

Fan-tastic

Fans bustle up for spirited season

Numbers tell the success story of a unified effort to boost the number of spectators at Louisiana's Ragin' Cajun football games. • Attendance was up about 35 percent for the first two home games and season ticket sales doubled, according to Nelson Schexnayder, UL Lafayette's athletic director. • About 20,000 fans welcomed new head coach Rickey Bustle at the first home game on Sept. 7, when the Cajuns faced Minnesota. A crowd of about 19,600 was on hand for UL

Lafayette's 34-0 victory over the University of Alabama at Birmingham on Sept. 21.

The fan tally has become just as important as the game score, due to changes in NCAA regulations that determine which teams play in Division 1-A, the highest level of collegiate competi-



DOUG DUGAS

tion. UL Lafayette has been in that top tier since the division structure was created in 1982. According to the new NCAA rules, a university must have an average of 15,000 people at each home game, over four years, to remain in Division 1-A.



DOUG DUGAS

Head Coach Rickey Bustle was tailgating in spirit with these Ragin' Cajun fans. From left, are: Tim Faulk, Dona Renegar, Shane Louviere, Peggy Stelly, Joey Mouton and D'Lane Wimberley.

UL Lafayette officials, like many others at universities across the nation, believe NCAA division status affects a school's economic impact, national image, student recruitment and its relationships with alumni, donors, the community and other higher education institutions.

In the spring, UL Lafayette President Ray Authement announced a five-part game plan intended to draw more people to the Swamp on five Saturdays this fall:

- increase student attendance;
- manage athletics promotions through the Office of Public Relations and News Services;
- conduct a highly visible season ticket drive;
- move all ticket operations to the Cajundome; and
- consolidate fund raising for athletics through the Office of Development.

Authement was encouraged by the support the university received this season. "This community and region have shown that they're hungry for the benefits of having a winning Division 1-A football program," he said.

He and Schexnayder had already taken a giant step forward by hiring Bustle as head coach. For eight of the past nine seasons, he was offensive coordinator and quarterbacks coach at Virginia Tech, one of the top 10 college teams in the nation.

Here's a recap of the execution of Authement's plan as of mid-October, when *La Louisiane* entered pre-press production.

RED HOT

At a retreat this spring, the Student Government Association came up with a "Get in the Zone" theme to promote spirit and encourage students to

watch Louisiana's Ragin' Cajuns in action. The Union Program Council's Spirit Committee took it from there. Volunteers created the "Red Zone" by painting three sections of the east side of the stadium. Wearing red is the ticket into that area, so free "Red Zone" t-shirts were distributed before and during home games.

Student groups were invited to attend Cajuns' spring practices. Freshman orientation included a video tour of campus that featured highlights of Ragin' Cajun football.

Ragin' Roar, a pep rally with a long tradition, was moved from Earl K. Long Gym to Cajun Field. Another twist: Cajun cornerback Charles Tillman emceed the event. "Ragin' Roar definitely set the tone for the season," said Jessica Clarke, SGA president.

EARLY START

The Office of Public Relations and News Services mapped out a multi-faceted "Bustle Up, It's A New Game"



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campaign soon after the new head coach was hired.

One of the first tasks: publicize the new NCAA attendance regulations.

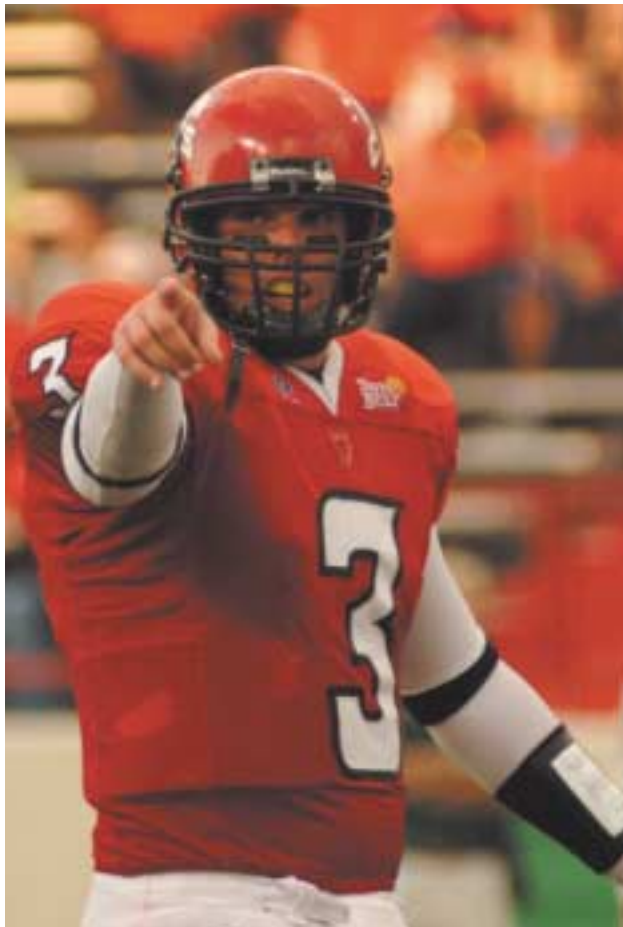
Home game attendance was also promoted through *La Louisiane*, a weekly e-mail newsletter, press releases, and local television and radio programs, and other direct promotions.

