

**Game Attendance In Luxury: Purchase Motivations Of Suites And Club Level Seating In Division I College Football**

Kurt C. Mayer  
Corinne McPadden

Olzhas Taniyev

*Roanoke College*

Division I Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS) athletic departments generate revenues from ticket sales, and premium seating areas provide spectators with upgrades in exclusive stadium areas for a substantial fee. The focus of this study was to determine purchase motivations for college football premium seating, where emergent themes were discerned from data provided by actual premium seating users and expert athletic administrators. Results indicated the following prevalent themes (and sub-themes) on motivations to purchase luxury suites: experience (comfort and amenities, watching the game), entertainment of others (family and friends, corporate), prestige, and support. In club level seating, results indicated purchase motivations included: watching the game (view, seat setting), upgraded amenities (climate comfort, food and beverages/alcohol), prestige, and support. Chiefly, the findings indicated college football premium seating spectators are distinct from general seating attendees. Also, the project expanded the premium seating literature in college sport, club seating, and beyond just corporate clientele.

In the Division I Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS) level of the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), most athletic department generated revenue is from the associated components with game attendance (Fulks, 2017). Ticket sales constitute the second largest generated revenue source, while monetary donations are the largest. At times these two areas are connected where a cash donation can be required to access tickets. Regardless, spectators with tickets in the general seating area sit in bleachers or hard seats and have access to the stadium's main concourse with its concession and kiosk offerings. However, general season ticketholders do not have access to the premium seating section of the stadium, as this area is restricted to only those with the more exclusive and expensive premium seating ticket. Additionally, the higher price points of premium seating tickets produce three to four times more revenue per attendee than general seating (Brown et al., 2016; Mason & Howard, 2008), which affords these ticketholders special stadium access and amenities beyond general seating.

Premium seating patrons are afforded special facility access to indoor club and lounge areas, more private and comfortable seating and bathrooms, and other amenities not available to general seating ticketholders. A premium seating ticket can come in several forms, but it is common for FBS stadiums to offer club level seating and luxury suites. A club level seat is an individual ticket that affords access to the club areas, and comes with a single upgraded seat. A luxury suite requires the

purchase of an entire room, and each of the approximately 20 tickets in the luxury box (Mayer et al., 2017), that is typically indoors with multiple seats to watch the game and utilize the space as desired. All suite patrons also gain access to the club areas.

As college football attendance has declined (Dodd, 2020), the demand for premium seating has grown (Hall, 2022; Hislop, 2022). Athletic administrators have thusly sought more premium attendees to replace revenues from general seating spectators, which has resulted in the expansion of premium seating through conversion of general seating stadium spaces (Pope, 2019; Wallstreet, 2020). Additionally, the rise in athletic expenses (Boettger, 2021; Mariner & Cartwright, 2020), coupled with the budgetary strains in higher education, have accelerated the necessity that athletic departments seek revenue independent of the institution (Enright, 2020). Given this college athletic facility and revenue pivot to premium seating, there is a need to have a better understanding of premium consumers. However, little research has been conducted on premium seating with most focused on professional sport (Titlebaum & Lawrence, 2010). The professional sport focus is a concern as colleges often operate in markets that are not large cities, and are most often free of professional sport, that result in different fans and consumers (Mayer et al., 2017). Therefore, this project aimed to create a foundational knowledge base of college premium seating purchases across the Division I FBS. Additionally, within

premium seating there is a need to differentiate between a luxury suite and a club level seat, given the even more substantial financial investment required to lease a suite (Brown et al., 2016; Mason & Howard, 2008), which minimal research has conducted (Popp et al., 2017). As such, the purpose of this research was to investigate the purchase motivations of these college football premium seating consumers, with a focus for club level seating and luxury suites. Altogether, this investigation should help to better understand this seating area and its clientele to enhance future revenues and stabilize athletic department budgets. Then, sales strategies and spectator environments can be crafted that are best suited to the premium seating consumers of club seats and luxury suites.

### **Literature Review**

The sport management literature on game attendance has received varying attention (Kim et al., 2019). Early works focused on team factors (Noll, 1974), and shifted to spectator behavior (Sloan, 1989; Wann, 1995). The Motivation Scale for Sport Consumption (MSSC) put forth general spectator attendance around motives of achievement, knowledge acquisition, drama, escape, aesthetics, family, social interaction, physical attraction, and physical skill (Trail & James, 2001; Trail, Fink, & Anderson, 2003). Also, attendance motivations research has included professional football (Brown et al., 2004; Coates & Humphreys, 2005; Coates & Humphreys, 2010; Hansen & Gauthier, 1989) and

college football (DeSchrive & Jensen, 2002; Falls & Natke, 2014; Hungenberg & Mayer, 2019; Mayer, 2021; Wells et al., 2000).

### **Division I College Football Attendance**

At the Division I FBS level, the stadium and customer service experience has been denoted to motivate spectator attendance of various fan segments (Lawrence et al., 2020; Wakefield & Sloan, 1995). Additionally, Robinson et al. (2005) denoted spectators were fans of the sport and of the team, where attendance was motivated by vicarious achievement, aesthetics, drama/eustress, physical skill, knowledge acquisition, escape, social elements, and identification with the organization. Palanjian et al. (2014) also supported attendance from aspects around the game like stadium elements, cleanliness and concessions, as well as from opportunities to socialize and escape daily life. In terms of non-premium season-ticket holders, Pan and Baker (2005) indicated renewals were related to performance, but its impact lessened as the years of ticket ownership increased. Student-aged research has indicated attendance motives included self-esteem, family, and entertainment (Wann et al., 2008), as well as attachment/love of the game, escape, excitement, and eustress (Kahle et al., 1996; Keaton et al., 2015; Swanson et al., 2003). Other motives have included group affiliation and pre-game activities like tailgating (Kahle et al., 1996; Keaton et al., 2015; Swanson et al., 2003; Wann et al.,

2008). Keaton et al. (2015) also denoted college football fandom was influenced by geography and family.

