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PLAYOFFS 2026
AF1
ARENA FOOTBALL ONE
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VS

MINNESOTA MONSTERS

PLAYOFFS 2026

2026 PLAYOFF GAME

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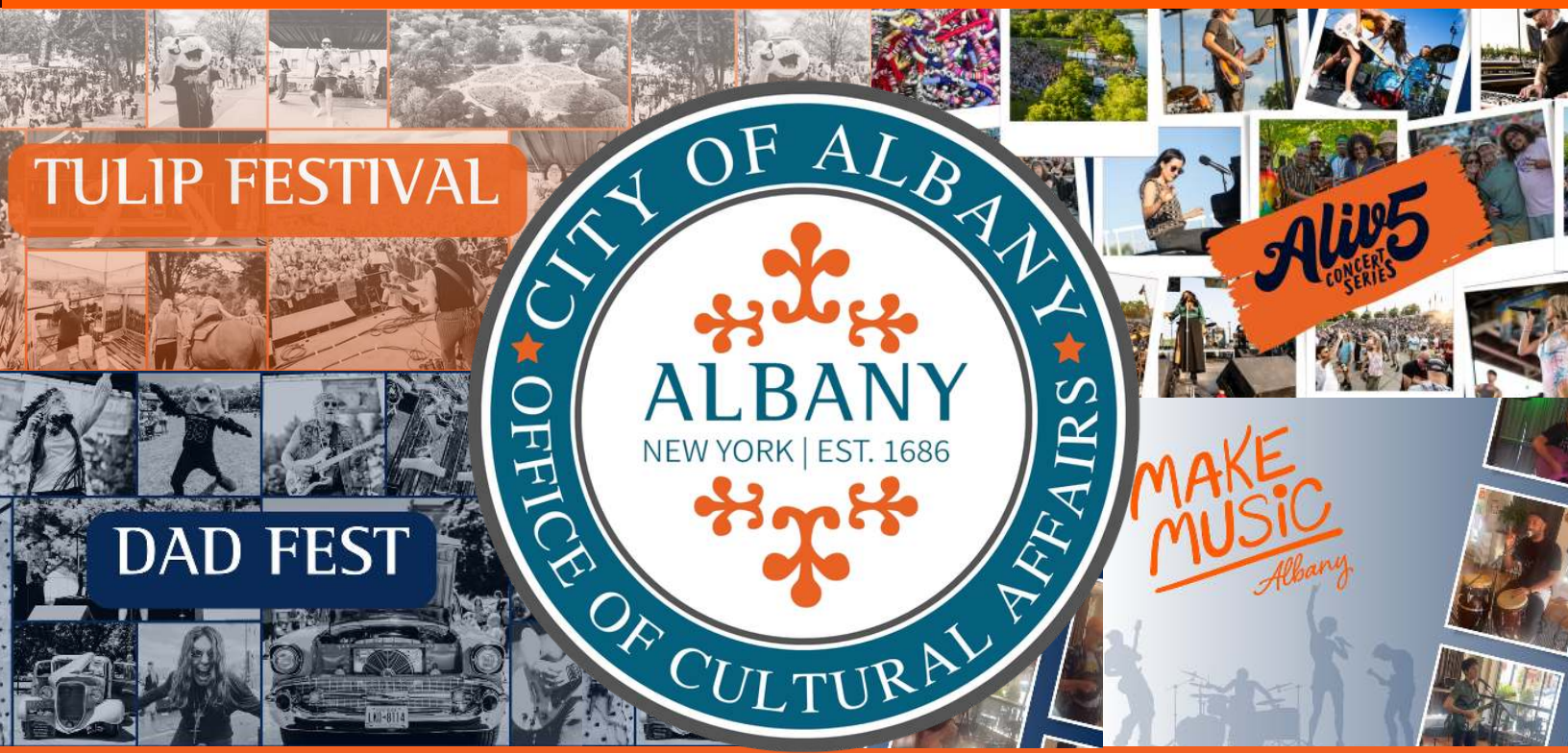
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2026 PLAYOFF GAME PREVIEW

AF1 Playoff Semi Final: Minnesota Monsters at Albany Firebirds

Saturday August 1st - Kickoff 4:00pm

The Albany Firebirds' playoff run begins this Saturday, Aug. 1 at 4:00pm ET, with a semifinal matchup at MVP Arena. The Firebirds will battle the Minnesota Monsters, who finished the regular season 8-4 and secured their spot in the semifinals on Sunday with a 48-32 win over the Washington Wolfpack. The winner of Saturday's playoff game will advance to Arena Crown 2026, taking place the weekend of Aug. 8-9.

GAME PREVIEW CONTINUED (PAGE 6)

Defending the Nest

The Firebirds return home after back-to-back bye weeks and look to make a statement against Minnesota. Reigning AF1 MVP quarterback Sam Castronova will make his highly anticipated return and will have league-leading receiver Darien Townsend, who currently leads the AF1 in multiple categories, including touchdowns, points scored, points per game, and touchdowns per game.

On the defensive side, linebacker Drew Singleton has been a dominant force all season, breaking the single-season tackle record with 89. With a trip to Arena Crown on the line, the Firebirds will look to bring their full force against Minnesota.

Back for Vengenance?

After a dominant playoff win over Washington, Minnesota heads to the semifinals looking to upset the defending champion Albany Firebirds. Led by Head Coach Daron Clark and standout players such as quarterback Ja'Vonte Johnson, who finished the regular season with 43 touchdown passes and more than 1,800 passing yards; powerhouse Claude Davis, who ranks third in the league in rushing yards; and defensive back Delvon Randall, who ranks second in the league in interceptions, the Monsters head to Albany with a chance to make history and punch their ticket to Arena Crown 2026.



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ARENA CROWN 2025 RECAP



2025 Arena Crown Championship Recap
Perfection achieved.

The Albany Firebirds completed a flawless undefeated season with a thrilling 60 to 57 victory over the Nashville Kats inside a packed MVP Arena, capturing the 2025 Arena Crown Championship.

The win delivered another title to Albany, one of the most iconic cities in arena football history, and cemented the Firebirds as the standard in Arena Football One.
Albany struck early and answered every challenge Nashville brought in a championship game filled with explosive plays, elite execution, and unforgettable moments.
Fast Start and Big Plays

All Arena kicker Henry Nell opened the scoring with a deuce, setting the tone immediately. League MVP Sam Castronova followed with a rushing touchdown on the Firebirds first offensive snap, igniting the crowd from the start.
Castronova continued to shine, connecting with playmakers all night, including a touchdown strike to Darien Townsend, who celebrated with his signature Dirty Bird dance as Albany took control.

