



Inside the Lines

Official Newsletter of the Tampa Bay Bowl Association Winter 2024



50 40 30 20 10 G

LSU, Wisconsin Square-Off in ReliaQuest Bowl

By Joey Johnston

Fans of sharply contrasting styles will love the ReliaQuest Bowl between the LSU Tigers and the Wisconsin Badgers on New Year's Day. It's the kind of matchup that's usually concocted in a coaching laboratory. Or maybe it serves as a backdrop for the ultimate question posed by passionate fans.

What comes first: The offense or the defense?

Stylistically, when the Southeastern Conference's Tigers (9-3) and Big Ten Conference's Badgers (7-5) tangle, the answer might reveal itself on the Bermuda grass of Raymond James Stadium.

LSU has the nation's No. 1-ranked offense at 547.8 yards per game and has surpassed the 500-yard mark nine times this season. The Tigers are the only team ranked in the top 10 of rushing (213.5, eighth) and passing (334.3, fourth).

Of course, during the regular season, those gaudy numbers were easily explained. Quarterback Jayden Daniels became the third LSU player to win the Heisman Trophy, presented annually to the nation's most outstanding player, and he served as catalyst for a Tiger offense that scored at least 41 points in seven of the eight SEC games (the exception was 34 points in a win against Arkansas).

In LSU's 12 games, Daniels passed for 3,812 yards and rushing for

1,134 more, becoming only the second player in SEC history (along with another Heisman winner, Texas A&M's Johnny Manziel, in 2012) to pass for 3,500 yards and rush for 1,000 in a single season.

"Jayden Daniels did things I have never seen before in my 32 years (as a coach)," LSU coach Brian Kelly said. "I'm usually very reserved (in promoting players), but I felt like at times I almost had to use it as a bully pulpit. This was crazy. And he's doing it in the SEC — against really fast and really big players."

The Tigers are chock-full of skill-position players who can make big things happen.

Malik Nabers (86 catches for 1,546 yards), who needs 22 yards to set LSU's career receiving yards record, and Brian Thomas (60 for 1,079) have combined for 29 touchdown catches, the most of any duo in the nation. Junior Logan Diggs, a transfer from Notre Dame, is a more-than-capable runner (652 yards, seven touchdowns, three 100-yard rushing games).

"I think these days you need to have a prolific offense," said Kelly, completing his second season at LSU after 12 years at Notre Dame. "You just have to have that to win. Your offense has to be outstanding."

At Wisconsin, in Coach Luke

continued on next page



The ReliaQuest Bowl • A Tampa Bay Treasure
\$1.1 Billion* ECONOMIC IMPACT
\$170 Million* PAID TO UNIVERSITIES
\$3.5 Million TO CHARITIES SINCE 2016
*over history of the bowl

Fickell's first season after shifting from a highly successful six-year tenure at Cincinnati, the defense proved to be the most outstanding aspect of the Badgers' program.

The Badgers have the nation's 31st-best defense (allowing 331.7 yards per game) that holds opponents to just 18.4 points (which ranks 18th as a scoring defense).

Wisconsin has two big playmakers in its secondary with safety Hunter Wohler (113 tackles, the most for a Badger defensive back since Reggie Holt in 1991) and cornerback Ricardo Hallman (six interceptions to tie for the Big Ten lead). Up front, outside linebacker C.J. Goetz established himself as a premier edge performer with 11 tackles for a loss.

"We didn't give up as many big plays," Fickell said. "We've done a good job with that, maybe not as well as we envisioned. But I think our defensive guys have evolved and gotten into what they do well. I think it comes down to (preventing) big plays. I think it ultimately comes down to what our guys are able to do."

When considering Wisconsin's early performance in its biggest game of the season — a 24-17 victory against Nebraska — Fickell laughed at the irony. In the first quarter, the Badgers allowed two long touchdowns (55-yard run, 58-yard pass). After those two Nebraska possessions, though, Wisconsin allowed just 193

total yards as it rallied for a 24-17 overtime victory and earned bowl eligibility for the 22nd straight season (only Georgia and Oklahoma have longer active streaks).