Importantly, fan segment differences have existed between football attendees such as by gender, age, attachment level, and ticket-type (Chang et al., 2019; Palanjian et al., 2004; Pan & Baker, 2005; Robinson & Trail, 2005; Swanson et al., 2003; Trail, Robinson, et al., 2003; Woo et al., 2009). As such, given the financial investment required to purchase premium seating tickets it is likely differences exist between general seating and premium seating attendees (Brown et al., 2016; Mason & Howard, 2008). However, a basic understanding of the premium seating spectator segment is needed. Moreover, attendance literature has only marginally explored premium seating, where college football premium seating has been minimally investigated (Mayer et al., 2017). Therefore, this work focused on college premium seating spectator motivations, and provided a knowledge base of these Division I FBS spectators.

### **Premium Seating and College Athletic Donors**

The premium seating literature is a growing topic that has mainly focused on professional sport (Balliau et al., 2020; Chang et al., 2019; Shapiro et al., 2012), and not on spectator motivations. Rather, research has highlighted food and beverage trends (Titlebaum, 2015; Titlebaum & Kloke, 2015; Titlebaum et al., 2011), as well as staff positions and the sales process (Pierce et al., 2013; Titlebaum et

al., 2014). Notably, the value of premium seating administrators has been denoted, and how salient their position is to the sport organization with obtaining initial sales and subsequent renewals from their client insights and customer service (Lawrence & Moberg, 2009; Lawrence & Titlebaum, 2010; Titlebaum & Lawrence, 2009). Historical views of stadiums and industry overviews have also been conducted (Seifried & Tutka, 2016; Titlebaum & Lawrence, 2011), which linked premium seating to sponsorships (Cousens et al., 2006; Lachowetz et al., 2003; Titlebaum et al., 2013; Sutton et al., 2000).

Research has mainly explored the corporate realm of premium seating in professional sport. Lawrence et al. (2009) and Lawrence et al. (2013) investigated corporate client characteristics in the National Football League (NFL), National Hockey League (NHL), and National Basketball Association (NBA). Results indicated nearly half of clients came from top industry segments, but organizations of various types and sizes purchased suites. Comparatively, organizations with a smaller number of employees and smaller asset size purchased club seating. Additionally, luxury suite research has focused on pricing of North American professional sport (Shapiro et al., 2012) and top college football (Mayer et al., 2017). The college county population negatively impacted price, a stark difference to professional suites, which highlighted the uniqueness of the college premium seating market. As such, the team locations and clients are much dif-

ferent between college sport and professional sport (Mayer et al., 2017). Another unique element is that for some college attendees a donation requirement can be attached to the ability to attain tickets (Martinez et al., 2010), and football can be an influence on that decision to donate (Martinez et al., 2010). As such, literature has explored college athletic donors (Mahony et al., 2003; Shapiro, 2010; Stinson & Howard, 2004; Tsioutsou, 2004).

In terms of donor motives, research has indicated giving to an athletic department has been connected to philanthropic support of the institution and team, as well as a display of commitment and attachment (Bass et al., 2015; Gladden et al., 2005; Ko et al., 2014; Staurowsky et al., 1996). Some donors have also denoted the power and influence their giving provides them, particularly with being able to offer input on athletic department decisions (Ko et al., 2014; Staurowsky et al., 1996). Contrastingly, others have donated because it then affords them social opportunities and special events (Bogina & Gordon, 2021; Gladden et al., 2005; Ko et al., 2014; Staurowsky et al., 1996). Whereas the above pertain to more intrinsic motives, another common motive has focused on the tangible donation benefits. In particular, common motives for donors have involved the benefits of gaining access to tickets, priority seating, and parking (Bass et al., 2015; Bogina & Gordon, 2021; Gladden et al., 2005; Ko et al., 2014; Mahony et al., 2003; Staurowsky et al., 1996). However, the area is further complicated as a donation is not

always required for premium seating, and there is no standard procedure for how athletic departments must calculate and report donations connected to premium seating (Mayer et al., 2017). Furthermore, research has indicated that consumers did not like when a donation was linked to their ability to attain tickets, which made the donation feel coerced, forced, or unnecessary to obtain tickets (Bass et al., 2015; Gladden et al., 2005). Notably, the potential of a donation being a requirement to purchase college tickets in general seating or premium seating highlights that there are elements that can reach across college sport regardless of seating type, and also displays an elemental difference between college and professional sport. However, while the above donor motivations could give some insights to premium seating, none of the literature has explored donations nor motives in connection to any form of premium seating. As such, there is a need to explicitly explore motivations to premium seating at the college level. Additionally, research has indicated differences among the various donor segments (Popp et al., 2016; Shapiro & Ridinger, 2011), which further supports the need to explore premium seating consumer motives.

Titlebaum and Lawrence (2009) were among the first to explore perceived motives to premium seating purchases, as based upon the perceptions of administrators in the Big Four professional sport leagues regarding professional suites (i.e., NFL, NBA, NHL, Major League Baseball). However, that input was from



those only in professional sport and on professional premium seating, and did not consider college sport with its different consumers and their desired features (Mayer et al., 2017; Popp et al., 2017). Also, the Titlebaum and Lawrence (2010) survey creation did not consider any input from actual premium seating consumers, which is troublesome as administrators and fans have differed on their perceived importance of attendance areas (Dick & Turner, 2007).

Moreover, the Titlebaum and Lawrence (2010) results indicated few perceived suite ownership motivational differences between the Big Four professional sports, and highlighted the importance of relationships for suite sales, of entertaining business clients, as well as team performance. When these results were compared to perceptions of college suite administrators from a single college conference, the Southeastern Conference (SEC), administrators indicated mostly similar perceived suite purchase motivations between the college conference and professional suites (Titlebaum et al., 2012). While it was suggested some college suite purchases were more for personal use and community support, the highest-rated perceived motivator in both levels was entertainment of business clients. Interestingly, Popp et al. (2017) utilized the same 10-item measurement with actual suite users of a specific college football team, and the results indicated key differences between the professional and college levels. Mainly, the college consumers denoted that the business-related motives were *not important* to them, a sharp contrast to the results put forth

by Titlebaum et al. (2012) and Titlebaum and Lawrence (2010). Rather, the value of exclusivity in the venue was an important motive to these college football premium consumers. Furthermore, the team performance and brand image of the team were important in both the professional and collegiate realms. It is also notable that the sample of actual users in Popp et al. (2017) resulted in user ratings that were *lower* than the administrator ratings of Titlebaum et al. (2012) and Titlebaum and Lawrence (2010). Therefore, the above discrepancies indicate that there is a need to further explore this motivation area, and to do so with input from across the country and from administrators and users. As such, the first objective of this project was to analyze the purchase motivations connected to college football luxury suites.

