

# BYU-Arizona the start of marquee college games at Allegiant

By [Mark Anderson](#) Las Vegas Review-Journal

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Putting together the Arizona-Brigham Young game was six years in the making. The original plan was to play it at Sam Boyd Stadium.

But now that Las Vegas Bowl executive director John Saccenti has Allegiant Stadium, the Raiders' 65,000-seat state-of-the-art facility, as his selling point, he expects Arizona-BYU to be only the start for even more marquee college football matchups.

As last week's news that [Louisiana State will face Southern California in 2024](#) showed, Las Vegas figures to be home to games that will attract national attention and help the city's economy by drawing more visitors to the valley.

A crowd of about 55,000 is expected Saturday for the 7:30 p.m. game between Arizona and BYU, which would make it the largest crowd to watch a college football game in Nevada. BYU also played in the game that set the record — their [2006 Las Vegas Bowl](#) against Oregon that drew 44,615 to Sam Boyd.

The Las Vegas Bowl will oversee the Arizona-BYU and LSU-USC games.

“With Allegiant being open, it’s been a game-changer,” Saccenti said. “The challenge has always been working with teams on their schedules because college football teams schedule so far in advance. ... The goal is to have a big blockbuster every year to kick off in Las Vegas.”

To that end, he said it was difficult to schedule neutral-site games in 2022 and 2023, thus the wait until 2024.

The bowl’s relationship with three of the Power Five conferences — Big Ten, Pac-12 and Southeastern Conference — gives Las Vegas an advantage in trying to schedule head-turning matchups. The Pac-12 will face a Big Ten or SEC opponent in the Las Vegas Bowl [the next five years](#).

It’s that relationship, Saccenti hopes, that eventually leads to landing the College Football Playoff National Championship.

“We have one of the most unique alliances in the college football bowl space, and that was part of it,” Saccenti said. “It was going to open up all kinds of other doors for big-time college football here in Las Vegas.”

Hosting the championship would come with a number of benefits for Las Vegas, not the least of which is financial.

The Arizona-BYU game also figures to boost the local economy, especially with both campuses within driving distance.

“We’re excited to welcome the inaugural Vegas Kickoff Classic to a packed house at Allegiant Stadium this weekend,” Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority president and CEO Steve Hill said in an email.

What that economic impact will be isn’t known. The LVCVA didn’t have that projection.

“Whatever we do on this one, I have a funny feeling that the USC-LSU game’s going to kind of blow that one out of the water,” Saccenti said. “I’ve been following Twitter ... and it seems like everyone in the state of Louisiana is fired up and ready to come out here. If there’s one town I think could handle the LSU fans, it’s ours.”

But that is looking ahead.

There is a game to be played this weekend that has Saccenti fired up given the strong ticket sales. He monitored those sales nearly nonstop leading up to game day, acutely aware of the the state history about to be made.

“I think this is the first foray into solidifying more of a college experience beyond the bowl,” said noted Las Vegas sports and economics expert Brendan Bussmann, director of government affairs for Global Market Advisors. “Sports is definitely a way we

can continue to diversify our tourism product. Just as we have seen with entertainment in the past and other things, this is a culmination of building up over the last 25, 30 years of bringing the Las Vegas Bowl and NASCAR and everything else in between and using sports as a driver.”

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