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U. of Phoenix buys naming rights to Cardinals stadium

Associated Press



GLENDALE, Ariz. -- The [Arizona Cardinals](#) played for 18 years at a college stadium in Tempe.

Now the University of Phoenix -- the nation's largest private university -- will pay the NFL team \$154.5 million over the next 20 years to put its name on the Cardinals' new home.

The "University of Phoenix Stadium" label was unveiled at a news conference outside the \$455 million structure in suburban western Phoenix on Tuesday.

The for-profit university has 323,000 students, most of them working adults in their 30s, at campuses in 39 states and through online programs. Its parent company, Apollo Group Inc., had \$2.3 billion in revenue last year, ranking it among Arizona's largest companies.

"This is the first time a National Football League venue has been named after an educational institution," Apollo president Brian Mueller said, "and the irony of that deal is not lost on us."

The Cardinals have naming rights to the stadium as part of the deal approved by voters to build the long-sought home for the NFL franchise, which had played at Arizona State University's Sun Devil Stadium since moving to Arizona in 1988.

Apollo has had some negative publicity lately.



Paul Connors / AP Photo

The University of Phoenix will pay \$154.5 million over 20 years for naming rights on the Arizona Cardinals' new stadium.

Earlier this month, the company saw the revival of a lawsuit that claimed the University of Phoenix wrongly paid incentive compensation to recruit students. The company also is undergoing a Securities and Exchange Commission review of its stock option granting practices.

Michael Bidwill, son of team owner Bill Bidwill, is the Cardinals' vice president and general counsel and point man on the stadium project. He said he believes the issues facing Apollo were the type of problems that any highly successful candidate for naming rights would have.

"It's clear they're addressing those and they're going to be resolved," Bidwill said. "But as they move forward, they've got a tremendous story to tell. That's part of the reason they wanted to get involved in their first-ever sports marketing deal. They hadn't even had a suite at any of the local stadiums or arenas before."

Mueller acknowledged that the company has SEC issues.

"Have we been hurt a little bit by what has happened from an SEC standpoint? Yeah," he said, "but there's a hundred other companies going through the same thing. While it doesn't make us feel good, it is part of the publicly traded business and we have to be the best participant in that as we can."

The stadium naming venture is part of a marketing effort aimed at emphasizing the university's success with students, Mueller said.

"Our next step is to tell the story of an innovative institution that provides programs for working adult students and gives them a chance to do things," he said. "It's a rigorous process and the ones that make it put a lot into it."

In addition to the Cardinals' games, the stadium is the new home of the Fiesta Bowl and in January will host the first of the new BCS college football championship games.

It also will be the site of the 2008 Super Bowl.

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