

# The Miami Herald

February 2, 2010

Circulation: 222,742

## Broward gets its shot as host of Super Bowl events

*The NFL has staged 10 Super Bowls in South Florida, but this year marks the first time it has based its headquarters and most of the events in Broward County.*

BY JAMES H. BURNETT III

Where can you go in South Florida to party with Playboy Playmates, NFL players, platinum-selling rappers and blues greats . . . in one week's time?

If you automatically thought South Beach, the good folks of Broward County would like to remind you that for the first time in 10 visits to South Florida for the Super Bowl, the NFL is headquartered *outside* of Miami-Dade County.

Fort Lauderdale's victory isn't a shocker. But Broward leaders are thrilled with the result.

"It's the first time you can't just pass us by if you're looking for five-star hotels, for the NFL headquarters, for the NFL Saturday Night free event at the beach, for the Taste of the NFL," said Nicki Grossman, executive director of the Broward County Convention and Visitor's Bureau. "This year if you want those things, you get them right here in Broward County."

NFL Super Bowl headquarters and media center are at the Greater Fort Lauderdale/Broward County Convention Center, while the Westin Beach Resort in Fort Lauderdale is the official NFL/Super Bowl hotel. The AFC champion Indianapolis Colts are staying at the Marriott Harbor Beach in Fort Lauderdale, which was also the NFL's official Pro Bowl Hotel.

### THE EVENTS

Most of the major official Super Bowl-related events take place in Broward: Super Bowl Saturday Night with the band O.A.R. on Fort Lauderdale beach, and Taste of the NFL, also Saturday, at the Fort Lauderdale/Broward County Convention Center.

Miami-Dade is still home to a few events and stagings.

**The NFC champ New Orleans Saints are staying at the Inter-Continental Hotel in downtown Miami, and the Pepsi Super Bowl Fan Jam takes place on the sands of South beach Saturday night.**

NFL spokesman Brian McCarthy says the league selected Broward as host county for the Super Bowl because it was finally convinced it could handle the volume of events and human traffic that come with Sunday's big game.

"What convinced us was cooperation from local government officials, hotel availability, transportation, security, and the fact that the Greater Fort Lauderdale Convention Center is a first-class building for our media center and other activities," McCarthy said. "Broward/Fort Lauderdale met our needs logistically and demonstrated to us that they were prepared to host world-class events."

Even in the unofficial parties and events surrounding Super Bowl this week, Broward holds its own with Miami-Dade in terms of sex appeal and star power. Miami-Dade boasts events like Friday's "Diddy's Models & Bottles Superbowl Jump-Off Party" at Dolce Ultra Lounge on South Beach, and the Nas/Goodie Mob concert at the Arscht Center in Miami. Broward can offer events like Saturday's Lingerie Bowl and Thursday's Jamie Foxx Party at Passion Nightclub.

The latter two events take place at the Seminole Hard Rock Hotel & Casino near Hollywood, which is proving to be a

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major staging area for celebrity and athlete parties.

"We're used to the assumption that Miami Beach is *it* when you come to South Florida, but we think we've done a lot to change that impression," said Seminole Hard Rock spokesman Ryan Rogers.

The Seminole Hard Rock, home to a 500-room hotel, 12 restaurants and 18 nightclubs, is scheduled to host 17 celebrity-driven events this week, including a dance fest with former *Girls Next Door* reality TV star Kendra Wilkinson, a Super Bowl night viewing party with rapper/actor Ludacris and a concert with B.B. King.

## IN SOUTH BEACH

But Miami-Dade boosters are playing up their game, too.

"The game can be wherever the game is going to be. The headquarters can be wherever they're going to be. But if the big event is in South Florida, then it's all about South Beach," said Brian Gordon, president of MMG, a special events marketing and promotions company that is hosting a VIP invite-only party for ESPN at the Fontainebleau and a charity dinner at filmmaker Michael Bay's Miami Beach house, among other events.

Gordon says he has nothing against Broward County: "We're doing an event at the Hard Rock in Hollywood -- the Miami Rice Gala, a party honoring Jerry Rice. But in Miami you have the Fontainebleau, which has pretty much set the bar, Liv [nightclub] and so many other venues. It is what it is."

In real numbers, the Broward shift means that nearly 100,000 of the 150,000 visitors in town or on their way for the Super Bowl will sleep in Broward County hotels, including the 3,500 members of the international media, according to Grossman.

Of the \$153 million expected to be spent in South Florida by the NFL, players, fans, and support businesses, according to PriceWaterhouseCooper, nearly \$92 million of that will directly benefit Broward County.

And at least 97 percent of the 33,000-plus hotel rooms in Broward will have been filled by the time the Super Bowl is played on Sunday, Grossman said.

Saturday afternoon on the Fort Lauderdale beach at the end of Las Olas Boulevard, Super Bowl tourists lined up to pose for photographs in front of the giant Roman numerals -- XLIV -- the city erected as sort of a Super Bowl XLIV welcome mat.

Frank Gernert, a charter boat captain and restaurant owner in Fort Lauderdale, found himself busy over the weekend fielding reservations from Super Bowl visitors.

"Many of these are people who had no idea what Fort Lauderdale or Broward were," Gernert said. "They assumed Miami was the 'city' and the rest was suburb. So it's neat to show them otherwise."