Fans got a chance to meet the Cajuns' new head coach in late spring when the Bustle Tour rolled across Louisiana. In July, Bustle conducted the first Women's Football Clinic, which drew about 200 female participants.

FOOTBALL MEANS FUN

The position of assistant director for marketing and promotions was created in the Public Relations and News Services Office.

Eric Maron, former assistant director for broadcast media at UL Lafayette, was tapped for the job. He had previously worked in entertainment market-



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Quarterback John Van Cleave shows some attitude.

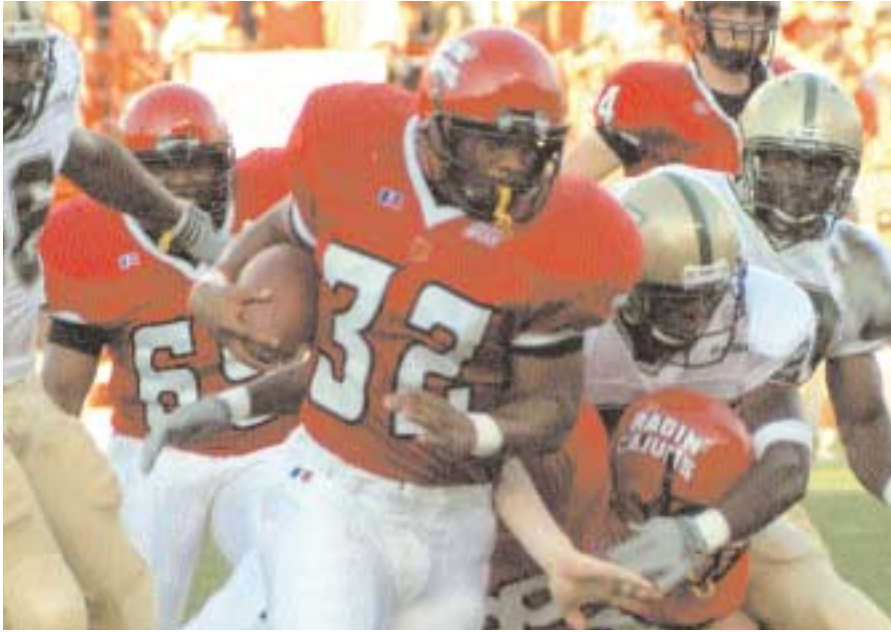


A tiny tailgater at Cajun Field.

ing with Circus Vargas and was marketing director for Private Cable Systems of America.

"Eric's main focus has been to create partnerships with businesses, fans and the media to increase awareness and support of Ragin' Cajun football, and to make each game day a family event filled with fun for everyone," said Julie Simon-Dronet, director of Public Relations and News Services.

Maron said that once fans arrive at the stadium, they need to be entertained by more than the football game. "We want families to come out to Cajun Field on five Saturdays each year, and they should have so much fun



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that they want to come back for more," he said.

Maron added pre-game activities for kids, such as a petting zoo and fun jump.

WIN, WIN, WIN

Residents across Acadiana were encouraged to "Get in the Game and Win." When fans entered the stadium gates, many became instant winners. Prizes included Ragin' Cajun quartz watches, seat cushions, key chains, lapel pins, megaphones, miniature footballs, rain ponchos and CheerStix.

Winning continued throughout each game. Some lucky fans won a chance to take home the grand prize, a red GMC truck from Courtesy GMC that's outfitted with a tailgating barbecue pit from Percy Guidry Home and Hearth. KLFY was also a sponsor of that Grand Prize.

Other spectators each won large-screen televisions, \$500 cash giveaways, and special tailgating packages that included a tailgating tent.

Other companies pitched in by:

- including references to Louisiana's Ragin' Cajuns in their advertising messages;
- producing home game schedules;

- sponsoring promotional banners;
- promoting game days on company marquees;
- participating in "Support Louisiana's Ragin' Cajuns, It's Good for Business," campaign;
- hosting live remotes;
- promoting ticket giveaways;
- making live appearances on television and radio; and

- promoting and selling Ragin' Cajun merchandise.