A defining moment came in the second quarter when the Firebirds defense delivered a massive goal line stand, stopping Nashville four straight times inside the two yard line. Moments later, a wild play ended with Duane Brown recovering a bounce and taking it in for a score, pushing Albany ahead 32 to 19.
A Championship Finish

GAME PREVIEW CONTINUED (PAGE 10)



ARENA CROWN 2025 RECAP

The Firebirds remained in command throughout the second half. Castronova opened the third quarter with another touchdown pass to Brown, then repeatedly found Isaiah Scott, who delivered a dominant performance with 8 catches for 155 yards.

Nashville made a late push, cutting the lead to just three in the fourth quarter. But Albany responded the way champions do. With just over a minute remaining, Castronova delivered the final statement, a rushing touchdown to make it a two score game. Nashville scored once more in the closing seconds, but the Firebirds recovered the final kickoff to secure the title. Mission Complete

Castronova was named Championship MVP of the game, adding another title to his Albany legacy.
He finished with seven total touchdowns and 251 yards in a legendary performance. The Firebirds defense came through with timely stops, and the offense proved unstoppable when it mattered most.

Head Coach Damon Ware called the season unfinished business. After a perfect year and the Arena Crown raised in Albany, that business is officially complete.

The Albany Firebirds are your 2025 Arena Crown Champions.

ARENA CROWN CHAMPIONS 2025

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CHAMPIONS SPOTLIGHT: DAMON WARE

Damon Ware has quickly established himself as one of the premier leaders in Albany football.
In 2024, his first season as Head Coach of the Firebirds, Ware guided the team to a 7–2 record and an appearance in Arena Bowl XXXIII at American Dream Mall in East Rutherford, New Jersey.

He followed that breakthrough year with a historic 2025 campaign. In the inaugural season of Arena Football One, Ware led the Firebirds to a perfect 10–0 undefeated regular season and delivered an Arena Crown Championship to Albany, as the Firebirds defeated the Nashville Kats 60–57 in a thrilling title game.

Ware's championship pedigree in Albany runs deep, having also played a key role in the city's back-to-back title runs in 2021 and 2022.

Respected across the league for his sharp offensive mind and steady leadership, Ware has built a team that consistently sets the standard on both sides of the ball. As the Firebirds look ahead to 2026, Damon Ware remains the driving force behind one of arena football's most dominant franchises.

FULL DAMON WARE BIO (PAGE 28)



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#	Name	POS	Height	Weight	College
0	Lorenzo Jones	DB			
1	Agiye Hall	WR			
2	Sam Castronova	QB			
3	Duane Brown	WR			
5	Drew Singleton	LB	6' 2"	235 lbs	Rutgers
7	Morris Joseph	DL			
8	Isiah Scott	WR			
9	Joshua Kulka	QB	6' 3"	220 lbs	St. Francis Univ.
10	Markus Smith	DB	6' 2"	205 lbs	
11	Dontae Mason	DB	5'8"	175lbs	Delaware Valley Univ.
13	Prince Umanmielen	DL			
15	Khris Walton	DL			
21	Darien Townsend	WR	5' 10"	180 lbs	Youngstown State
22	Bailey Hale	K			
23	Travion Mosby	DB			
65	Ryan Johnson	OL			

ALBANY FIREBIRDS ROSTER

#	Name	POS	Height	Weight	College
69	Joshua Zacher	FB	6'2"	300	Duquesne
70	Ty'Kieast Crawford	OL			
74	Colby Byrd	OL	6'3"	300	Norfolk State
79	Brandon Nicholson	OL			
97	Jyaire Stevens	DL/LB			
	Inactives				
6	Tyrese Chambers	WR			
16	Seth Robertson	DL			
58	Aiden Ferguason	OL			







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#	Name	POS	Height	Weight	College
0	Robert Fuentes	DL	6'5"	235	Central Oklahoma
1	Chei Hill	LB	6'1"	245	Jones College
2	Delvon Randall	DB	6'1"	205	Temple University
3	Jarvai Flowers	WR	6'0"	180	Delaware Valley Univ
5	Ja'Vonte Johnson	QB	6'1"	195	Dakota College
6	Eric Phoenix	QB	6'3"	210	South Carolina St
6	Jamal Couch	WR	6'5"	227	Mississippi State
7	Donovan Johnson	WR			
7	Shiloh Flanagan	WR			
8	Javonte Haynes	DB	6'3"	190	IUP
9	Claude Davis	DL	6'4"	285	South Florida
12	Ledarian McAllister	WR	6'4"	220	Kentucky State
14	Jadarius Byrd	DB			
16	Caden Walters	QB	6'4"	215	Dodge City/ Sioux Falls
16	Dontorian Best	LB	6'0"	225	Wingate University
20	Jacquez Mabin	DL	6'2"	255	Delaware Valley
21	Labarron Mallory	DB			
22	Jordan Semanat	DB	6'4"	205	Texas A&M Kingsville
23	Moe Strong	WR			
25	Samson Tai	LB	6'0"	240	Wayne State

MINNESOTA MONSTERS

#	Name	POS	Height	Weight	College
25	Trevon Jones	LB			
27	Michael Hall	K			
28	Carlos Thompson Jr	WR			
71	Kyler Edwards	OL	6'6"	310	Eastern Kentucky
72	Leon Brown	OL			
77	Gunner Hurlburt	OL	6'4"	315	Wisconsin Eau Claire
91	Antonio Simley	DL	5'11"	295	Siena Heights
95	Shaki Holines	DL	6'4"	260	UMass
99	Toree Boyd	OL	6'4"	315	Howard University

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AF1 STANDINGS

Rk	Team	W	L	W%
1	Nashville Kats	11	1	.917
2	Albany Firebirds	9	3	.750
3	Kentucky Barrels	7	4	.636
4	Minnesota Monsters	7	5	.583
5	Michigan Arsenal	5	6	.455
6	Washington Wolfpack	5	7	.417
7	Beaumont Renegades	4	7	.364
8	Oceanside Bombers	1	9	.100