Offensively, Wisconsin remains a work in progress. Offensive coordinator Phil Longo, whose "Air Raid" system worked to near-perfection at North Carolina and Ole Miss, didn't establish a potent attack under quarterback Tanner Mordecai, a transfer from SMU who missed 28 days with a broken hand.

By the late season, Wisconsin looked like Wisconsin — physical up front with a standout at running back (Braelon Allen, 984 yards, 12 touchdowns). But with Allen headed to the NFL and not playing in the bowl game, the Badgers will turn to their depth for ground-gaining opportunities.

Similar opportunity exists in the LSU defense, which has been searching for the right combination of players. The Tigers' defense is ranked 101st nationally (409.2) and its deficiencies were exposed in LSU's three defeats (45-24 against Florida State, 55-49 against Ole Miss, 42-28 against Alabama).

"If our defense had been average, we probably would've scored enough (to win every game)," Kelly said. "We went to the transfer portal for 15 players to put together a sub-standard defense. We played freshmen (last season) and developed players on offense. On defense, we filled holes, but I think we got better at the end of the year. We needed to get a lot better."

Can LSU's prolific offense have success against Wisconsin's rugged defense?

And what about the other side? Can the Wisconsin offense and LSU defense find ways to thrive?

"You want to play well and get a springboard to the next season," Kelly said.

"Competing against a team like LSU is a big test and a really big opportunity for our program," Fickell said.

Let the game — and the comparisons — begin!



BADGERS™



TIGERS™

Coaches Meet Bowl Supporters At Contract Signing Party

More than 500 ReliaQuest Bowl sponsors and VIP Club members got to meet the coaches from LSU and the University of Wisconsin at the annual **Contract Signing** on December 7th.

After a media session with local media outlets, Tiger Head Coach Brian Kelly and Badger Head Coach Luke Fickell mingled with ReliaQuest Bowl supporters and their guests in the West Club of Raymond James Stadium.

Guests also got to hear from the coaches, as well as Athletic Directors Scott Woodward and Chris McIntosh.

The event was capped off with the coaches signing a ceremonial contract agreeing to play in the bowl game on New Year's Day.

Check out our photo gallery from the event on the ReliaQuest Bowl web site at www.ReliaQuestbowl.com



ONE OF THE NATION'S BEST HOSPITALS

#1 IN TAMPA BAY, AGAIN

BEST HOSPITALS
USNews
RANKED IN 6 SPECIALTIES 2023-2024

BEST REGIONAL HOSPITALS
USNews
TAMPA-ST. PETERSBURG RECOGNIZED IN 26 TYPES OF CARE 2023-2024

For nearly two decades, Tampa General Hospital has been recognized on a national stage.

Tampa General continues to lead the nation with award-winning care powered by academic medicine. And once again, we're named the #1 hospital in Tampa Bay. Our specialized team performs more procedures, has more expertise and delivers better outcomes. We'd like to thank our physicians, nurses and health care professionals for their collaboration and commitment to best-in-class care.

Florida's Leading Academic Health System For Over 50 Years

#1 FOR PROTECTING THE POCKET.

CELEBRATING

90

YEARS STRONG

LMCU

In football and finances, it's important to protect the pocket. Since 1933, we've been doing what's best for our members. It's no wonder LMCU is rated #1 for helping members earn more when they save and pay less when they borrow.* With over 20 locations across Central and Southwest Florida, we have the coverage to help you tackle your financial goals.

[Learn more at LMCU.org/WhyLMCU](http://LMCU.org/WhyLMCU)

LMCU™

You'll **love** banking here.

*Rated #1 for Return of the Member for credit unions in Michigan and Florida. Callahan & Associates, June 2023. Federally insured by NCUA.

Clearwater Beach Day Welcomes ReliaQuest Bowl Fans

Presented by Visit St Pete Clearwater

One of the most popular traditions of ReliaQuest Bowl Week is **Clearwater Beach Day** where thousands of visiting fans from around the country join the teams, college bands, cheerleaders and local residents. This year's event will be held Saturday, December 30th and feature performances by the University of Wisconsin and LSU marching bands and cheerleader squads. The day also includes live music on stage, a tug-of-war contest between the cheerleading squads, and even a pie eating contest among fans.

