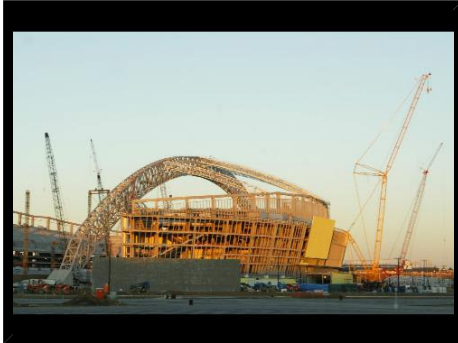


Bloomberg.com

Dallas Cowboys \$150,000 Seat Rights Send Some Fans to View TV

By Crayton Harrison



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Dec. 20 (Bloomberg) -- Loyal Dallas Cowboys fans are fuming.

The team is asking them to pay as much as \$150,000 for the right to buy season tickets for games at the \$1.1 billion stadium it's building, to open in 2009. That's on top of \$340 for each game ticket.

``It's way too much money," said Steve Block, a Dallas attorney who has had Cowboys season tickets for more than two decades. He said team owner Jerry Jones is ``not interested in the average fan. He's only interested in maximizing his income."

Block said he isn't alone in refusing to buy a 30-year license for season tickets at the new stadium. That may not be cause for Jones to worry. He's betting that plenty of Cowboys fans are willing to pay premium prices for the prestige associated with an elite team, sports business analysts say.

``When you go to a Cowboys game, you're not just going to a football game," said Marc Ganis, president of SportsCorp Ltd., a Chicago-based marketing consulting firm. ``There's a status associated with going to a Cowboys game."

The team is sensitive to fans' concerns, said Greg McElroy, the Cowboys' senior vice president.

``Our intention is to have all our current season seat holders have a seat in the new stadium," he said. Jones declined to comment.

Parking, Super Bowl

For \$150,000, the so-called personal seat licenses buy cushioned seats on the 50-yard line, food and drink on game days, and access to premium parking, McElroy said.

They also include invitations to team events, and the option to buy tickets for the 2011 Super Bowl that is scheduled to be played at the new stadium in Arlington, he said. For \$100,000, fans don't get invitations or the Super Bowl option.

``It's certainly a quantum leap forward in what these teams are charging, so it has to be a quantum leap forward in the amenities they offer," said David Carter, founder of Sports Business Group, a sports marketing company in Los Angeles.

Jones has said the new stadium will bring the Cowboys the highest revenue among the 32 National Football League teams.

Even the Cowboys' cheapest licenses, \$16,000, are a record, NFL spokesman Brian McCarthy said. Max Muhleman, chief executive officer of Private Sports Consulting Inc., said the previous record was \$10,000 licenses sold by the Chicago Bears in 2002.

Rights for Cowboys' seats in low-tier spots close to the field start at \$16,000, rising to \$50,000 at the 50-yard line, McElroy said. Prices for the end zones and upper tiers haven't been set.

Unfailing Support

``The people who supported the team through the bad years, the late '80s and early '90s, and have been with the Cowboys through a long period of time are pretty much just getting cut out," said Block, 52. His seats are in the 16th row on the 40- yard line.

The Cowboys have a 12-2 record this season, winning their conference's East Division title and putting them in the playoffs. The team won the Super Bowl five times from 1972 to 1996.

Michael Reisman, who owns a home-construction business in Dallas, sits several rows behind the opponents' bench, near the 40-yard line. A license for a similar seat at the new stadium costs \$35,000, which is too much, he said.

``It is kind of sad," he said. ``Everything for dollars, that's how it's been for Jerry."

Season-ticket holders can move if they think rights for a similar location in the new stadium are too expensive, McElroy said. More people are asking for better seats than cheaper ones, he said.

Borrow the Money

For fans who can't afford to buy a license outright, the Cowboys will arrange a loan. The team is offering 30-year financing at 8 percent for all seats. Fans can sell licenses they no longer want.

It isn't the first time the Cowboys have raised money through ticket licenses. When the team built Texas Stadium in 1971, fans were required to buy \$250 bonds for the rights to buy season tickets.

``They were a good investment," Jones said in an interview last month. The rights ``turned out to be very marketable. They went as high as about \$20,000 a seat 15 or 20 years later" in aftermarket sales.

At least 10 NFL teams have sold seat licenses, starting with the Carolina Panthers, who charged as much as \$5,400 a seat in 1993, Muhleman said. Rights also are sold in professional baseball, in college sports and at Churchill Downs, home of the Kentucky Derby.

`Magical' Aura

Cowboys fans have a relationship with the club that few sports franchises can match, said Muhleman of Private Sports Consulting, which advises teams on seat licensing but isn't working with Dallas.

``It's a magical sort of aura that the Cowboys have," Muhleman said. They have Texas tradition, a great logo and memorable players, he said.

Block said he won't sever all ties. He'll watch the Cowboys on TV and may attend a game to see the new stadium. He may even go hear the official sales pitch for seat licenses.

``I think at least I owe them the chance to give me an explanation," he said.

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Last Updated: December 20, 2007 01:02 EST

