

EMERGENCE OF THE BOWL

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It all began two years ago at a Washington, D.C., neighborhood restaurant.

Marie Rudolph and Sean Metcalf -- Co-Founders of the DC Bowl Committee, Inc. and the EagleBank Bowl -- sipped on drinks as commercials for college football bowl games flashed across the television screen. They wondered why D.C. didn't have a bowl game.

That curiosity hatched the notion of bringing the first-ever college football post-season bowl game to the nation's capital. The two sports aficionados dug around and determined that no one, in fact, had ever brought a bowl game to the District.

"We decided, let's make it happen," Rudolph says.

Rudolph and Metcalf, who is now Chairman Emeritus of the Bowl Committee and the EagleBank Bowl, started researching the requirements for hosting a bowl game and also called on local politicians, business leaders and others, asking for their thoughts.

Early on in their effort, Rudolph and Metcalf received a mostly lukewarm reception. "People really didn't think we could do it, which served as motivation," Rudolph says. The duo, however, remained confident that D.C. would make a spectacular host city for a bowl game.

So they kept reaching out to people in the community. Both Rudolph and Metcalf previously worked in D.C. government, and the connections they made over the years would pay off as they eventually gained the support needed for their idea to become reality.

Metcalf recalls a dinner he had with two members of the D.C. Council, Jack Evans (Chair Pro Tempore) and Vincent Gray (Council Chair). "They said I should continue exploring the concept, that a bowl game would be good for the city," Metcalf says. "If they told me it wasn't good for D.C., why would we continue? But it wasn't pie in the sky. It was feasible."

The pair spoke with officials from the U.S. Naval Academy (Navy) and the U.S. Military Academy at West Point (Army), as well as the Atlantic Coast Conference (ACC). All three expressed interest.

They also searched for a TV partner, and they would land one in ESPN, the self-described worldwide leader in sports that broadcasts countless bowl games.

"We didn't realize how big this was until ESPN was sitting across the table from us," Metcalf says.

They found another vital partner -- in addition to Navy, the ACC, and ESPN -- in Navy Federal Credit Union, which provided the necessary financing for D.C. to obtain its bowl license.

“The NCAA, in awarding a license, has critical concerns,” Metcalf says. “A stadium. A TV partner. Two teams. And a letter of credit. The game would not be here without Navy Federal Credit Union providing the letter of credit.”

New to the bowl-game business, Rudolph and Metcalf have relied on the experience and knowledge of a few instrumental advisers, including Navy Athletic Director Chet Gladchuk, former ACC Commissioner Gene Corrigan, past FedEx Orange Bowl President Peter Pruitt, former Pacific Life Holiday Bowl Executive Director John Reid, current Pacific Life Holiday Bowl Executive Director Bruce Binkowski and Meineke Car Care Bowl Executive Director Will Webb.

“We’ve had the right cast of characters for a hit,” Metcalf says.

In January 2008, Rudolph and Metcalf wrapped up negotiations with Navy and they began preparing their license application for a bowl game in Washington, D.C.

Several months later, in April, they boarded a plane to Florida to meet with the Committee of roughly two-dozen university officials responsible for licensing prospective bowl games.

Rudolph and Metcalf, joined by their advisers, including the DC Bowl Committee’s Chief Financial Officer, Gene Metcalf, and former Holiday Bowl Executive Director Reid, presented for 10 minutes then diligently answered all questions asked of them for another 20 minutes. With their 30 minutes of allotted time up, the meeting ended.

Relieved to have gotten the presentation under their belt, yet anxious as they awaited the Committee’s decision, Rudolph and Metcalf truly didn’t know what to expect next.

Soon thereafter, the Committee called them back in for another hour of rapid-fire questioning. Rudolph and Metcalf were prepared.

Once this second meeting concluded, they awaited what they hoped would be an answer that day. Sipping on drinks once again – much like they did in December 2006, when they first broached the thought of bringing a bowl game to the nation’s capital – they received a call from the Committee.

After approximately 18 months of hard work everything came down to one phone conversation, and the news was good: Rudolph and Metcalf had won approval for a license. Bowl mania would take flight to D.C.

“It was a great feeling of accomplishment,” Metcalf says.

Though ecstatic about the outcome, they had only a minute to celebrate. Much work lay ahead – and in a fraction of the time usually available to put on a bowl game. In the past, when a city received a provisional license for a bowl game, the game would take place in the winter of the following year, some 18 to 20 months away.

With the provisional license eliminated, D.C. would hold its bowl game in December of the same year. That left them with only six months or so to get the job done. No time for procrastinating or listening to those who said it couldn't be done.

"We checked out of our hotel in Florida, came back to D.C., and finalized the remaining deals," Metcalf says.

A few giant hurdles overcome.

Once Rudolph and Metcalf secured the license, the D.C. Sports and Entertainment Commission came on board as a partner, lending the city's support on a wider scale.

Rudolph and Metcalf initially called the game the Congressional Bowl, given that D.C. is the nation's capital and home to the federal government. The name changed, however, when Bethesda, MD-based EagleBank, a leading community bank in the Washington, D.C., metropolitan area, officially signed on in September as the title sponsor.

Conversations with EagleBank's top two executives, Ron Paul and Bob Pincus, started in June 2008. "When you're sitting in a conference room with those two, you're doing something right," Metcalf says.

"EagleBank's commitment is refreshing and encouraging, given the current state of the U.S. economy," Rudolph adds.

For the past two years, Rudolph and Metcalf have experienced many highs and some lows. Showcasing Washington in a premier collegiate sports event, they say, is well worth working early in the morning, late in the evening, and many hours in between.

"I don't know if during the week, or even the actual game, it will sink in what we've accomplished," Rudolph says. "But when it does, it will be even more special surrounded by family and friends."

Her partner through the entire process wholeheartedly agrees. "I'm excited that we've brought a new event to the city," Metcalf says.

"We're providing work for other local businesses, we're employing people and we're helping charities," he says. "We're also promoting student athletes, boosting the bowl business and creating an economic engine for D.C. It's been a fascinating, fun and truly rewarding experience."