Visitors will also be able to take their picture in front of a huge custom designed ReliaQuest Bowl sand sculpture, as well as life size dolphin statues designed with the team uniforms.

Dozens of out of town and local media typically cover the event as well showcasing the beautiful beaches of Pinellas County as footage is beamed throughout the country.

All the festivities take place behind the **Hilton Clearwater Beach Resort & Spa** (just north of Pier 60) and run from 11:30 AM to about 4:00 PM.

Fans are encouraged to arrive early for the best parking. There are a variety of new parking options along the island along with a park and ride ferry service from downtown Clearwater and the Clearwater Ferry service via the water. Food and drinks along with bowl merchandise will be available for purchase.



Come on out and enjoy the No. 1 ranked U.S. beaches with your Badger and Tiger friends!

Visit St Pete-Clearwater is the presenting sponsor of the event. Additional sponsors include the **Hilton Clearwater Beach Resort & Spa**, **Amplify Clearwater**, the **City of Clearwater**, **Allegiant**, **St Pete-Clearwater International Airport**, **970WFLA**, **620 WDAE** and **93.3 FLZ FM**.

For more information on the ReliaQuest Bowl and Clearwater Beach Day go to www.ReliaQuestBowl.com or call the Bowl office at 813-874-BOWL.



Busch Gardens to Host Fans & Teams For A Wild Day During Bowl Week

ReliaQuest Bowl fans will get to join the Wisconsin and LSU players for some wild rides, shows and even animal encounters at Busch Gardens when they head to the world famous theme park on Friday, December 29th. Each year the park hosts the participating teams for a special day during "Bowl Week."

Guests will get to experience the many park features including animal exhibits, exciting coasters such as Falcon Fury, North America's tallest freestanding drop tower, Cheetah Chase, Montu and the new Iron Gwazi. Players will mix with fans to enjoy these

rides along with the many shows and animal interactions. So don't be surprised if that big guy sitting next to you with a death grip on the handles is a star football player for one of the teams!

Some of the players will also get a behind-the-scenes animal encounter as well.

In addition, the Badger and LSU Marching bands are expected to make an appearance at the park on December 31st. Normal park admission prices apply for both days and tickets are available at the gate or online at www.BuschGardens.com. Teams typically arrive in mid-afternoon on the Team Day.



Reliaquest Bowl Fans to Bring in 2024 at New Year's Eve Parade & Big Storm Brewing Pep Rally

Thousands of Tiger and Badger fans are expected to visit Tampa's Ybor City historic district on December 31st for the annual **ReliaQuest Bowl New Year's Eve Parade & Big Storm Brewing Pep Rally**.

The parade steps off at 5:30 PM. as numerous high school marching bands and floats join the University of Wisconsin and LSU marching bands at this family-friendly parade as it travels along historic 7th avenue of this beautiful and unique Latin quarter of the city.

Immediately following the Parade both college marching bands and their cheerleading squads will participate in the **Big Storm Brewing Pep Rally** on stage in front of the Centro Ybor complex at 16th St. and 7th avenue where the groups will take turns firing up their fans. After the parade check out Big Storm Brewery and

all the unique places in Ybor or jump on the trolley cars and head to downtown. It's a fun way to usher in the new year with family and friends!

The Parade & Pep Rally is sponsored by **Big Storm Brewery, 970 WFLA, MIX 100.7, 98 ROCK FM, 620 WDAE** and the **City of Tampa**.



Bowl Continues To Impact Tampa Bay Region

The **ReliaQuest Bowl** continues to impact the Tampa Bay region in multiple ways. Not only has the bowl generated well more than \$1.1 Billion in economic impact for the region over its history but also millions of dollars in exposure each year. In addition, the bowls Charitable Giving Initiative donates at least \$500,000 each year to local non-profit organizations. Since the Charitable Giving Initiative has distributed over \$3.5 million to more than 170 charities.