FIREBIRDS SCHEDULE

Sat Apr 11 6:00pm EDT	Albany, New York Albany Firebirds		50	VS	23		Minnesota Minnesota Monsters	Final	W	BOXSCORE
Sat Apr 18 4:00pm EDT	Albany, New York Albany Firebirds		55	AT	27		Beaumont Beaumont Renegades	Final	W	BOXSCORE
Sat Apr 25 9:00pm EDT	Albany, New York Albany Firebirds		48	AT	24		Oregon Oregon Lightning	Final	W	BOXSCORE
Sat May 2 6:00pm EDT	Albany, New York Albany Firebirds		42	AT	34		Everett, Washington Washington Wolfpack	Final	W	BOXSCORE
Sat May 9 7:00pm EDT	Albany, New York Albany Firebirds		55	VS	37		Kentucky Kentucky Barrels	Final	W	BOXSCORE
Sat May 16 7:00pm EDT	Albany, New York Albany Firebirds		60	AT	57		Michigan Michigan Arsenal	Final	W	BOXSCORE
Sat May 30 7:00pm EDT	Albany, New York Albany Firebirds		69	VS	33		Oceanside Oceanside Stealth	Final	W	BOXSCORE
Fri Jun 5 7:00pm EDT	Albany, New York Albany Firebirds		45	VS	12		Beaumont Beaumont Renegades	Final	W	BOXSCORE
Fri Jun 12 7:00pm EDT	Albany, New York Albany Firebirds		39	VS	57		Michigan Michigan Arsenal	Final	L	BOXSCORE
Sat Jun 20 5:00pm EDT	Albany, New York Albany Firebirds		69	AT	78		Nashville Nashville Kats	Final	L	BOXSCORE
Sun Jul 5 6:00pm EDT	Albany, New York Albany Firebirds		66	AT	48		Beaumont Beaumont Renegades	Final	W	BOXSCORE
Sat Jul 11 7:00pm EDT	Albany, New York Albany Firebirds		54	VS	57		Nashville Nashville Kats	Final	L	BOXSCORE


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WEEK 14 PHOTOS













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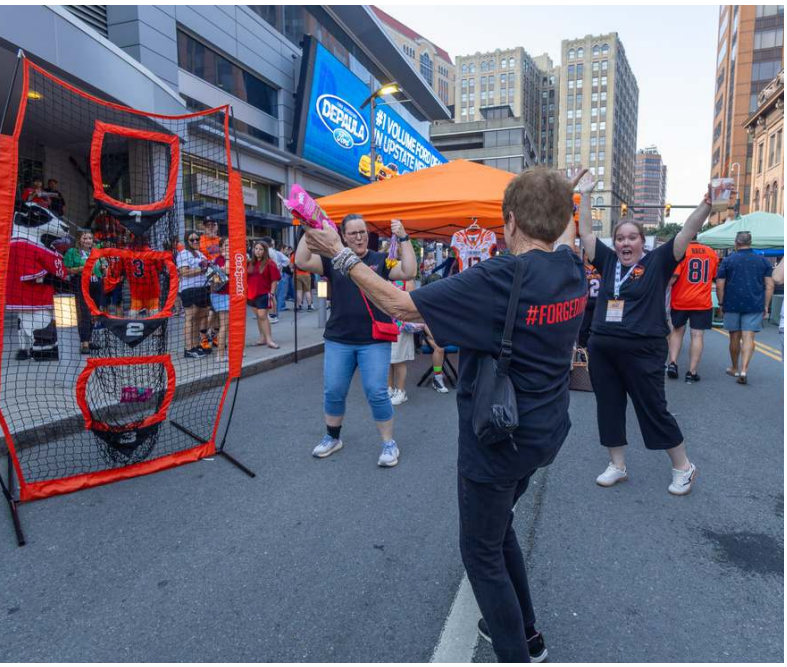
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WEEK 14 BLOCK PARTY PHOTOS!







WEEK 8 BLOCK PARTY PHOTOS!







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HEAD COACH DAMON WARE

Damon Ware joined the historic Albany Firebirds in October 2023 as Head Coach and General Manager, the same day it was announced that the Firebirds were returning to arena football. Prior to taking over as head coach, Ware spent the 2021 and 2022 seasons in Albany as Offensive Coordinator and Assistant Head Coach, helping the team secure back-to-back National Arena League Championships.

The 2024 season marked Ware's first as Head Coach, guiding the Firebirds to a 7–2 record and an appearance in Arena Bowl XXXIII at American Dream Mall in East Rutherford, New Jersey. In 2025, Ware led Albany to a perfect 10–0 undefeated season and captured the Arena Crown Championship, defeating the Nashville Kats 60–57. His outstanding leadership earned him AF1 Coach of the Year honors, cementing his reputation as one of arena football's top coaches.

Ware's coaching career spans nationally and internationally, with experience at every level of the game. In the 2020 shortened season, he served as Offensive Coordinator for the Omaha Beef. In 2019, Ware was Assistant Head Coach/Offensive Line Coach for the Nebraska Danger, helping lead the team to the third-ranked rushing attack in the Indoor Football League, highlighted by Rookie of the Year Tommy Armstrong (Nebraska).



HEAD COACH DAMON WARE

In 2018, Ware served as Assistant Head Coach/Offensive Coordinator for the Cedar Rapids Titans, leading the #1 passing offense in the IFL, with former Firebirds QB Jake Medlock (Florida International) topping the league in passing yards per game and touchdowns. He also held the title of Assistant Head Coach/Offensive Coordinator for the Colorado Crush in 2017. Ware was Head Coach of the Cheyenne Warriors during the 2012–2013 seasons in the American Professional Football League and also served as Assistant Head Coach/Offensive Coordinator for Adams City High School in 2013.

Internationally, Ware coached the Calanda Broncos in Switzerland in 2011, leading them to an undefeated season and a Swiss Bowl national championship, finishing ranked #1 in offense and defense and #5 in all of Europe. In 2010, he was Head Coach for the Finland Oulu Northern Lights, leading them to the championship game. He also served as Head Coach/General Manager of the Denver Titans (2009) and the Black Hills Red Dogs (2004–2005).
Ware's high school coaching tenure includes William Hinkley High School (1998–2000, 2002–2003), where he coordinated offense, defense, and special teams, winning two conference championships, including the school's first undefeated conference title, while coaching players of the year on both sides of the ball and breaking the state record with 28 interceptions, nine returned for touchdowns. **In 2001, he was selected to coach with the New Orleans Saints through the NFL Minority Internship Fellowship Program as an assistant wide receivers coach.**

For the 2026 season, Damon Ware brings his extensive experience, championship pedigree, and proven leadership to the Albany Firebirds. With a perfect 2025 season, an Arena Crown Championship, and AF1 Coach of the Year honors, Ware continues to set the standard for excellence in arena football.

Ware holds a Bachelor's degree in Social Science/Psychology and a Master's degree in Organizational Leadership.