RQ 1: According to premium seating administrators and actual users from across the FBS, what reasons motivate the purchase of a college football luxury suite?

Additionally, Popp et al. (2017) included club level seating, an area that is largely unnoticed in premium seating research. The motives to purchase club level seats were nearly identical to suites, albeit suites had slightly higher ratings. Popp et al. (2017) also denoted the need for work to be completed from more than one school, as their study consisted of users from just a single institution. As such, this study aimed to fill that gap in the literature. Therefore, the second objective of this project was to analyze the purchase motivations connected to college football club level seats.

RQ 2: According to premium seating administrators and actual users from across the FBS, what reasons motivate the purchase of a college football club level seat?

Collectively, the college premium seating investigations have only been conducted on users from one school, administrators from one conference, or focused on suite prices in the Power Five. In addition to a need for research on college premium seating, there is also a need to include Division I institutions from across the FBS (Mayer et al., 2017; Titlebaum et al., 2012). Further, a need exists to understand not just corporate purchasers of luxury suites, but to include individual purchasers of premium seating through input from both administrators and actual users (Titlebaum & Lawrence, 2010; Titlebaum et al., 2013). A gap in the literature also exists for investigations to explore club level seating (Popp et al., 2017). The above research questions would aid to form a foundational knowledge base for college premium seating regarding luxury suites and club seats.

Given the paucity of literature on college premium seating, and highlighted differences between professional and college attendance in general seating and premium seating, this work also aimed to gain an understanding on all Division I FBS college football premium seating attendees. In particular, more analysis is needed on what entices spectators to purchase all forms of premium seating, defined to be not just suites or club seats, but to include other premium options such as loge boxes, cabanas, and field

terraces. As such, the third objective of the project was to analyze what all premium seating spectators, broadly defined, enjoyed in their experience over general seating in the football stadium.

RQ 3: According to premium seating administrators and actual users from across the FBS, what do college football spectators who purchase premium seating get out of their experience over general seating?

### **Method**

The present study aimed to investigate the primary motivations to purchase college football premium seating. Given the paucity of empirical evidence concerning motivations to purchase collegiate premium seating ticket options, an open-ended qualitative survey was developed to elicit responses from all perspectives and establish a foundational knowledge base across Division I FBS (Lock & Filo, 2012; Lyons & Coyle, 2016; Moller et al., 2009). The use of online questionnaires was particularly advantageous for open-ended responses and expediting survey delivery (Dillman, 2007). Further, given the emphasis on a relatively understudied area, the survey focused on participants offering their perspectives in an expressive manner, the aspect instrumental in promoting credibility of qualitative inquiries (Bernard, 2002; Patton, 2002; Shenton, 2004). Specifically, the survey was designed to elicit more in-depth data and delve into participants' experiences related to the purchase motivations of their premium seating via perceptions

from athletic administrators of their clientele, and from actual users of premium seating that purchased luxury suites and/or a club level seat (Gratton & Jones, 2004).

### **Data Collection Procedures and Open-Ended Survey**

To address the research questions, open-ended surveys were utilized with two NCAA Division I FBS premium seating participant groups. One group was athletic department administrators. The other group consisted of the actual premium seating users of luxury suites and/or club level seats.

For a deeper understanding, a five-question open-ended survey was developed to uncover insights about consumers' motivations for purchasing premium seating. To further understand the phenomenon, the main question and sub-question approach was utilized for suites and club seats as previous research has indicated attendance motivations to be multifaceted (Kim et al., 2019). The overarching question was intended to capture the goal of the study, and sub-question aided to guide the process through more information and specifics being gathered, where together they enhanced comprehension of the phenomenon (Agee, 2006; Creswell, 2014; Dures et al., 2017; Lock & Filo, 2012). Two questions involved luxury suites which included "Please describe the main reason that motivates the purchase of college football luxury suites," as well as "Please describe some other reasons,

factors, or secondary areas that motivate the purchase of college football luxury suites." Two questions involved club level seats that mirrored the first two questions, which included "Please describe the main reason that motivates the purchase of college football club level seats," as well as "Please describe some other reasons, factors, or secondary areas that motivate the purchase of college football club level seats." Lastly, as the premium seating level consist of more than just club seat or luxury suite, to account for access to all premium areas the survey contained the question of "Please describe what those that purchase premium seating get out of their experience over general seating." It should be noted that athletic administrators responded to each of the above questions. However, a premium seating user only responded to the questions that aligned with their purchase history. As such, a user only answered the luxury suite questions if they had previously purchased a suite. Likewise, a user only answered the club level seat questions if they had previously purchased a club seat. If a user had previously purchased a suite and club seat, that participant answered both sets of questions. Regardless of suite and/or club purchase designation, each participant responded to the premium seating over general seating question, as well as some demographic information.

As past research highlighted the importance of administrators, these practitioners were targeted for insights as experts in this space, a consistent technique



with other premium seating research (Lawrence & Titlebaum, 2010; Titlebaum & Lawrence, 2010). However, this project did not aim to be like previous investigations and solely reliant on the insights of administrators (Titlebaum & Lawrence, 2009; Titlebaum & Lawrence, 2010). As such, to increase the trustworthiness of results, responses were also elicited from the actual premium users. Additionally, in each participant group (i.e., administrators and users), representation was from across all of Division I FBS, as opposed to just premium seating of a single institution (Popp et al., 2017).