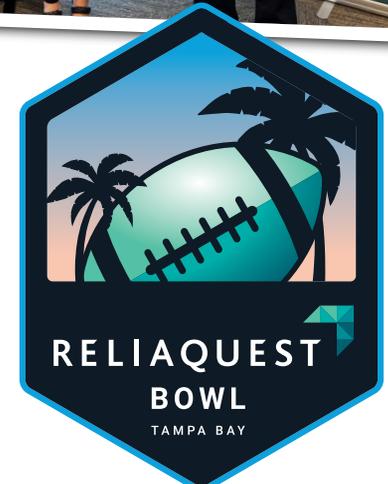
This giving is also in addition to the \$176 million contributed to universities over its history. “The Bowl was started as, and remains, an

economic engine for the region and contributes millions to universities each year, but we also want to do more to help the day-to-day lives of local residents,” explains Bowl President/CEO Jim McVay. “Our Charitable Giving Initiative provides much needed funding to the dozens of deserving Tampa Bay organizations that are directly meeting the needs of the community.”

The Bowl selects recipient organizations that assist people in need through a variety of causes including disadvantaged youth, the disabled, the homeless, military veterans, and more. And through numerous programs such as medical research, food banks, mental health and others.

“The Bowl has a tremendous impact not only on Wheelchairs for Kids but the entire Tampa Bay area,” notes Wheelchairs for Kids Executive Director. “Most people think of it as a football game, but it is so much more.”

Learn more about the ReliaQuest Bowl’s Charitable Giving Initiative and the organizations it has supported online at www.reliaquestbowl.com/giving-back.



Bowl Supporters Celebrate College Football Season at Buchanan Happy Hour Huddle

More than 450 ReliaQuest Bowl supporters celebrated the college football season at the **Happy Hour Huddle at Splitsville Presented by Buchanan**. Guests gathered to network and play games at the entertainment concept located at the Sparkman Wharf complex on Tampa's Downtown Waterfront. It was the perfect way to kick off the season and the bowls fall VIP event calendar. Bowl sponsors, Club Members, local media and other VIP guests enjoyed a variety of food as well. Guests also mixed in a variety of games including bowling, darts, ping pong, shuffleboard and billiards. There was also a special photo area where they could take photos in a

locker room themed setting with different fun props to post on social media.

The Huddle was one of many VIP events that ReliaQuest Bowl VIP Club Members and Sponsors get to attend leading up to the big game. Splitsville will also host the participating college teams on December 28th. Fans can join in the fun that that night beginning at 7:00 p.m.

For more information the ReliaQuest Bowl VIP Club Membership program and how you can get the best seats to the game and join us for our other VIP events contact Blake Guthrie at blake@reliaquestbowl.com or 813-874-2695.



Welcome New Supporters

New Sponsors:



Constellation Brands



JW MARRIOTT
TAMPA WATER STREET

New VIP Club Members

(As of December 1, 2023)

Cheeseology
Dan Sallade & Blakely Echeverry
Tampa Restoration Company
Cogent Bank
Comerica Bank
Bank of Central Florida
Windsor Capital
Halifax Solutions
Tim & Kaia Rider
Chris & Anita Roederer
Strong Claim Consultants
Coast Dental
Mr Kamra Man, LLC
AON

Hotel Tampa Riverwalk
Sweetheart Ice Cream
Dr. John L. Redd
Antonio Annesi
CLA
Titan Vanguard
Apex Coup
Prestige Business Enterprises
Raquel Merrill
Four Rivers Law Firm
Shawn Ryan
HUB International
Better Together

Frameworks
Beachcomber Beach Resort
Bellwether Beach Resort
Salt Block Hospitality
Westin Tampa Waterside
Tampa Bay Business Journal
Merrill Lynch
The Penny-Crevasse Group
MOSI
RI Automotive
The Current Hotel
Agility Labs SEO
Kings III Emergency
Communications



2023-2024

Calendar of Events

Note: All events, locations, dates and times are subject to change. ** (indicates event open to general public all others are invitation-only)