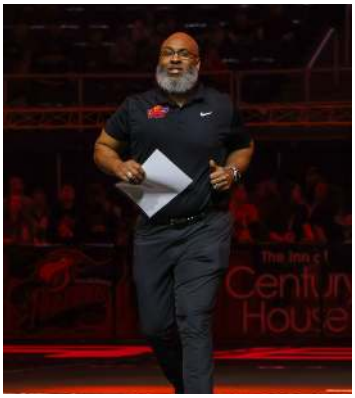
BRANDON SESAY

Defensive Coordinator

Brandon Sesay, Defensive Coordinator for the Albany Firebirds in Arena Football One (AF1), brings a championship mindset, extensive playing experience, and a deep commitment to the Albany community. A former Offensive and Defensive Lineman at Texas Tech, Sesay has been a vital part of every Albany arena football franchise since 2018, playing a key role in securing ArenaBowl 32 and contributing to back-to-back championships in 2021 and 2022. Off the field, his Champ Camp inspires local youth with football skills and life lessons, solidifying his legacy as a player, mentor, and beloved figure in Albany football.

TONY BOWICK

Offensive Line



Tony Bowick is the Offensive Line Coach for the Albany Firebirds in AF1, entering his third season with the team. A former Atlanta Falcons player and former Firebirds Head Coach, Bowick brings decades of experience and championship insight. He helped lead Albany to ArenaBowl 33 in 2024 and an undefeated championship season in 2025. Known for his expertise and leadership, Bowick remains a key part of the Firebirds' pursuit of excellence.

GABE YOUNG

Strength & Conditioning



Gabe Young is the Strength & Conditioning Coach for the Albany Firebirds in AF1, entering his third season. A former professional player with the Albany Conquest, New England Surge, and New Jersey Revolution, Young brings extensive experience in speed, strength, and conditioning. He has coached at Shaker and South Colonie High Schools and founded Power House Athletics. Young played a key role in Albany's ArenaBowl 33 appearance in 2024 and their undefeated 2025 championship season, overseeing Wide Receivers and Strength & Conditioning.

JORDAN GOOCH

Fullbacks



Jordan Gooch is the Fullbacks Coach for the Albany Firebirds in AF1, entering his second season. He began with Albany in 2024 as a coaching intern, helping the team reach ArenaBowl 33, and in 2025 guided the Fullbacks to an undefeated championship and Arena Crown victory. Known for his dedication and leadership, Gooch remains a key part of the Firebirds' pursuit of excellence.

SEAN JOHNSON

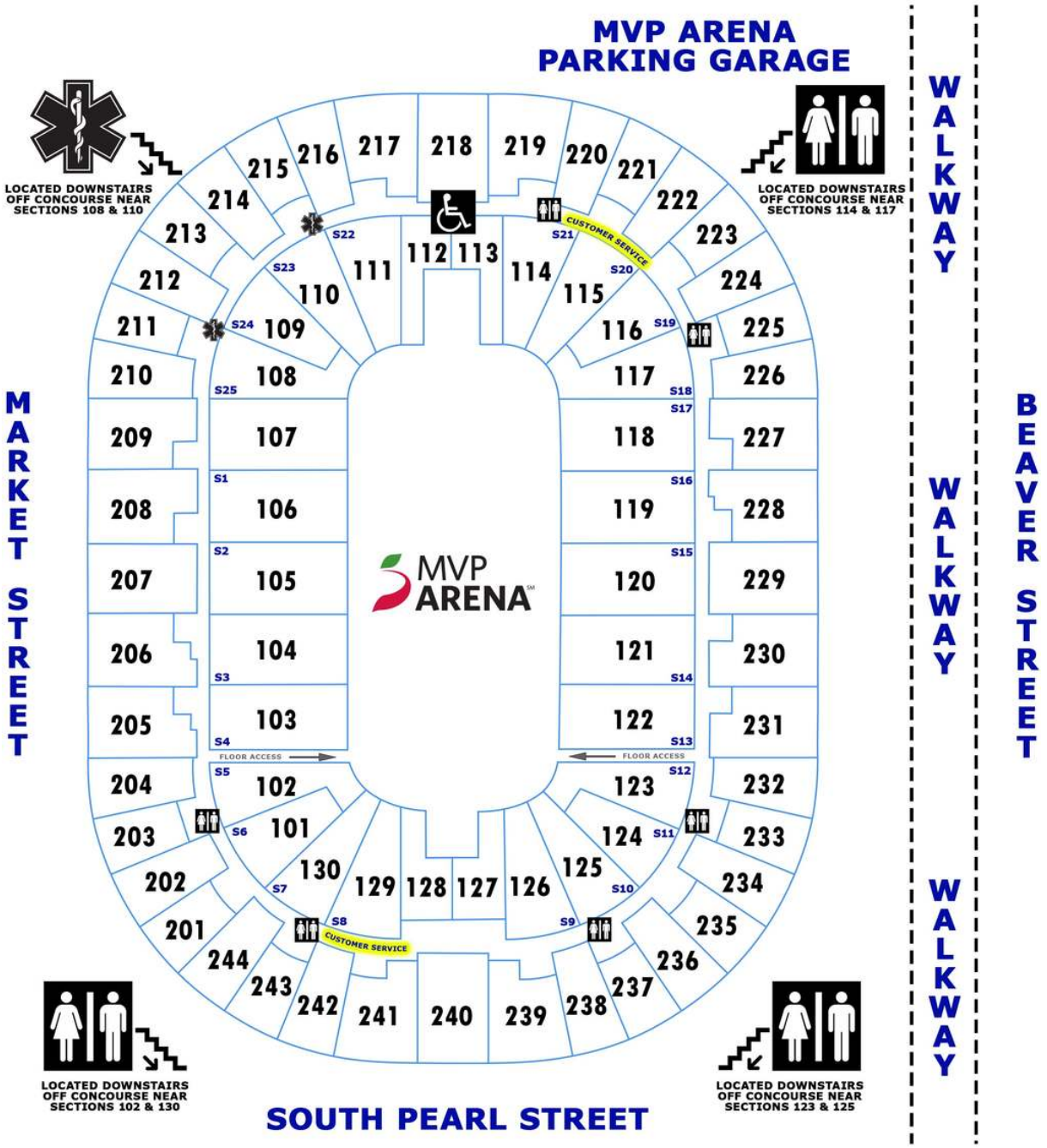
Scouting Director

Sean Johnson is the Scouting Director for the Albany Firebirds in AF1, entering his third season. He helped guide Albany to ArenaBowl 33 in 2024 and an undefeated championship in 2025. Previously, Johnson coached with the Albany Empire during their 2022 championship season. Known for his talent evaluation and dedication, he remains a key part of the Firebirds' pursuit of excellence.