CLEANER AND BETTER

Before the season got under way, volunteers helped spruce up Cajun Field.

Under the direction of Gerald Hebert, UL Lafayette's new athletic development coordinator, they scrubbed and repainted the facility. Local artists painted murals depicting moments in Louisiana's Ragin' Cajuns football history.

The old scoreboard was refurbished and transformed into an attractive message center for the university.

Media facilities were also improved, thanks to sponsors.

TICKET TEAMWORK

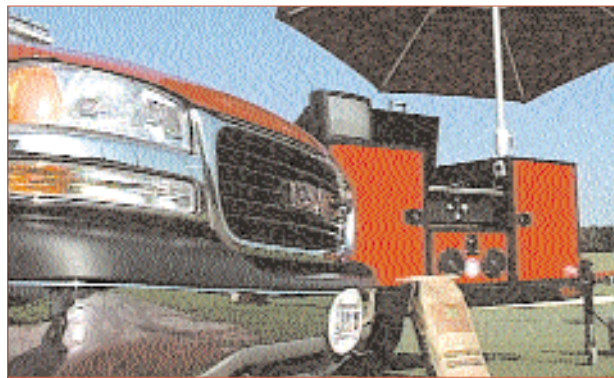
The university's Alumni Association leadership joined forces with the Athletic Department to promote season ticket sales.

Robert Trahan, president of the UL Lafayette Alumni Association, and Jim Doyle, past president of the Association, were co-chairs of the drive. They recruited volunteers to lead teams throughout the region who concentrated on selling season tickets to bring back former fans and attract new ones.

Doyle and Trahan got backup from three honorary co-chairs – former Ragin' Cajun head football coaches Russ Faulkinberry, Sam Robertson and Nelson Stokley.

Trahan and Doyle also cooked up a new way businesses could help fill the stadium: block ticket sales and strategic distribution of those tickets. "Many new fans walked through the gates at Cajun Field as a result of the generosity of 13 Acadiana companies who purchased and used large numbers of tickets," said Simon-Dronet.

UL Lafayette transferred ticket operations to the Cajundome to make it as convenient as possible for fans to buy tickets. Tickets are now sold at the dome's full service box office, Monday through Friday from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.



Generous sponsors donated giveaways that included a GMC truck and tailgating barbecue pit, CheerStix, rain ponchos, miniature footballs and megaphones, key chains and Ragin' Cajuns watches.

MONEY MATTERS

Operation Kickoff began in January 2001 to endow athletic scholarships. Former Ragin' Cajun and current New Orleans Saints quarterback Jake Delhomme is co-chairman, along with alums D'Lane Wimberly and Mike Arabie.

"To maintain its competitiveness, donor commitment similar to that in the academic *Investing in Our Future* centennial campaign will be necessary to provide



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adequate funding to the Ragin' Cajun athletic program," said John T. Landry, director of Development.

The UL Lafayette Foundation cre-

ated a new committee to ensure that donations are used for donor's intended purposes and that donors receive appropriate recognition for their gifts.

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For more information about contributing to Operation Kickoff, contact Landry at (337) 482-GIFT or gift@louisiana.edu ■

New Directions

Coaches plan to parlay past success into winning programs

Four new coaches are leading Louisiana's Ragin' Cajuns teams. • They are Lance Veazey, track and field; J. Kelley Hall, women's basketball; Becky Madden, volleyball; and Justin McGrath, men's and women's tennis. • "We're looking forward to these coaches using their experience and talent to take Ragin' Cajuns programs to a higher level of performance," said Nelson Schexnayder, UL Lafayette athletic director. "We're confident that our student-athletes will benefit from working with these new leaders."

TRACK AND FIELD

Lance Veazey, a former assistant track coach at UL Lafayette, replaces veteran head coach Charles Lancon, who died April 13, 2002, of a heart attack at age 67. Under Lancon's leadership, Louisiana's Ragin' Cajuns® earned 17 conference titles.



Lance Veazey

Veazey first worked with Lancon as a student assistant coach from 1990-93. He then became assistant track and field coach at Blinn College in Brenham, Texas, where he coached eight National Junior College Athletic Association national championship squads, 15 junior college All-Americans, seven NJCAA individual national champions and five national junior college record holders.

Veazey left Blinn to coach at the University of Texas, Austin, where he helped guide the Longhorns to the

1995 Southwest Conference outdoor championship, one of a string of six straight league titles for the UT squad.

Later that year, Veazey went to Southeastern Louisiana University in Hammond, where he was in charge of jumping events for men and women, as well as working with sprinters and hurdlers. His job responsibilities included recruiting and handling administrative duties.

