

# Opener sells out as Sun Devil Football kicks off most anticipated season in years

## Record number of students cheer ASU's 38-19 victory over NAU

By Scott Bordow, ASU News  
August 31, 2025

At exactly 5:30 p.m. Saturday, the gates to Mountain America Stadium opened.

It was 104 degrees. The sun still was torching much of the stadium.

But that didn't deter the hundreds of students who bounded up stairs at the south side of the stadium and ran to their seats in the Inferno section behind the south end zone.

Arizona State University's season opener against Northern Arizona University wouldn't begin for another 90 minutes, but nothing could subdue the enthusiasm for the most anticipated Sun Devil football season in more than 20 years.

First-year business student Yajaira Cardenas Martinez sat in the front row of the section. She arrived at the stadium at 5 p.m. to get in line. Soon, she would be watching the first ASU game of her life.

"I'm really excited," she said. "This is such a cool experience."

Since he was hired as ASU's coach in November 2022, Kenny Dillingham's rallying cry has been "Activate the Valley." Dillingham has urged fans, time and time again, to support the Sun Devils with their wallets and "butts in the seats."

They listened. And responded.

Saturday's game was the first opener to sell out — the official attendance was announced as 56,759 — since 1998. A record 14,280 students also were on hand.

---

### Sun Devil Football a touchdown for Arizona's economy

[Game days brings significant dollars — nearly \\$55M — to state GDP](#)

---

Since the Sun Devils' unexpected run to the Big 12 championship and College Football Playoff last season, ticket revenue has increased by 40%, and the ticket renewal rate for this season is 96%. Club and premium seating is sold out, and there are 7,500 new season ticket holders.

"The city likes winning," Dillingham said after ASU's 38-19 victory over NAU on Saturday.

With less than 15 minutes before kickoff, the energy in the stadium felt different than it has in past years. There was a heightened anticipatory sense to it, befitting a team that was ranked No. 11 in the country and has a Heisman Trophy candidate in quarterback Sam Leavitt.

Athletics Director Graham Rossini took it all in as he stood on the sideline. Earlier in the evening, Rossini went up to his office overlooking the stadium and saw the students sprinting to get to their seats.

"It was unbelievable," said Rossini, adding that, ironically, the 1998 opener was the first ASU game he attended. "Just special. People are paying attention and want to get plugged in. That's the goal. We want it to be a hard ticket. We have to make this the toughest ticket in town consistently. We're not there yet, but this is a really important step forward."

In the suite level, Bob Hobbs Jr. extended his hand as he thought about how long his family has had season tickets to ASU's games.

"Honestly, since the 1970s," he said.

Hobbs Jr., the son of longtime athletic department donors Bob and Karen Hobbs, said this season feels different. It feels, he said, like 1996.

That would be the 1996 team that finished 11-1 and went to the Rose Bowl.

"When that team walked onto the field, I kind of expected them to win," Hobbs Jr. said. "I expect this team when it walks onto the field to have that same swagger."

One sign of the excitement surrounding the program: the phone calls Hobbs Jr., is getting rather than the ones he's making.

"Normally, first game, first two games, I'm calling people and saying, 'Hey, do you want to go the game?'" he said. "For this game, I had people calling me and saying, 'Do you have any room, any tickets, in your suite?' I was like, 'No, we're completely booked.' It's just a completely different energy, and it's so refreshing."

ASU also has upgraded the fan experience at Mountain America Stadium. One example: the new Huss Hideout on the upper east side of the stadium. The air-conditioned space features Huss Brewing's Devil's Halo lager and amber craft beers, along with food and a disc jockey.

Just before 7 p.m., the Sun Devils took the field. They ran to the south end zone, and as they gathered, students in the Inferno section roared with delight.

No one can predict how this season will play out, but on this night, anything seemed possible.

"It was pretty cool to come out here for Game 1 against NAU and see that," Leavitt said. "Congrats to Coach Dillingham for getting it jumping like that."

Activating the Valley is well underway.

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

## Main image



ASU students Kiki Carity (center left) and Sarah Chandler (center right) cheer during Sun Devil Football's opener against NAU at Mountain America Stadium in Tempe on Aug. 30. A record 14,280 students attended the game. Photo by Samantha Chow/Arizona State University

## Gallery



Candy Quigley (left) takes her daughter, Aspen, to her first ASU football game at Mountain America Stadium during the season opener Aug. 30.





Young fan Bobby McAllister cheers during the season opener. The ticket renewal rate for this season is 96%, and there are 7,500 new season ticket holders. Club and premium seating is sold out.



With nearly 57,000 fans in attendance — including a record 14,280 students — ASU Football's game against NAU on Aug. 30 was the first opener to sell out since 1998.





Jessica Kiermayre cheers during the football opener Aug. 30.



Young ASU fan Ellie Hall gets a lift up from Elyse Paulsen during the ASU football season opener on Aug. 30.





Sun Devils wide receiver Malik McClain (12) runs with the ball during Saturday's game against NAU at Mountain America Stadium in Tempe.



From left: Sun Devil fans Leah Calamity, Derek Duncan, Cade Duncan, Lewis Calamity IV and Audrina Calamity pose for a photo during the opening game.





Matthew Slade (middle) and Leah Slade (cheer during the game against NAU on Saturday.





ASU quarterback Sam Leavitt scores a touchdown Saturday against NAU in Tempe. The Heisman Trophy candidate scored on runs of 52 and 18 yards, and he threw for 257 yards and two additional touchdowns.



ASU's Sparky the Sun Devil mascot hypes up the crowd during the season opener.





ASU students Greta Raum (left) and Julia Wise cheer during the game against NAU.





ASU students cheer during the Sun Devil Football home opener against NAU on Aug. 30.



ASU linebacker Martell Hughes (18, center left) and safety Kyndrich Breedlove (5) tackle an NAU player during Saturday's game.