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ARENA MAP

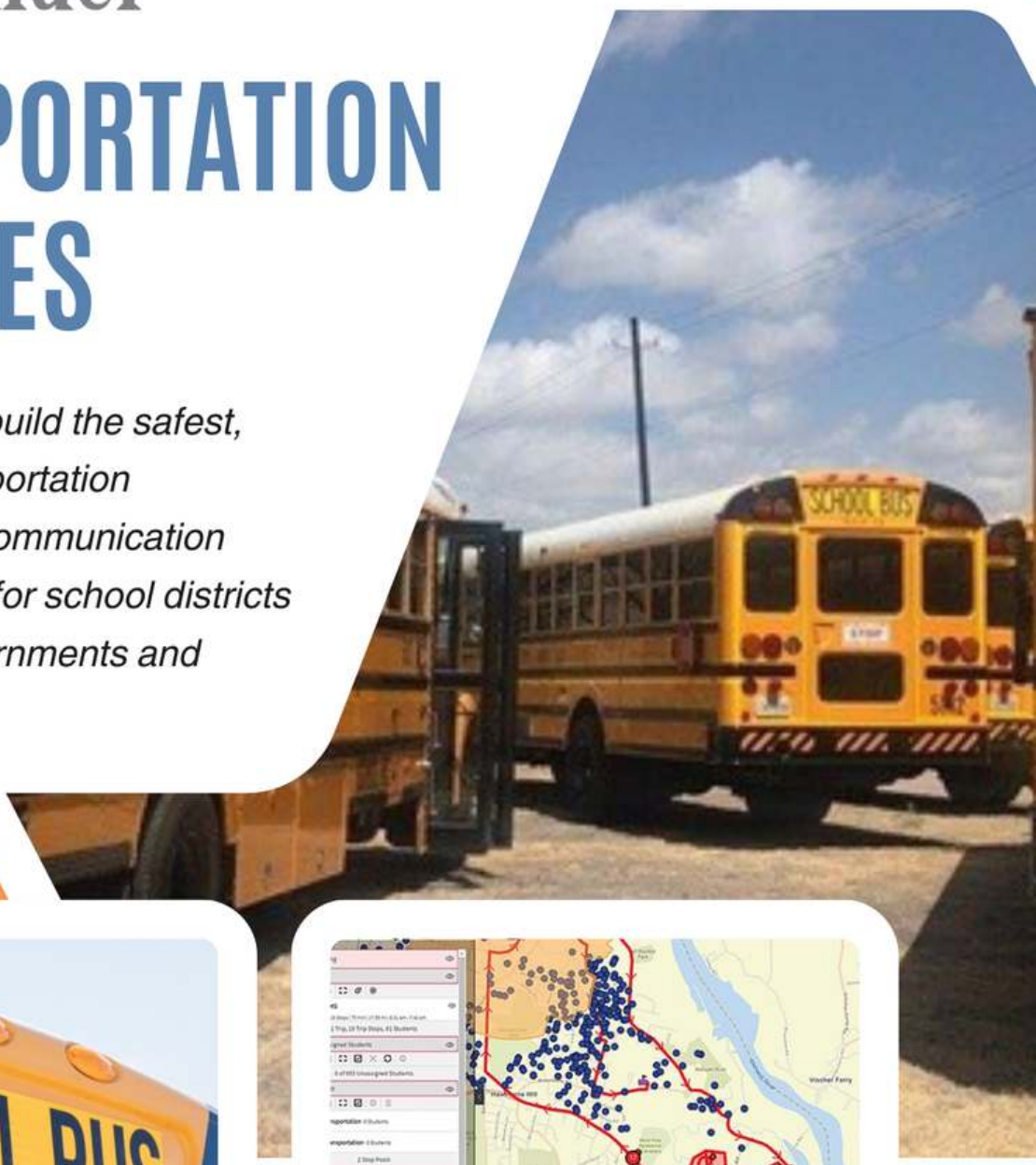


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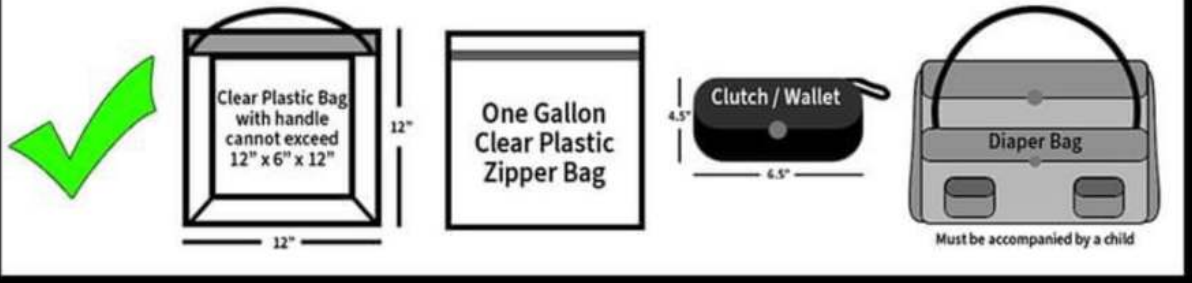
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FIREBIRDS IN THE COMMUNITY

At the Albany Firebirds, community lies at the heart of our organization. We are dedicated to fostering a strong bond with the community we call home. Our commitment goes beyond the field, extending into the neighborhoods and streets that surround us. We believe that by actively engaging with our community, we not only enhance the fan experience but also contribute to the well-being of the place we proudly represent.



INVOLVEMENT IN THE COMMUNITY

Our involvement in the community is not just a checkbox on our to-do list; it's a core part of our identity. From youth outreach programs to community events, we actively seek opportunities to make a positive impact. Whether it's supporting local initiatives or collaborating with schools, we strive to be more than just a sports team. By embracing the spirit of community, we aim to create lasting connections that transcend the boundaries of the game.



FLAMES APPEARANCE REQUESTS

Want to bring the Albany Firebirds spirit to your event? We welcome appearance requests! Whether it's a school assembly, charity function, or community gathering, our Flames are ready to share the excitement and camaraderie that defines our team. Simply submit your request,and let us join you in making your event a memorable experience. It's all part of our commitment to being an accessible and engaged presence in the communities we proudly represent.



