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Demand for Rose Bowl tickets 'out of sight'

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Associated Press

LOS ANGELES - There are about 88,000 tickets "available" for the 2006 Rose Bowl game, but you'd be hard pressed to find one.

The contest between top-ranked University of Southern California and No. 2 Texas is more than just a bowl game - college football's national championship is at stake and the local Trojans are an early 6.5-point favorite.

With half the total tickets designated for the two schools and thousands of others committed to sports conferences, sponsors and media, among others, thousands of fans are competing for a handful of seats available online and from various brokers.

The result? Demand is high, and prices are soaring.

"It's out of sight," said Mitch Dorger, chief executive of the Tournament of Roses, which will hold its 92nd Rose Bowl game in Pasadena on Jan. 4.

On Tuesday, the last public tickets for the game, about 1,000, went on sale through Ticketmaster. They sold out within five minutes.

The ticket crunch can be partly attributed to first-ever, revenue-sharing agreements with two ticket distribution companies.

The Tournament of Roses, which is prevented from selling tickets beyond the \$175 face value, has entered into an agreement with PrimeSport, a subsidiary of RazorGator Interactive Group, which will resell the tickets as part of travel packages that start at \$1,879 per person.

The packages include two night stays at a hotel, a ticket in an end zone and ground transportation.

RazorGator is also a sponsor of the Rose Bowl. Dorger declined to reveal specifics of the financial agreements.

The Tournament of Roses also allocated 2,500 tickets to The Ticket Reserve, which sold options to the big game. A Longhorn or Trojan who bought early could get away with paying as little as \$100 above the regular ticket price.

"We had the tickets available, and it was a way to increase revenues for the game," Dorger said. "It was also an opportunity ... to give people who would not ordinarily have a chance to buy a ticket that opportunity."

It's the first time the Tournament of Roses has entered into these types of agreements, and sports consultant David Carter said it's one of the highest profile events to do so.

"They are certainly the wave of the future," said Carter, executive director of the Sports Business Institute at USC.

Carter, who does consulting for Rose Bowl stadium operations, said the arrangements allow the Tournament of Roses to ensure all the tickets are distributed and share in revenue previously hoarded by scalpers. Carter had no involvement in the revenue-sharing agreements.

But the days of face-value tickets could be over. There have been no box-office sales for the Rose Bowl. By tradition, 500 tickets were set aside for Pasadena residents last weekend.

"I can't recall seeing more jockeying for position for a game ticket than in the last few days," Carter said. "I was just recently reminded of how many friends and colleagues in the state of Texas whom I have lost touch with."

The Rose Bowl is a contractual sellout, with tickets earmarked for all sorts of groups. But the number of tickets could never be enough for a matchup that will produce an undisputed national champion.

Dorger noted that USC has been selling out its home games all season at the Los Angeles Coliseum, to the tune of some 90,000 tickets. For the Rose Bowl, USC received about 22,000 tickets for its donors, alumni, students and others.

"You can do the math," Dorger said. "Supply and demand."

On StubHub.com, tickets in the Texas end zone were selling for \$1,050 apiece. Tickets near the 40-yard line were priced at \$4,458.

With the "buy it now" feature on one eBay auction, two Rose Bowl tickets could be had for just under two grand.

USC donor Robert Avakian, who graduated from the USC School of Dentistry in 1954, said he's been promised four tickets from the university and couldn't imagine selling them.

"I've had 15 people call me," Avakian said. "They think I'm a ticket agency."

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