To establish consistency between the research questions and our sample, an athletics staff directory analysis for each website of the 130 FBS institutions was performed. The sampling strategy was deemed appropriate given the lack of empirical evidence regarding the research area and participants' extensive familiarity with the topic, the aspect of utmost importance given the qualitative inquiry (Kemper et al., 2003; Miles & Huberman, 1994). In sample suitability criteria, athletics staff directories aided identification in potential participants. Suitable study participants were contacted via email regarding voluntary participation and survey details. After the first recruitment email, a two-week reminder was sent to maximize response rates (Dillman, 2007). Premium seating users were also recruited for voluntary participation through emails with study details and surveys, with a two-week reminder. The inclusion of users was also important as those that

have experienced this seating area. Users were identified through two avenues. In one avenue, each administrator participant was asked to distribute the survey to some of their clients given the privacy concerns in college athletic departments, and follow the above protocol. In a second avenue, aimed to reduce bias in the sample and have more well-rounded representation in the sample, social media and popular press articles were utilized to identify those that have at some point purchased premium seating as current or former premium seating purchasers. Then, those individuals were contacted by the researchers to participate in the study in the same protocol as above.

### **Sample**

The sample contained 67 responses that included 42 athletic administrators and 25 users. The final sample was deemed adequate due to reaching the point of data saturation (i.e., no new findings) (Fusch & Ness, 2015). The data set also surpassed sample sizes of other premium seating investigations (Titlebaum & Lawrence, 2010; Titlebaum et al., 2013), as well as established sample size requirements (Lyons & Coyles, 2016; Wimmer & Dominick, 2006).

### ***Participants: Athletic Administrators and Users***

Athletic administrator participant responses ( $N = 42$ ) were received from athletic department personnel from each of the Power Five ( $n = 24$ ) and Group of Five conferences ( $n = 18$ ), as well as

each of the four geographic regions of the country, as well as eight of the nine geographic divisions except the New England division (“Census,” n.d.). On average, college administrators worked in premium seating for over 8 years in fundraising/development ( $n = 35$ ) or sales and service ( $n = 7$ ), and were male ( $n = 34$ ). Table 1 provides a further breakdown.

Participant responses from premium seating users ( $N = 25$ ) were received from eight different teams. All but one of the Power Five conferences ( $n = 20$ ) were represented from six teams, and one Group of Five conference ( $n = 5$ ) was represented from two teams. Re-

sponses were from the South ( $n = 22$ ) and Midwest ( $n = 3$ ) geographic regions, which represented three geographic divisions. On average, participants attended games in the premium seating area for 13 years, were mostly male ( $n = 19$ ), and aged 54 years. All participants had attended college, and distance travelled to game was split nearly evenly with slightly more traveling under 31 miles to the game ( $n = 14$ ) than over 60 miles to the game ( $n = 11$ ). Lastly, the distribution was about even between club seat purchasers ( $n = 17$ ) and luxury suite purchasers ( $n = 13$ ), but some participants purchased both seating areas. Table 2 provides a further breakdown.

**Table 1**  
*Participant Demographics: Athletic Administrators*

Conference Representation	Regions & Sub-Regions	Job Area	Gender	Industry Experience
<b>Power Five</b>	<b>Midwest</b>			
ACC	East North Central			
BIG 10	West North Central			
BIG 12	<b>Northeast</b>			
PAC	Middle Atlantic	<b>Fundraising &amp; Development</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>Male</b>
SEC	New England		<b>34</b>	<b>1-5 Years</b>
<b>Group of Five</b>	<b>South</b>			<b>21</b>
AMER	East South Central	<b>Sales &amp; Service</b>		<b>6-10 Years</b>
CUSA	South Atlantic		<b>7</b>	<b>10</b>
MAC	West South Central		<b>Female</b>	<b>11-15 Years</b>
MTW	<b>West</b>		<b>8</b>	<b>7</b>
SUN	Mountain			<b>16-20 Years</b>
	Pacific			<b>1</b>
				<b>21+ Years</b>
				<b>3</b>

Note: # indicates two respondents from a single institution participated in the study

**Table 2***Participant Demographics: Premium Seating Users*

Conference Participation	Regions & Sub-Regions	Travel Distance to Game	Gender	Years Purchased
<b>Power Five</b>	<b>Midwest</b>			
ACC	East North Central			
BIG 10	West North Central			
BIG 12	<b>Northeast</b>	<b>Under 1 mile</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>1-5 Years</b>
PAC	Middle Atlantic	<b>1-5 miles</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>6-10 Years</b>
SEC	New England	<b>6-10 miles</b>		<b>11-15 Years</b>
<b>Group of Five</b>	<b>South</b>	<b>11-30 miles</b>		<b>16-20 Years</b>
AMER	East South Central	<b>31-60 miles</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>21+ Years</b>
CUSA	South Atlantic	<b>60+ Miles</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>No Response</b>
MAC	West South Central			
MTW	<b>West</b>			
SUN	Mountain			
	Pacific			

**Data Analysis**

The anonymous participant responses were examined and coded into categories for thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Specifically, the content analysis was used to group participant responses for further review and interpretation of the entire data set by each author separately (Creswell, 2014). Further, data were analyzed using the inductive approach (i.e., taking direction from the responses) to discern emerging themes from the data and organize the responses into main concepts and sub-categories (Kyn-gas, 2020). To this end, we condensed in-depth responses inherent in the transcripts into a summary format (Thomas, 2006). Further, project trustworthiness was aided from the use of a wide range of participants to verify individual perspectives against others, and having provided a detailed description of the phenomenon under study (Shenton, 2004). Once each author had completed their analysis, the researchers came together to form a consensus among the results. After a substantial discussion among

the authors, and several rounds of the analysis coding procedure, inter-coder agreement was achieved, thereby assuring rigor and transparency of the data concerning spectator motivations to purchase premium seating (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Additionally, expert reviews and member checks were conducted, to ensure the trustworthiness and accuracy of the project's findings (Merriam, 2009; Thomas, 2006).