Veazey returned to UL Lafayette in 1997 as an assistant coach. The following year, the Ragin' Cajuns men's squad continued the most successful streak in Sun Belt history by winning its eighth straight conference outdoor title.

He earned an associate degree from Blinn College in 1990 and a bachelor's degree with honors from USL in 1992. In 1994, he received a master's degree from Prairie View A&M, with a 3.7 grade point average, while coaching at Blinn.

WOMEN'S BASKETBALL

Along with 19 years of collegiate coaching experience, J. Kelley Hall brings an impressive recruitment record



J. Kelley Hall

to UL Lafayette's women's basketball program.

He spent the past two seasons coaching at the University of Louisville, where he coordinated recruiting and handled the on-

floor coaching duties of the post players.

Hall's first recruiting class at Louisville included the second-ranked junior college player in the country.

Before joining the University of Louisville program, he was recruiting coordinator at Auburn University. His first recruiting class there was ranked fourth in the nation by *Blue Chip* magazine. His second recruiting class ranked fifth overall in the country; every player was named an All-American by *USA Today*.

Hall's third and fourth recruiting classes at Auburn were ranked in the Top 10 in the nation by *USA Today*.

At UL Lafayette, Hall is tackling his first Division 1 head coaching job. He has also coached at Troy State, Cal State Fullerton and Mississippi State.

He holds a bachelor's degree in secondary education from Troy State.

WOMEN'S VOLLEYBALL

Becky Madden has experience rebuilding a volleyball program.

Prior to joining Louisiana's Ragin' Cajuns®



Becky Madden

program, she was head coach for three years at Valparaiso University in Valparaiso, Ind., which is in the Mid-Continent Conference. Prior to her arrival, the school was 6-8 in conference play. This past season, however, the Crusaders earned a 10-2 conference record and nabbed a spot in the conference tournament championship match. That success earned Madden the league's Coach of the Year award.

Before her Valpo coaching run, Madden was an assistant coach at some of the top volleyball programs in the country, including Clemson and South Florida.

While a student at Purdue – a Big Ten school – she was a four-year letter winner. She later played professionally in Holland.

After receiving a bachelor's degree in psychology at Purdue, Madden earned a master's degree in therapeutic recreation at Wisconsin-LaCrosse in 1992.

MEN'S AND WOMEN'S TENNIS

Justin McGrath, former assistant coach at the University of Arkansas, will lead Louisiana's Ragin' Cajuns' men's and women's tennis programs.

McGrath contributed to the Razorbacks' biggest turnaround in tennis in 10 years. When he joined the coaching staff in 1999, the Razorbacks were unranked. This past season, the team finished 25th in the nation and competed in the second round of the NCAA Tournament.



Justin McGrath

Before his stint at the University of Arkansas, McGrath was an academy coach at John Newcombe's Tennis Academy in New Branfels, Texas, for several years. There, he coached several nationally and internationally ranked players.

McGrath has coached at several other private academies and clubs, also.

He holds a bachelor's degree in education/recreation sports programming from the University of Arkansas. ■

WEBSITE ENABLES RAGIN' CAJUNS TO STAY CONNECTED

As RETIRED UL LAFAYETTE professor spearheaded the creation of an information network for all former UL Lafayette athletes, athletics program staff and spirit groups.

The Athletic Network is a collection of names, contact information, bios and historical facts. Its purpose is to identify, locate and communicate with former athletes and associated groups.

Dr. Ed Dugas, former professor of health and physical education, said the idea to develop this type of data base came from discussions with Liz Landry, director of UL Lafayette's Advancement Services, about the athletic portion of the university's centennial observance.

"During Centennial, it was revealed that only a small percentage of former athletes and their support groups were in contact with each other and the university," he said.

So, with the help of his son, John Dugas, he mailed over 2,400 data request cards to former athletes to verify contact information. The pair then set up a website – www.athleticnetwork.net

– to share the information.

That website was designed, and is now hosted by, Firefly Digital. Mike Spears, a former USL cheerleader, is president of that firm.

The Athletic Network is organized by sport. For each sport, there is a tier arrangement of captains and co-captains. Dugas expects more than 300 captains to be listed before the end of the year.

By July 1 of next year, he predicts, information for about 6,000 former athletes, cheerleaders, dance team members, coaches, managers, trainers and sports information personnel will be posted.

Since the website was activated, additions and improvements have been made. For instance, athletes can update their own profiles, photos of Athletic Network tailgating have been posted, and viewers can get the latest news about Ragin' Cajun athletics on the site.

For more information, contact Ed Dugas at (337) 482-0999 or athletic-network@louisiana.edu ■

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