SPIKE APPEARANCE REQUESTS

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FIREBIRD FLAMES







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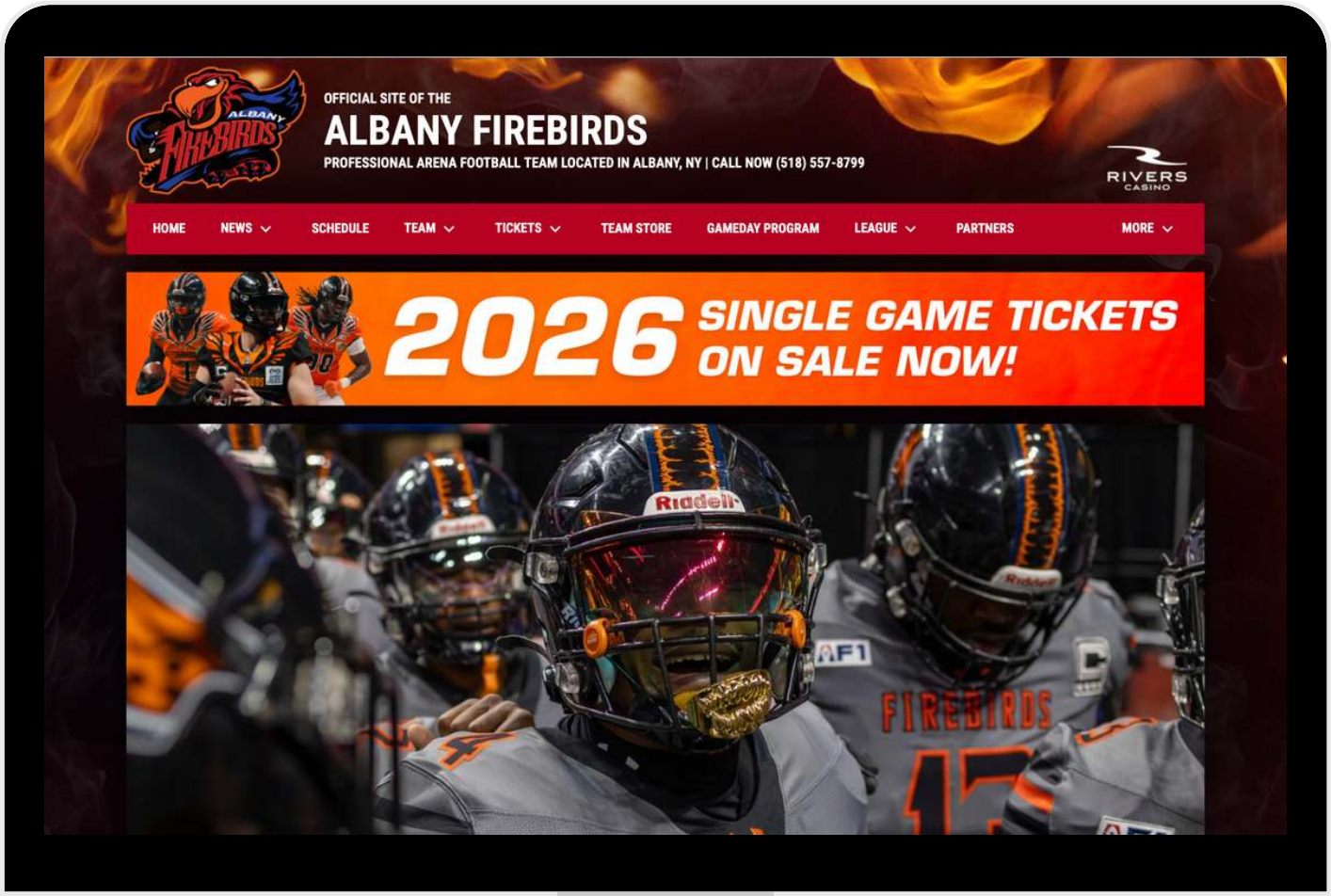
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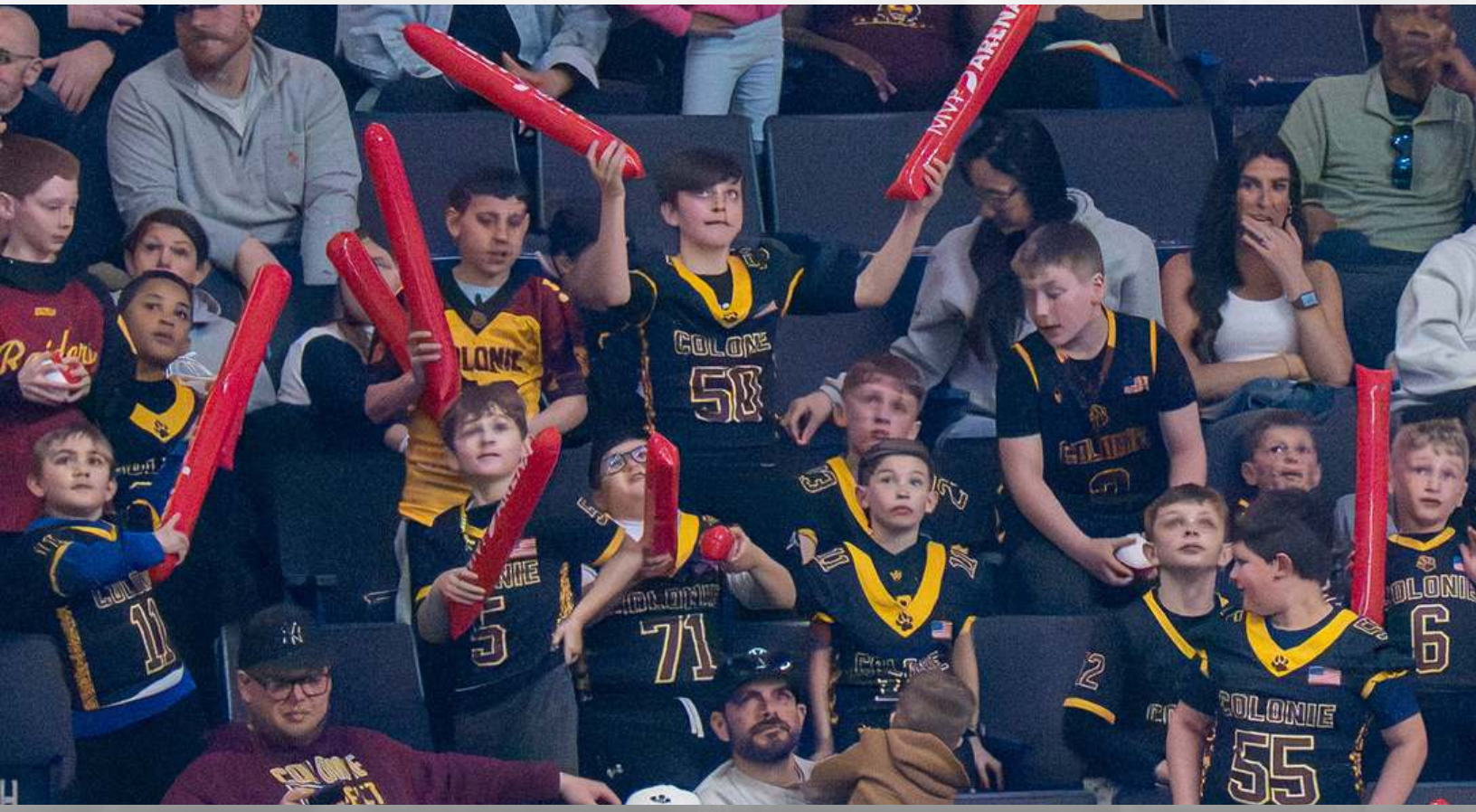




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FIREBIRDS COMMITMENT TO ALBANY

To our fans, the Albany Firebirds are committed to staying in Albany and representing the Capital Region for years to come. This is our city, our home, and we are dedicated to bringing electrifying arena football and championships to this community season after season.