Trustworthiness was established using verification strategies of methodological coherence, appropriate sample, collecting and analyzing concurrently, thinking theoretically, theory development, independent parallel coding/inter-coder agreement, expert review, and member checks (Merriam, 2009; Morse et al., 2002; Thomas, 2006). To this end, methodological coherence was prioritized to allow for congruence between the aforementioned research questions and the current methodology (e.g., appropriate sample, concurrent data analysis). The present inquiry's focus on rigor guided verification of new inferences and parti-

nent theory emerging from the data. In addition, thick descriptions of the findings reconfirmed emergent conceptualizations and furthered implications of the data (Creswell, 2014). To ensure our participants' anonymity, all identifying data were removed from the responses (Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

## Results

Salient themes and sub-themes in relation to the study's research questions were revealed, thereby elucidating emergent patterns within the data. Table 3 contains representation of the relevant themes to each research question associated with administrator responses, premi-

**Table 3**  
*Results by Research Question*

	RQ 1 Luxury Suites	RQ 2 Club Level	RQ 3 Premium Seating Over Gen. Seating
<b>Administrator</b> Main Theme Subtheme	Experience <i>Comfort &amp; Amenities</i> <i>Watching the Game</i>	Watching the Game <i>View</i> <i>Seat Setting</i>	Comfort & Amenities
	Entertainment of Others <i>Family &amp; Friends</i> <i>Corporate</i>	Upgraded Amenities <i>Climate Comfort</i> <i>Food &amp; Beverages/ Alcohol</i>	Prestige
	Prestige	Prestige	
	Support	Support	
<b>User</b> Main Theme Subtheme	Experience <i>Comfort &amp; Amenities</i>	Watching the Game <i>Seat Setting</i>	Comfort & Amenities
	Entertainment of Others <i>Family &amp; Friends</i> <i>Corporate</i>	Upgraded Amenities <i>Climate Comfort</i> <i>Food &amp; Beverages/ Alcohol</i>	Prestige
		Prestige	
<b>Both Users &amp; Administrators</b> Main Theme Subtheme	Experience <i>Comfort &amp; Amenities</i>	Watching the Game <i>Seat Setting</i>	Comfort & Amenities
	Entertainment of Others <i>Family &amp; Friends</i> <i>Corporate</i>	Upgraded Amenities Climate Comfort Food & Beverages/Alcohol	Prestige
<b>Only Administrators</b> Main Theme Subtheme	Experience <i>Watching the Game</i>	Watching the Game <i>View</i>	
	Prestige	Support	
	Support		

um seating user responses, and similarities and differences from the two groups.

### **Luxury Suites (RQ 1)**

The findings for motivations to purchase college football luxury suites are reported using the following themes (and sub-themes): experience (comfort and amenities, watching the game), entertainment of others (family and friends, corporate), prestige, and support. Of note, only the administrators denoted the watching the game sub-theme, as well as the prestige and support themes. All other themes and sub-themes were denoted by both administrators and users.

#### ***Experience***

Participant responses indicated attendees' motives revolved around the desire to have an elevated experience and first-class treatment. Administrator Participant 33 illustrated the theme in remarking "The main reason for the purchase of luxury suites is to have a private all-inclusive experience." This sentiment was echoed from the "fun in that environment," and ability to experience it all "in a premium space" by User Participant 8. These luxury suite buyers prioritized comfort, amenities, an enhanced viewing and entertainment experience, and convenience for their large groups. The responses underlined nuanced consumer expectations for premium spaces. For instance, Administrator Participant 24 responded suite consumers' decisions were affected by a want for "the highest quality of game-day experience." This result made it clear a combination of

inducements influenced consumers' preferences, and there was no single benefit of buying suites. The advantageous suite game-day experience was evidenced from Administrator Participant 29 when he said, "Experience. A better experience than sitting in the stands." Stated another way, User Participant 11 commented on "the ability to enjoy games with multiple friends in a comfortable environment." As further evidence, Administrator Participant 27 explained his clients' purchase motivations as "genuine desire to experience/possess high quality memories and goods." User Participant 2 also focused their remarks on the "experience" and "environment" during the game in a suite. These comments illustrated the multifaceted experience of consumer purchase decisions regarding college football luxury suites.

**Comfort and Amenities.** Participant responses pointed to enhanced comfort, amenities, and features included in luxury suites. Administrator Participant 41 identified spectators are influenced by consideration of "Comfort, enhanced food/beverage opportunities," as well as "parking opportunities." User Participant 3 supported this sentiment by denoting the "food and comfort" in the luxury suite, and User Participant 18 denoted having their own "amenities like a bathroom and a refrigerator." Additionally, Administrator Participant 1 denoted the ability "to gather together in luxury and style and enjoy the game day experience at the highest level with private high-end food off custom menus as well as full bar service within the suite." User Participant 8



supported these preferences for the “air conditioning, food, (and) cocktails” while User Participant 15 enjoyed the “catering” and “being out of the weather.” As such, participants indicated spectators sought the suite experience for comfort and amenities at football games.

**Watching the Game.** The upscale experience of watching the game impacted buying behavior. This sub-theme was highlighted as Administrator Participant 33 denoted being able to be in a suite “while watching football” and Administrator Participant 21 denoted when watching the game this space offered access to the “best seats.” Administrator Participant 39’s response of “the opportunity to watch the game in comfort”, as well as Administrator Participant 40’s response to “enjoy the game” also supported this luxury suite purchase motivation.

### ***Entertainment of Others***

The second luxury suite theme focused on consumers’ access to premium hospitality. Responses uncovered consumers’ approach to entertaining clients and family. To illustrate, User Participant 15 stated the suite was for “entertaining” and Administrator Participant 31 echoed the suite was for “entertainment.” Similarly, Administrator Participant 38 reported that “having their own area with their own guests is the biggest factor” for suite purchases. User Participant 18 also denoted in the suite the “interaction” element was important. Interestingly, there was a distinction between family and friends and corporate clients.

**Family and Friends.** Participants stressed the importance of interaction with family and friends provided by the suite. In Administrator Participant 20’s view, these spectators opt for luxury suite seats to “Spend time with family/friends in a private space allowing all to enjoy the game.” User Participant 1 supported this by stating the suite motive revolved around being able “to enjoy college football with my family and friends.” In a similar manner, Administrator Participant 19 opined, “... the main motivation to purchase suites is the social aspect. Being able to invite your friends and family and enjoy the game with food and drinks as if you’re in your own living room.” This was further supported when User Participant 3 denoted the suite is for the “large family and friends group, and want to experience the games together.” User Participants 2 and 15 also put forth this sentiment and denoted the suite was for “family and friends,” as well as a “great place for small children,” respectively. Evidently, an influence of consumer suite choices is the desire to spend quality time with family and friends.

