

Touchdown for Super Bowl shoppers

Donna Hogan, Tribune
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Scottsdale-based Sports Fan Marketing CEO Steve Sodell is betting locals are so thrilled to have Super Bowl XLII on their home turf, they'll be buying lots of logo-emblazoned stuff for themselves and for Christmas gifts.

"The demand is high at the moment. It's very popular," he said.

So instead of waiting until the lineup is set, Sodell opened five stores Nov. 1 that sell only Super Bowl XLII goods, just in time for the seasonal spending splurge.



The stores are in prime shopping spots such as Paradise Valley Mall, Mesa Riverview, and a warehouse-showroom at his Scottsdale Airpark headquarters near Scottsdale Road and Acoma Drive.

He plans to open 15 more stores before the main event on Feb. 3, most of them in Scottsdale, including a super-sized store in the city's downtown shopping and entertainment district, even though the game will be played in the west Valley.

"We know the Super Bowl is in Glendale," Sodell said.

"But a lot of the fans will be headquartered in Scottsdale."

In fact, Sodell, who has been opening temporary Super Bowl shops in host cities for seven years, said this time he can pick the best spots better than bigger licensed retailers because he knows the area.

"I have a huge advantage because I am local," he said. "We're going to sell a boatload of product."

When the teams win their respective conference championships, he'll have products boasting the match up on shelves by the next morning, Sodell said.

And when the big game is over, he'll have hats, T-shirts, pins and pennants for sale "in seconds," he said.

Sodell said he is one of fewer than a dozen companies licensed by the National Football League to sell official Super Bowl merchandise.

He has similar deals for the NCAA Final Four and Major League Baseball's World Series gear, he said, but the football extravaganza is by far the most lucrative of the big events in merchandise sales.

Arizona Super Bowl Host Committee president Bob Sullivan said the host organization also is selling some NFL-licensed goods and some of its own, including plush versions of its mascot, Spike, through its Web site, www.azsuperbowl.com.

The Host Committee only started selling the merchandise two weeks ago, Sullivan said, so he doesn't know yet how well it's moving.

But as the countdown clock ticks away minutes, hours and days, enthusiasm is growing statewide, he said, and locals want to share the excitement. One way to do that is by buying stuff.

"I am told by the NFL that there are selling cycles," Sullivan said.

The general merchandise is available now, the second wave happens when the team info is emblazoned on the gear, and the third when the championship stuff is on the shelves, he said.

The 7-foot-tall football, for example, has been a hit from the start, he said.

"As soon as Spike went out on the road, people started asking us for Spike dolls," Sullivan said.

The game, products, side events and visitors are expected to generate at least \$400 million for Arizona.