Our focus extends beyond the field. From engaging with local schools and youth programs to supporting community initiatives and events, the Firebirds are proud to be an active part of Albany. Every game, every play, and every moment in MVP Arena is dedicated to you.

Game day in Albany is more than just football; it is an experience. From the roar of the crowd to the energy in the arena, every fan is part of the action. The Firebirds are committed to creating unforgettable moments on and off the field, dedicated to you and the community that supports us.

Albany is more than just a home; it is the heart of Firebirds football. We are committed to this city, this community, and to delivering thrilling arena football experiences for you for many seasons to come.

OWNERSHIP GROUP



MIKE KWARTA
CO-OWNER

Former owner of Tech East Fire & Water Restoration and current General Manager of BELFOR Property Restoration Albany, Mike's leadership and experience have been instrumental in shaping the Firebirds' legacy



ANDY GUELCHER
CO-OWNER

Co-owner of Mohawk Chevrolet, Andy brings a strong business acumen and deep community ties to the Albany Firebirds ownership group.



RICH SZESNAT
CO-OWNER

Rich, whose family owns Constantine Construction, adds local expertise and a commitment to Albany's success as a key part of the Firebirds ownership team.

CORPORATE FRONT OFFICE



MATT WOODS

Team President

Matt Woods, a lifelong Capital Region resident and a graduate of Shaker High School and Hobart College, has been part of Albany Arena Football since 2022.

Named team president in March 2026, he is focused on growing the Firebirds' impact in the community and delivering an outstanding fan experience.

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VARIOUS RESTAURANTS ACROSS THE CAPTIAL REGION



CORPORATE FRONT OFFICE



BEN NELSON

Director of Media

Ben Nelson, a Capital Region native and Colonie Central High School graduate, is entering his 3rd season as Director of Media for the Albany Firebirds in Arena Football One (AF1) and his 6th season working in professional sports. Ben's journey from a social media intern with the Albany Empire in 2021 to leading media for the Firebirds highlights his creativity and dedication. Along the way, he served as Lead Graphic Designer and managed social media for the Albany Empire, Interned and worked with the media team at the Albany Patroons, Director of Digital Media at the Orlando Predators in 2023. Now back in Albany, Ben leverages his passion for local sports and media to elevate the Firebirds' presence in AF1.



ZACH SODEN

Corporate Activations Manager

Zach Soden, a Siena College graduate, is entering his second season with the Albany Firebirds. He holds a Bachelor's degree in Sports Communication and brings experience in live entertainment, fan engagement, and corporate activations. Zach has worked with several organizations, including the Tri-City ValleyCats, Westchester Knicks, and Albany FireWolves, where he developed skills in event execution and partnership fulfillment. He previously served as the Firebirds' In-Game Show Manager and now continues in an expanded role focused on delivering high-energy gameday experiences. A lifelong Capital Region sports fan, Zach is passionate about creating memorable moments for fans and enhancing the Firebirds' experience at MVP Arena.

CORPORATE FRONT OFFICE



ANTHONY BISNER

Account Executive, Ticket Sales & Service

Anthony Bisner, a Watervliet High School graduate, is beginning his first year as an Account Executive for Ticket Sales & Service with the Albany Firebirds. He is pursuing a degree in Business Administration with a concentration in Sport Management at Russell Sage College. Anthony gained his first professional sports experience with the Firebirds during the historic 2025 Championship Season, contributing to gameday operations, public relations, and ticket sales. He has also worked with the Savannah Bananas at Citizens Bank Park and Yankee Stadium, gaining experience in fan engagement and live event operations. Passionate about building connections with fans, Anthony is focused on delivering exceptional service and creating memorable experiences for Firebirds ticket holders.



CHRISTOPHER PELLEGRINI

Account Executive, Ticket Sales and Service

Christopher Pellegrini, a Sage College graduate, is beginning his first season in the Albany Firebirds' Ticket Sales Department. He holds a Bachelor's degree in Sport and Recreation Management and is a native of Colonie, NY. A four-year member and team captain of Sage's cross country and track programs, Christopher developed strong leadership skills and a disciplined work ethic. He gained professional sports experience during the 2025 season as a Ticket Sales Intern and Game Day Operations Intern, assisting with ticket initiatives, fan engagement, and gameday logistics. Passionate about sports and teamwork, Christopher is focused on contributing to smooth game-day operations and creating memorable experiences for Firebirds fans.



MICHAEL FORST

Official Team Photographer

Michael Forst is a graduate of Colonie High School and is currently attending SUNY Polytechnic Institute, MIchael began his journey with the Firebirds as an intern during the team's return season in 2024. attending every home game and covering the team throughout their season, including ArenaBowl 33. His dedication and commitment to his craft led to his promotion to Official Team Photographer for the 2025 season. He is passionate about his work and takes great pride in documenting the legacy of one of arena football's most legendary teams, bringing the Firebirds' unforgettable moments to life for fans and the community.

CORPORATE FRONT OFFICE



BRIAN RHATIGAN

In-Game Show Host

Brian Rhatigan, also known as Back 9 Bri, is entering his second year as the Albany Firebirds In-Game Show Host. As the hype man, he brings energy and excitement to the role, engaging fans and elevating the game-day experience. He loves seeing the fans get excited and thrives on creating a dynamic, high-energy atmosphere that amplifies the energy of the game.



