

Sun Devil Football a touchdown for Arizona's economy

Game days bring significant dollars — nearly \$55M — to state GDP

By Marshall Terrill , ASU News
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Everyone loves a winner. With Arizona State University's stellar performance on the gridiron last year, the organization has a lot of affection coming its way, including in the form of revenue.

As the Sun Devils prepare to take to the football field on Aug. 30 against the Northern Arizona University Lumberjacks, university economists say there's more than touchdowns to cheer for.

A [recent study](#) on the economic impact on Sun Devil Football states the team generated close to \$55 million in 2024 for state GDP in Maricopa County. The study was conducted by the [L. William Seidman Research Institute](#) in the W. P. Carey School of Business.

More from the report

[**Sun Devil Athletics' overall economic impact is \\$99.5 million, with ticketed Olympic sports like hockey and gymnastics bring in \\$45 million to Arizona's GDP**](#)

"Football is truly the heavyweight champion of the ASU athletics program at the university," said [Anthony Evans](#), the director of the institute whose expertise includes sports and leisure, entertainment marketing, public transport and energy. "Almost 278,000 fans attended six Sun Devil home football games last year, generating \$1 million in taxes for the city of Tempe alone."

The 10-page report, co-authored by three¹ other ASU economists, looked at the financial impacts of the infusion of new dollars into the local economy associated with the football team.

It presents an analysis of the overall economic effects² linked to six regular home games from the past season, all of which resulted in victories for the Sun Devils. It was also the first academic year ASU competed in the Big 12 Conference, which gave a big and unexpected boost to the local economy.

In 2024, Sun Devil football drew an average attendance of 46,307 at each home game, generating approximately \$2.5 million in ticket revenue per game.

Visiting fans mean more dollars

“Geography is a big impact on new dollars that come into a location,” said Evans, noting the report only counted dollars from non-Tempe residents who attended ASU football games. “When a visiting fan comes to the metro area to see a football game, they tend to spend more than someone who lives in Tempe or Maricopa County. They tend to spend money on hotels, car rentals, restaurants, bars, concessions and other game day expenditures.”

Tempe residents accounted for 25.4% of all football attendees and 17.3% of all football ticket revenue. Residents of other parts of Maricopa County accounted for 43.1% of all football attendees, and 52.4% of all ticket revenue. Visiting fans residing outside of Maricopa County made up approximately 31.5% of all football attendees and 30.4% of all football ticket revenue.

While their dollars were not included in the report's total figure, the Seidman Institute estimates city of Tempe residents spent on average about \$73.61 on a regular-season football game day. This consists of \$36.84 on tickets, \$14.97 on merchandise and food/beverage concessions inside [Mountain America Stadium](#), and \$21.80 outside the stadium on local travel and food and beverages.

Other Maricopa County residents spent slightly more — \$113.39 per regular season football game day. This consists of \$65.60 on tickets, \$19.97 on stadium merchandise and concessions, and \$27.82 outside the stadium on local travel and food and beverages.

Those averages tick up significantly for people who live outside of Maricopa County, according to the report. It states that 88.6% of visitors stayed overnight for an average for almost three nights and spent an average of \$144.74 per person per day within the Valley during their trip, including accommodations, food and beverages, souvenirs, local travel and other forms of entertainment. This excludes game day tickets, stadium merchandise and concessions of \$88.31 per visiting fan.

The bigger picture

Fans are not the only people spending money.

[Sun Devil Athletics](#) estimates that each visiting football team spent on average \$136,000 while in the Valley. These costs include transportation, hotel accommodation, food and beverages, and any local medical costs. The impacts also include expenditures by an estimated six media members per home game who had traveled from outside Maricopa County.

The report estimates that the city of Tempe directly earned \$1.1 million in taxes, while the combined state, county and Tempe taxes generated totaled \$4.9 million.

The six regular-season home games were also a win for merchants and the hospitality industry.

“ASU football game days offer a huge boost in foot traffic and revenue for businesses in downtown Tempe as well as along Mill Avenue,” said Lori Foster, president and CEO of the [Downtown](#)

[Tempe Authority](#). “Many people spend their pre- or post-game experiences along Mill Avenue, and that can boost sales between 30-40% depending on the merchant, the game time and the opponent. It’s definitely a big economic driver.”

“Tempe’s hospitality industry welcomes students, alumni, fans and ASU families every year during the ASU football season,” said Michael Martin, president and CEO of [Tempe Tourism](#). “The increase in foot traffic to our shops and restaurants is often noticeable with visitors wearing their team colors in support of their university. The Tempe Tourism Office receives data on a weekly and monthly basis to determine how much demand we had for our hotel rooms. Depending on the visiting team, we often see a year-over-year increase in occupancy, which helps drive hotel room demand for weekend business.”

[Omni Tempe Hotel at ASU](#), located just steps from Mountain America Stadium, is seeing strong demand as the 2025 football season approaches, according to one of its executives.

“Game weekends are driving transient leisure occupancy up to 25 percentage points higher than non-home-game weekends, compared with a 15% difference last year, and food and beverage activity picked up at the end of the 2024 season,” said Jacqueline Lucas, director of marketing at Omni Tempe.

Economic kickoff

With the 2025 season almost underway and 16 starters returning to a lineup that has ASU [ranked No. 11 in the Associated Press preseason poll](#), fans and merchants alike are ready for Saturday's kickoff.

“When the Sun Devils are wining, it’s a huge deal. People want to spend more money,” said J.D. Ybanez, owner of Varsity Tavern on Mill Avenue. “The crowds are larger, and people come earlier and stay later to celebrate. We hit capacity pretty quickly.”

Capacity at Varsity Tavern is about 1,400 people spread over three levels, according to Ybanez, who played tight end for the U.S. Army in college. He said revenue can increase from 20% to 100% depending on the opponent, day and time of game.

“Our game days are the biggest days of the year for us, especially when U of A comes to town,” Ybanez said. “I’m a big fan and hugely optimistic for 2025.”

This story originally appeared on [ASU News](#).

¹ The other authors of the report are Owain Evans, Jazmin Castaneda and Sean Ewen.

² This includes direct, indirect and induced impacts.

Main image



Fireworks from the ASU vs. Utah football game at Mountain America Stadium in Tempe on Oct. 11, 2024. Photo by Emma Fitzgerald/Arizona State University

Text image(s)



Fans cheer during the ASU vs. Kansas football game at Mountain America Stadium in Tempe on Oct. 5, 2024. Photo by Emma Fitzgerald/Arizona State University



ASU football plays Kansas in front of a sold-out stadium at Mountain America Stadium in Tempe on Oct. 5, 2024. Photo by Samantha Chow/Arizona State University



A view of Mill Avenue in downtown Tempe. Photo by Samantha Chow/Arizona State University