**Corporate.** Participants identified client entertainment and business development as motivations for purchasing luxury suites. The motive was supported as User Participant 21 stated the main reason for the purchase was to “entertain customers,” and User Participant 16 echoed suite use with potential customers for “cultivation and stewardship.” User Participant 11 also denoted the use of the suite as “perks for company employees,” while User Participant 24

denoted it was his “corporate suite” that “my company owned.” Administrator Participant 42 echoed this sentiment by articulating, “... the main reason people purchase luxury suites is related to business. It is a great opportunity to entertain and build relationships with clients and prospects.” Clearly, the opportunity to further corporate interests motivated suite purchases.

### **Prestige**

The prestige motivator encapsulated the status, privacy, and exclusivity that came with purchasing a suite. Administrator Participant 34 highlighted “privacy, being exclusive, status symbol, (and) level of being catered to” represented major factors that influenced purchases. In addition, Administrator Participant 10 denoted “The exclusivity of being in a luxury suite creates a lot of motivation,” while Administrator 41 denoted the “status” and Administrator 17 denoted the “special access” that came with a suite. Further, Administrator Participant 38 denoted the biggest factor was “The exclusivity and having their own area.” As such, administrators indicated purchases were influenced by the associated prestige that came with a suite lease.

### **Support**

The last theme centered on support for the institution and its team. For example, Administrator Participant 9 mentioned, “Affinity for the school,” and Administrator Participant 11 shared “The main reason that we see luxury suites purchased is to support the University.”

This was also echoed by Administrator Participant 24 where “passion for the school’s program” was put forth. Similarly, Administrator Participant 12 indicated suite purchase consumers “Feel like they are donating and supporting the athletics program while getting something in return.”

### **Club Level (RQ 2)**

Motivations to purchase college football club level seating included the following themes (and sub-themes): watching the game (view, seat setting), upgraded amenities (climate comfort, food and beverages/alcohol), prestige, and support. Of note, only administrators denoted the view sub-theme, as well as the support theme. All other themes and sub-themes were denoted by both administrators and users.

### **Watching the Game**

Club level attendees valued watching the game in a premium setting, and doing so with a great view of the gameplay in a premium *seat*. Enjoyment from being able to view the action on the field was valued. However, it was also about the coziness that came with the seat. User Participant 13 denoted it was a “great gathering place” to be able “to watch the game.” Further, this sentiment was supported by the “viewing area” and “seating location” provided by the club level from Administrator Participant 34 and Administrator Participant 1, respectively. User Participant 23 also mentioned the “great seats” that were in this area. The response from Administrator Participant

23 summed up the area by remarking, “Access to what are likely the best seats in the house.” The two sub-themes are further explored below.

**View.** Spectators valued the view of the field a club level seat provided as Administrator Participant 31 remarked about the quality of the “sightlines” while Administrator Participant 3 denoted these were the “highest quality seats to view the game.” Administrator Participant 30 also mentioned the “great view” of the game from the club level, and Administrator Participant 2 also remarked spectators had a “desire to view the games from” the club level. The enjoyment of watching the game with a great view of the on-field action motivated club level purchases.

**Seat Setting.** Club level spectators expected higher luxury with their ticket, especially with the size and cushion of the seat. Administrator Participant 41 denoted, “better actual seats to sit in,” Administrator Participant 4 remarked on the “cushioned seat,” and Administrator Participant 28 noted, “high-end luxury with ample space similar to being at home.” User Participant 9 stated “it would be very uncomfortable and difficult for me to sit in regular seats. The school has gone to great lengths to provide us great seats that are extremely comfortable.” This sentiment was echoed by User Participant 4 by stating the club level provided “nicer seating for my parents when they want to attend games.” User Participant 14 also appreciated that the club level provided a “dedicated seat” and “more seat space.” Additionally, lux-

ury is not just from the actual seats with more leg room, but from the layout and mobility the club level provided. Administrator Participant 36 remarked consumers enjoyed that the club level setting provided “the option to sit outside in a covered area as well as the option to go inside and walk around freely,” while User Participant 9 denoted “the area is not crowded.” Further, User Participant 12 supported the theme by stating non-club seats “were too small” and “difficult to get in and out,” whereas the club level provided a “private space” and “club seats.”

### ***Upgraded Amenities***

Spectators enjoyed elevated comfort and amenities available in the club level, as Administrator Participant 26 expressed client purchases were motivated “to have the more upscale experience they won’t get sitting down in the lower bowl.” Administrator Participants 37 and 40 also echoed the “upscale amenities” and “premium benefits” provided by the club level, respectively. User Participant 6 supported this notion by stating the club level is a “first-class way to attend a game.” User Participant 23 also supported that club level “seats were an upgrade” from his general seating season tickets. Notably, these higher expectations did not span all areas, but were focused on climate comfort and concessions.

**Climate Comfort.** Spectators enjoyed that the club level provided protection from the elements in the forms of indoor access to heating and air-con-

ditioning, as well as outdoor areas with overhead covers and fans. User Participant 9 denoted climate comfort "... to get out of the weather, whether it is hot, cold, or raining, is a very big plus." User Participant 15 also valued "being out of the weather" in the club level, while User Participant 18 highlighted the "air-conditioned space." Additionally, User Participant 17 valued "the opportunity to go inside in bad weather," and User Participant 19 echoed appreciation for "the safety of enclosure" in the club level. Administrator Participant 39 highlighted the club level provides "relief from the outdoor conditions," while Administrator Participant 5 stated her clients' enjoyment of "the option to access a climate-controlled building."

**Food and Beverages/Alcohol.** The other upgraded amenity focused on food and beverages, which included alcoholic options. Primarily, spectators valued increased access to these high-end concessions. In the club level, spectators not only have access to these upgraded options, but it was denoted these upgrades are also not available in any other part of the stadium. User Participant 4 denoted the "better food and drink options" available in the club level. The availability of alcohol was also a focus, as User Participant 15 denoted preference for the "catering and drinks," while User Participant 13 referenced the "food and beverage availability." Similarly, Administrator Participant 38 stated, "Increased access to food and alcohol," while User Participant 7 appreciated the access to upgrades with "food" and "liquor lockers." User

Participant 12 summed up the area by stating that in the club level "food and alcohol were available. That way we don't have plan, purchase, prepare." As such, spectators expect, and look forward to, the higher-end concession options club seats afford them.

