

Fans worldwide gear up for championship bout

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With the Crimson Tide gearing up for its first SEC Championship Game in nine years, students around campus and alumni nationwide are also preparing themselves for one of the biggest days in recent Alabama football history.

In Atlanta, fans can gather at the Cheyenne Grille at 7 p.m. tonight to engage in food and festivities. University cheerleaders will lead a "Stomp the Gators" pep rally, Big Al will be in attendance, and former Alabama quarterback Scott Hunter will be a featured speaker.

Shakers and stickers will also be handed out.

Ten percent of the proceeds generated that evening will be given to the Atlanta scholarship fund.

"In addition to being a gathering place for Bama fans, the event will help generate scholarship money for incoming freshmen from the Atlanta area," said Mark Roberts, manager of alumni chapter development.

The excitement surrounding Alabama's bid for a 22nd SEC Championship radiates much further than just in Tuscaloosa and Atlanta. In New York City a group of about 500 alumni and fans are expected to congregate in the Mercury Bar and Bar 12 for a viewing party.

The Manhattan bars will feature waitresses in cheerleader outfits and plenty of boisterous fans.

"I've done this twice before," said Pat Whetstone, director of alumni affairs. "It's a lot of yelling and screaming."

Whetstone said he expects people from around the northeast to make the trip to Manhattan. He and national alumni president Wilbur Masters will be making the trip this weekend. "It'll be raucous in there," he said.

"In New York, everyone wears black or gray," Whetstone said. Laughing, he said the Alabama fans in their crimson attire would stand out like a sore thumb.

In total the alumni association has more than 50 official viewing party locations scattered across the country. Whether in the frigid cold of Boston or the sunny skies of Los Angeles, Bama fans nationwide will find a host of bars, restaurants and residences to call home on Saturday afternoon.

"Everybody's going to be glued to the TV when the game is going on," Whetstone said.

The Tide has even made its impact felt outside the nation's borders, with international viewing parties being held in London and Moscow.

"I host parties because I can, thanks to my Slingbox technology," said Scott Bowen, a 1985 graduate of the University. Slingbox technology allows people to stream their home cable or satellite television through a broadband Internet connection. Bowen streams either live telecasts or recordings from his mother's Tivo in the United States.

"It's a connection to home, which is important if you live in Moscow for any period of time," Bowen said. "We are watching the game live on my Slingbox starting at midnight Moscow time. Roll tide!"

Worldwide Tide fans will be tuning in on Saturday.

"I don't know if other schools have this much reach, but Alabama does," Whetstone said.

"When students are here on campus, they tend to become strong Crimson Tide fans. It's gone on through[out] generations."

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