

NFL Ticket Sales Robust, Still Planning for 100 % Capacity Despite Delta Variant

By Daniel Kaplan

Could the COVID-19 Delta variant interfere with the NFL's plans to have full stadiums next month? When NFL commissioner Roger Goodell disclosed the 100 percent capacity plans in March, vaccinations were booming and Delta was primarily known as an airline. Now, many companies are requiring vaccinations for their workers, mask requirements are reviving, and even New York City is rolling out a vaccine mandate to go into indoor establishments. But so far the NFL is not changing plans, leaving fan protocols to teams and local health officials. The Miami Dolphins, located in the current epicenter of the pandemic, said they currently have no restrictions on fans planned. And demand for tickets thus far across the league is robust, with 200,000 fans attending training camps just on July 31, which for the first time was marketed as a special event, "Back Together Saturday." At games, fans sitting near players will have no special health screening.

"All of the seating will be open this year, including field-level seating, including field suites, field clubs, all will be open this year," said Bobby Gallo, the NFL's senior vice president of club business development. "We renewed 92 percent of our season tickets across the league, and that equals the

highest we've seen over the last five seasons.

"When you look at total season tickets, renewals, plus new sales, we've actually exceeded 2019 levels trending up there, which is really promising and positive. Since the schedule release back in May, clubs have sold 1.1 million tickets, which is up 57 percent versus 2019. And we're up 71 percent in revenue, versus 2019."

Asked if the league was getting any feedback from fans expressing concern about attending an NFL

game because of COVID-19, Gallo shook his head and said if anything, it's been the opposite. "Fans are really amped up and geared up and ready to come back and we saw that as recently as this past Saturday (July 31)."

Vicki Seyfert-Margolis, the founder of

health care app MyOwnMed and a former health official in the Obama administration, cautioned American sports leagues to prepare to adjust quickly in terms of screening fans.

"I don't think anybody wants to have their event become, you know, quote-unquote, a super-spreader event," she said. "I don't think anybody wants to be in that situation. But I recognize that I think the other thing is that people believe that there's some wisdom that's going to come from these local health authorities. And I'm not sure there always is."



“Is Delta going to start sweeping through everywhere?” she asked, answering, “Probably. I mean, look at Miami right now. Miami is a hot mess right now. Hospitals are filling again. And they’ve got a huge positivity rate.”

MyOwnMed is working with Skidata, which provides venue access technology, to offer a solution within team apps that allows fans to upload vaccine and/or COVID-19 test results,



and a health screen function. So far their public sports clients are in Europe, though Seyfert-Margolis said discussions are ongoing with several U.S. teams.

“In the fall, people in

hospitals and clinicians are worried about not just Delta, but Delta plus flu, and some of these other respiratory viruses that are seasonal, that, you know, could have an impact also. So I think it’s, it’s a time when people should be looking at strategies to mitigate risk, you know, that nothing’s going to be perfect.”

Gallo emphasized fan safety has always been a priority for the NFL, and that the league hosted 1.2 million fans last season without any apparent COVID-19 spread when there were no vaccines. In a typical season, roughly 17 million fans attend NFL games. This season for the first time there is a 17-game schedule, up from 16.

“We’re certainly going to be mindful, we’re certainly going to pay attention, we’re ready to, you know, adjust if and when needed, and hopefully that’s not the case,” Gallo said.

The league is focused greatly on marketing tickets to as many fans as possible, tapping into a centralized league database that is at 120 million

names. Using those names, league data analysts recommend contacts to the teams, which have been finding success with the leads. The database is growing at a 10 percent to 20 percent clip per annum and only looks to expand more with the spread of sports betting.

“Sports betting is going to be a huge reservoir of data in our fans and engagement tools for the clubs and partners,” said Chris Halpin, the NFL’s chief strategy and growth officer. “For our adult fans who bet legally in states with our partners, we will have even more information around and be able to link it to their profiles of who they are and, you know, how they consume.”

Online single-game ticket sales are double their level from this time in 2019, the league said, and secondary sales are up 80 percent. And average resale prices are up 30 percent since 2019. Halpin and Gallo ascribe those results to pent-up demand from the pandemic and data-driven marketing.

Teams are also finding a growing appetite for sponsorship, Gallo said, “As of the end of June, the average club local sponsorship and media revenue already reached 2019 final revenue numbers, end of season totals.” Part of that is the burgeoning sports betting category.

Asked, given the trends, would the NFL set a local revenue record, Gallo replied it is too early to predict.

“But as we sit here today, we’re clearly excited by what we’re seeing, and, you know, our fans are stepping up, our partners are stepping up,” he said. “And, you know, I think we’re still a month plus out from the regular season. And so we’re, you know, we’re excited by that. But until we sell every single ticket, we fill every single seat, we’re not going to necessarily be happy or stop.”

(Photo: Charles Trainor Jr. / Miami Herald / Tribune News Service via Getty Images)