flag. “I’ve had quite a few spills [diving without legs], but I haven’t given up,” Bowman said.

Troy Phillips - Now a freelance writer based in the Fort Worth area, Troy covered various teams and beats for the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* for 17 years, including Texas Tech, Baylor, TCU, North Texas and small colleges. Among several bowls Troy covered (Rose, Holiday, Cotton, Texas, and Galleryfurniture.com) were the last three Bell Helicopter Armed Forces Bowls. He covered high schools at two smaller papers and the S-T after graduating from TCU in 1990, and covered the debut of Major League Soccer in North Texas when FC Dallas (then the Dallas Burn) arrived on the scene. For more than a decade, Troy was part of coverage teams at the region’s two PGA Tour events, the HP Byron Nelson Championship and the Crowne Plaza Invitational at Colonial and for years was one of the S-T’s backup golf writers. In 2009, he was named Sportswriter of the Year by the Lone Star Conference. He has a master’s degree (1995) from the University of North Texas.