### ***Prestige***

The prestige result indicated spectators were motivated with the status, privacy, and exclusivity granted by their ticket. The result is a culmination of various parts, where User Participant 3 enjoyed "access to friends," while User Participant 14 denoted the club level was "not crowded by folks sitting in the wrong areas." Further, User Participant 22 responded the club level had a "mature atmosphere with better fans." The sentiment is summed up best from Administrator Participant 35 as he denoted how his clients can "... join their friends in an exclusive social setting," and "enjoy the social atmosphere inside of the club." The club level spectators enjoy the prestige associated with their ticket as it grants access to spaces unavailable to the general public, and as Administrator 10 denoted helps them to feel a "status symbol."

### ***Support***

The area of support impacted club level seating, wherein club purchases enabled support of the institution and program. Spectators appreciated feeling their purchase of a club seat also enabled being able to donate and show support for the institution, athletic de-

partment, team, and players. The generosity conveyed by this result is indicated by Administrator Participant 37 when he denoted, “Supporting the program/university,” as rationale for club level purchases. Similarly, Administrator Participant 14 also mentioned the “philanthropic affinity to help the institution.” Furthermore, Administrator Participant 14 denoted the “sense of pride,” with the club level purchase, and Administrator Participant 10 added this purchase enabled the “ability to support beyond basic tickets.”

### **Premium Seating Over General Seating (RQ 3)**

The last analysis area involved what premium seating consumers receive over those in general seating, and indicated the following themes: comfort and amenities, and prestige. Of note, each of the themes were denoted by both administrators and users.

#### ***Comfort and Amenities***

Premium seating spectators enjoy the benefits received from the enhanced comfort and upgraded amenities not available in general seating. Participants denoted how premium areas encompassed access to food, beverages, alcohol, beer, wine, climate control, comfortable seats, televisions, parking, and restrooms. While much of this is referenced above, premium consumers expect an upscale environment and access to hospitality spaces, where convenience and cleanliness are valued. This was represented when the “top shelf experience” was

denoted by User Participant 20, and User Participant 5 remarked his enjoyment from “being in a comfortable environment and being able to communicate with our guests easier than being in the general seating area.” The result was summed up well as Administrator Participant 22 denoted premium seating enabled a “nicer and more controlled environment with upgraded and cleaner facilities.”

#### ***Prestige***

Premium seating spectators receive a level of prestige not granted to general seating patrons. The special treatment involved greater privacy with special lounge access, where a smaller capacity leads to a more intimate environment and social club of sorts. There are also exclusive benefits such as private entries and exits, other event invitations, and opportunities to connect with VIPs like coaches that contribute to a status symbol. User Participant 13 exemplified the result when she denoted enjoyment from the “special perks” of premium seating, as did Administrator Participant 12 when he stated, “They get access to things and information the general seating folks do not, whether it is access to events, coaches, student-athletes etc.”

### **Discussion**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the motivations to purchase luxury suites and club level seating, and expand the limited intercollegiate premium seating research. Results indicated premium seating is more multi-faceted



than previously suggested as an array of areas motivated consumers. Chiefly, extant premium seating literature does not include a large portion of this investigation's results, an indication college football premium seating spectators are distinct from corporate clientele in professional sport (Titlebaum et al., 2013) and general college football attendees (Kahle et al., 1996; Pan & Baker, 2005). The results challenge past constructs as experience, family and friends, and elements concerned with watching the game have not been denoted in prior premium seating investigations (Popp et al., 2017; Titlebaum et al., 2012). Moreover, previous premium seating survey measures noted the importance of team performance, brand, and community perception, which were not noted by this investigation.

The entertainment result indicated a need to use the luxury suite for family, friends, and corporate use. While Titlebaum et al. (2012) denoted the importance of corporate entertainment for SEC suites and Titlebaum and Lawrence (2010) for professional sport, Popp et al. (2017) indicated business factors were not relevant to their college site. Also, the Pan and Baker (2005) business area for college football season-ticket renewals did not meet analysis criteria. Findings of this study support utilization of suites for entertainment with business use *and* personal use, which are important revelations. College football premium seating is dependent on the local market and extended competition radius, or lack thereof. Thus, the area is complex, as

put forth by Mayer et al. (2017). It is also notable the entertainment area was exclusive to suites.

The importance of family, and its influence on college football (Keaton et al., 2015), is supported where a suite affords a family the ability to spend time together at the stadium without disruption (Mayer et al., 2017; Wann et al., 2008). Further, results indicated the suite experience with its enhanced comfort and upgraded amenities, to go with a stellar game viewing experience, impacted attendees. Titlebaum et al. (2012) supports upgrades are expected in college football.

In terms of the club level, Popp et al. (2017) indicated brand image of the team, venue exclusivity, and team performance were important for attendance. The prestige theme in the current study, and somewhat the support theme, only partially corroborate those findings. Popp et al. (2017) also indicated suite and club level purchases from a single institution were nearly identical, but this work suggested there are distinct differences. The themes that revolve around watching the game and doing so in climate comfort came through much more strongly for club level spectators, while suite spectators had higher expectations for all amenities.

Spectators in both luxury suites and club level seating valued enhanced comfort and upgraded amenities, albeit to varying degrees. The literature has not included these elements in their attendance motivations (Popp et al., 2017; Titlebaum et al., 2012), rather only noted food and beverage trends and menus (Ti-

tlebaum, 2015; Titlebaum & Kloke, 2015; Titlebaum et al., 2011). Notably, Chang et al. (2019) denoted some personality traits may determine premium purchases, which included needs for material resources and status. As such, a connection between having comfort and amenities present to fulfill consumer needs is likely. Likewise, distinctiveness between seating levels in terms of comfort and amenities is present. The club level is interested in certain features (e.g., climate comfort, beverages/alcohol), whereas luxury suite users expect those features plus additional suite amenities to fulfill their even higher needs.