SEPTEMBER 21 RELIAQUEST BOWL HUDDLE AT SPLITSVILLE PRESENTED BY BUCHANAN

The ReliaQuest Bowl kicks off its fall event calendar with a festive evening at Splitsville in the Sparkman Wharf entertainment complex in downtown Tampa sponsored by Buchanan. (Invitation only)



DECEMBER 30 CLEARWATER BEACH DAY** Presented by Visit St Pete Clearwater

Join the school marching bands and cheerleaders as they enjoy the sun and beaches at the Hilton Clearwater Beach Resort & Spa. Enjoy this fun day which will also feature live music, skydivers, a tug-of-war and other contests from 11:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Sponsored by Visit St. Pete-Clearwater, the Hilton, Amplify Clearwater, Allegiant, St. Pete Clearwater International Airport, 93.3FLZ, 970WFLA and 620 WDAE Radio.



DECEMBER 31 NEW YEAR'S EVE PARADE & BIG STORM BREWING PEP RALLY**

Eclectic Ybor City is the site of this festive celebration featuring the ReliaQuest Bowl New Year's Eve Parade and a pep rally by the college marching bands & cheerleaders. The parade will feature floats, high school marching bands from around the country along with the Wisconsin and LSU college bands! This free family event is sponsored by the City of Tampa, Ybor City, Mix 100.7, US 103.5, 98Rock, 970 WFLA and 620 WDAE Radio. Be there early. The Parade starts at 5:30 p.m. and runs along 7th Avenue.

DECEMBER 7 DEBARTOLO CONTRACT SIGNING PARTY

Bowl supporters will celebrate the announcement of our teams and welcome the participating college head coaches to the Tampa Bay area. The party will be held in the West Club Lounge of Raymond James Stadium. (By invitation only)

DECEMBER 26 TEAM WELCOMES

Bowl officials and media greet the participating teams as they arrive at the team hotels. (TBD)

DECEMBER 27 SPOUSES BRUNCH

Spouses of both teams' coaching staff will enjoy a special luncheon at the Tampa Yacht Club. (Private event)

DECEMBER 28 PLAYERS HOSPITAL VISIT

Players from both teams will brighten the day for children at Tampa General Hospital (no fans please).

PLAYERS NIGHT AT SPLITSVILLE**

Join the teams as they enjoy the fun at Splitsville at Sparkman Wharf. This unique venue offers bowling, billiards, ping pong and more. Teams only from 6:00-7:00 PM. Doors open to public at 7:00 P.M.

DECEMBER 29 BUSCH GARDENS TEAM OUTING**

Both teams and their fans will enjoy the unique blend of thrilling rides, live shows and animal exhibits. Admission tickets are available at buschgardens.com or at the front gate.



TAMPALAW GRIDIRON GALA

This is a prestigious evening event for bowl sponsors, VIP's and the college administrators at the Marriott Waterstreet (by invitation only).

DECEMBER 31 BATTLE OF THE BANDS AT BUSCH GARDENS**

Join the two college marching bands at Busch Gardens as they square-off for a special "Battle of the Bands" performance. Admission to park required. Time TBD.



JANUARY 1 PREGAME BOWL BASH**

Bowl fans can warm-up for the big game with live music, displays and a pep rally. Food & refreshments will be available for purchase. The fun begins at 9:00 a.m. on the south plaza outside the stadium between the 5/3 Bank Gate and Gate D, so come out early.

TAMPA GENERAL HOSPITAL PREGAME SHOW**

Enjoy a colorful pregame show featuring the pageantry of high school and college bands along with numerous special activities including skydivers. A popular ReliaQuest Bowl tradition you won't want to miss. The show begins at 11:20 a.m.

RELIAQUEST BOWL 2024**

The ReliaQuest Bowl matching the LSU Tigers and the Wisconsin Badgers. Kickoff is scheduled for 12:00 p.m. (Gates open 10:30 a.m.).

RELIAQUEST HALFTIME SHOW

Wait until you see this colorful show featuring more than 2,500 performers!

Official Game Sponsors