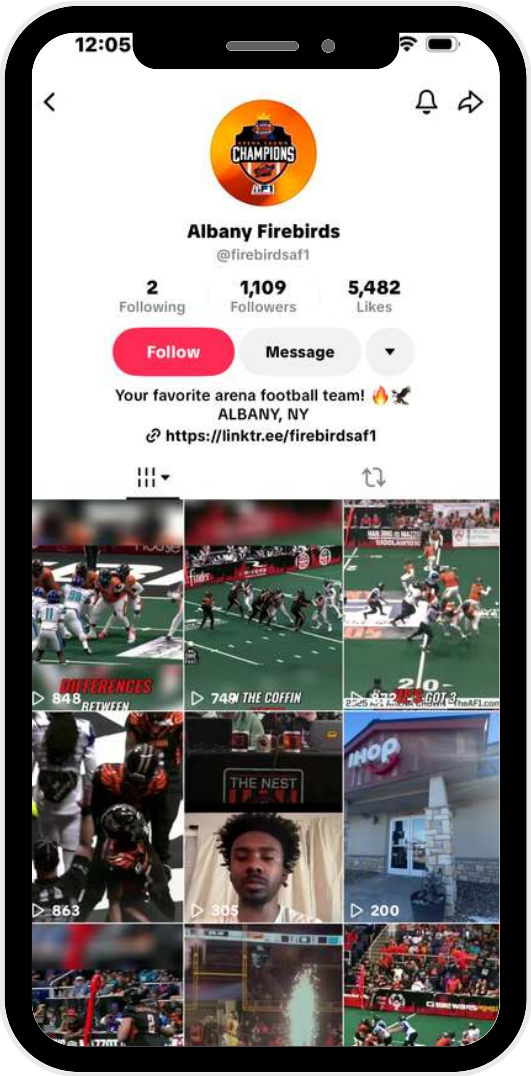
MICHAEL FELONG

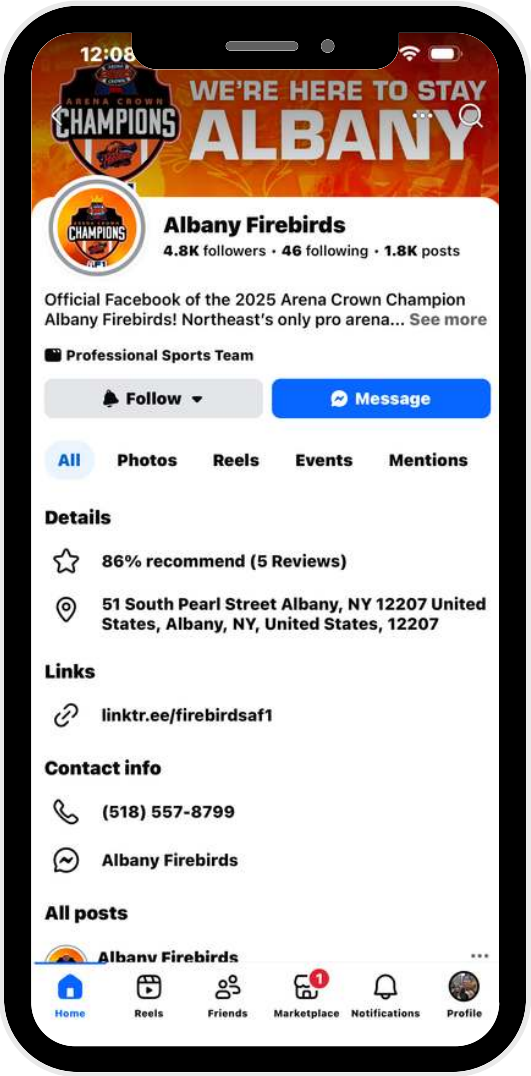
In-Game Show Manager

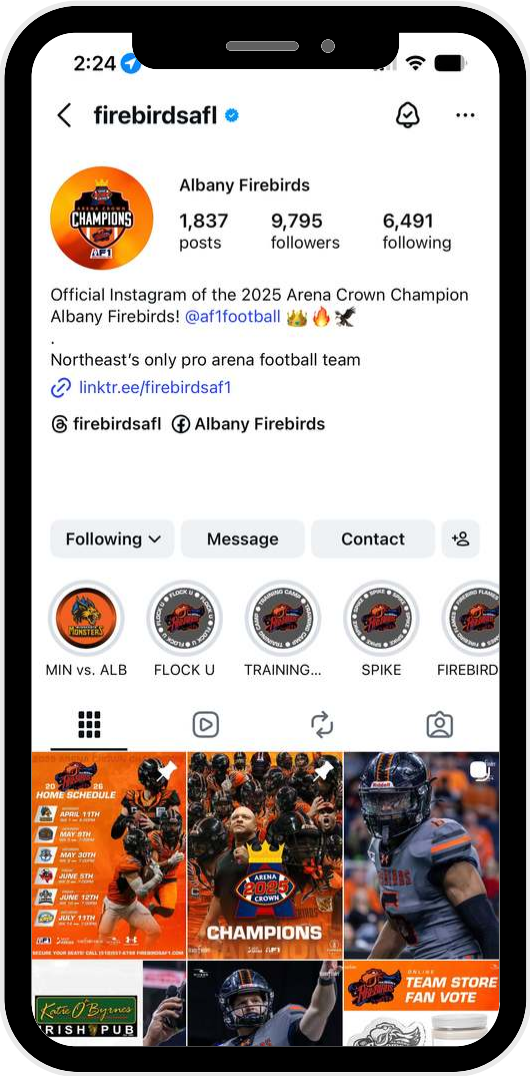
Michael Felong, a Siena College graduate, is entering his first year as In-Game Show Manager for the Albany Firebirds. He holds a Bachelor's degree in Marketing with a concentration in Sports and brings experience in live event production and fan engagement. Michael previously worked at the US Open, where he helped coordinate in-game entertainment and enhance the fan experience at a premier global sporting event. In his role with the Firebirds, he focuses on creating high-energy gameday entertainment and delivering memorable moments for fans at MVP Arena.

FOLLOW THE FIREBIRDS 24/7

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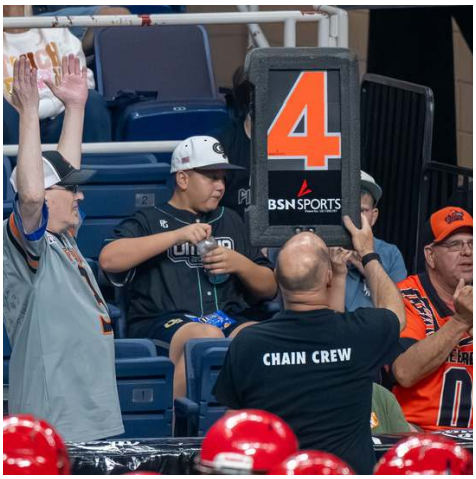
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