The prestige result indicated spectators valued the privacy, exclusivity, and access afforded through premium seating. While Popp et al. (2017) alluded to some of the above in their value of exclusivity, it did not encompass the depth of the current finding. Prestige is associated with comfort, cleanliness, lounge access, and exclusive perks where some view premium seating as a status symbol to be amongst peers. Additionally, the elements associated with prestige are not prevalent in the attendance motivations literature (Kim et al., 2019; Wann et al., 2008). Rather, general attendees are around others to socialize or for group affiliation. As such, this provides another distinction between general seating attendees and premium seating attendees. Altogether, the elements of prestige and comfort and amenities are evident in club seating and suites. While commonalities exist across these spaces, an important note is consumer preferences and expecta-

tations with prestige and amenity expectations will morph and be dependent to a particular premium space (e.g., loge box, club seat, luxury suite, etc.). Then, the motives will expand beyond just those elements as dictated by the given premium seating space.

Across college football premium seating, administrators indicated showing team support through a seat investment as a relevant purchase motivator. The team support differed from prior work that denoted purchase allure from brand image and community support (Popp et al., 2017; Titlebaum et al., 2012). Also, the tradition and ritual of college football, and watching the game, appeared to be more important in college while winning was more important to professional sport (Mayer et al., 2017; Titlebaum & Lawrence, 2010). Again, this work indicated there are distinct differences between the intercollegiate and professional levels.

Interestingly, each theme denoted by the users was highlighted by the administrators. The commonality between themes from administrators and users supports administrators' expert insights, and the value their experiences provide to research. Also, administrators noted a few additional themes (i.e., Suites: Experience-Watching the Game; Prestige; Support; Club Level: Watching the Game-View, Support). One explanation, particularly in prestige and support with luxury suites, could be a social desirability bias where certain users did not want to self-disclose motives to be viewed favorably by others (Leary & Kowalski, 1990).

However, it is notable that the philanthropic support of the institution and team has been denoted in the general donor motives literature (Bass et al., 2015; Gladden et al., 2005; Ko et al., 2014; Staurowsky et al., 1996). Additionally, there are facets of donor motives that were in other premium seating results, but with distinct differences between the two areas. For example, a previous donor motive indicated a donation was focused on the social aspects concerned with the individual being included, and was very self-focused with the donor wanting to be entertained (Gladden et al., 2005; Ko et al., 2014; Staurowsky et al., 1996). Contrastingly, the premium seating motive revolved more on the entertainment of others. This difference is also evidenced in the prestige result. While premium seating motives revolved around special treatment, access to areas, and exclusive opportunities, donor motives were more focused on the power and influence a donation brought to the individual via input on athletic department decisions from their donor affiliation (Gladden et al., 2005; Ko et al., 2014; Staurowsky et al., 1996). Interestingly, the donor motivations literature has also touched upon the amenities that come with a donation, and again highlights the differences between these areas. A donor expected to receive amenity benefits such as access to tickets and parking (Gladden et al., 2005; Ko et al., 2014), and not the enhancement of the overall gameday experience and the upgraded amenities such as food, hospitality spaces, and overall convenience and

upscale environment expected with premium seating users. Likewise, while the tickets were denoted as being accessible with a donation, the literature does not appear to denote the view or seat setting. A distinctiveness between motives for the club level and suites was noted above, where suite consumers have higher expectations and needs, and it may be that a similar pattern exists between a general donor and a premium seating user. While the general donor provides the monetary support for altruistic reasons or personal benefits, so too may the premium seating user but with higher expectations of the *gameday* advantages they are provided from any donation connected to a premium seating purchase.

From an investigative standpoint, the above results indicated previous premium seating literature, and perhaps athletic donor literature, did not denote all the relevant motives to purchase premium seating. Therefore, past survey measures were incomplete in the range of areas that motivate premium seating game attendance. Additionally, there are distinct differences between spectator seating areas (i.e., premium seating and general seating), within premium seating (i.e., suite and club level), as well as between professional and collegiate premium seating. As such, any quantitative measures utilized for future investigations should be accordingly updated with the above results for accurate motivations to purchase premium seating. Additionally, this work supports the use of administrators as an accurate source for expert insights to consumers.

The results of this research also present timely findings for college football premium seating practitioners. Largely, athletic administrators need to denote the college premium experience is different from professional sport, and it should be treated as such. Additionally, the importance of comfort and amenities in the stadium, as well as prestige, should be re-evaluated. Recently, some beer and wine amenities only available in premium seating have been extended to all stadium areas (Leistikow, 2021). Thusly, to ensure retention of premium seating ticketholders, additional exclusive premium benefits should be crafted to create new ways to view prestige of the premium ticket. For example, clients could be allowed access to premium spaces before and after home games, during away games, and provided special events. These exclusive experiences should also be promoted, so others are aware the availability is limited to premium ticketholders, to reinforce the prestige.

It is welcome news that club level spectators expect climate comfort, as it is easily controlled through stadium design and renovations, as well as portable accessories and shaded areas. Also, practitioners should add exclusive food and drink options for premium members each season, and weekly themed specials, to meet their higher expectations. Additionally, more marketing communications needs to be performed on the privacy, climate comfort, and top-notch gameplay views and seat comfort provided by club level seats. Luxury suite practitioners should recognize their clients expect the

same comfort and amenities as the club level, and additional features only available to suite holders. As such, when a new feature is distributed to any stadium level, sport managers should ensure it does not take away from any high-end element to which luxury suite users are accustomed. Further, administrators should determine if the penchant in their local market is corporate or personal entertainment, or both. Then, to optimize selling capacity some staff should focus on individual suite users and others on corporate clientele. In each instance, the design and amenities should enhance watching the game with others.

#### **Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research**

The current study is limited in it only analyzed college football. The investigation was warranted given the paucity of premium seating research and prevalence of football across the country, and future research could expand to other college sports. Additionally, updated survey measures with these new areas that impact premium seating consumption should lead to more comprehensive results and accurate quantitative analysis. Another limitation is that differences between school sizes or locations were not considered. While the current study included a national sample, future work could explore conferences, Power Five and Group of Five standing, as well as urban to rural locations. Also, the current project analyzed club level and luxury suites of premium seating, and future research can extend to the smaller, albeit valuable, areas of premium seating



such as loge boxes and cabanas. It would also be interesting for a future project to compare the purchase motivations of personal users to corporate users in the various premium seating spaces. Similarly, a future project could explore if a donation is required to access premium seating, and the feelings consumers have about the connected donation to such a purchase. Overall, while this investigation contains some limitations, it contributes to the premium seating literature and to a better understanding of premium seating consumers.

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