

Union Jack Classic: 'An awesome experience'

ASU fans, players, coaches revel in London visit, win over Kansas

By Scott Bordow, ASU News
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Story highlights

ASU fans flood tailgate party, Wembley Stadium for game

Sun Devils leave London with 24-17 victory

Kenny Dillingham calls trip an “awesome experience”

LONDON – Game Day.

It's 11 a.m. Saturday, six hours before the Arizona State Sun Devils and the University of Kansas Jayhawks will face each other in the Union Jack Classic, the first American college football game ever to be played in London's iconic Wembley Stadium.

Marian Reyes and 15 other students participating in ASU's London Sports Event study abroad program have gathered at Hat & Feathers, a gastropub just down the road from ASU London.

In a few minutes they'll board the London Tube and head to Wembley Stadium, where they'll serve as volunteers at Sparky's Touchdown Tailgate before heading to the stadium to watch the game.

“I'm so excited,” said Reyes, a senior majoring in global management in ASU's Thunderbird School of Global Management. “The biggest reason I came here is because I want to work at a marketing company and get into events. So, seeing something like that on an international level is going to be great.”

As the students get off at the Wembley Park tube stop and walk down the few steps onto Olympic Way, the street stretching from the stop to the stadium, maroon and gold is the dominant color scheme. ASU fans seem to outnumber Kansas fans 20-1.

One of those fans, Mike Bonds, graduated from ASU in 1999 but has lived on the East Coast for years. Watching ASU games, particularly the ones that start at 10 p.m. Eastern time, has been problematic. So, when Bonds heard the Sun Devils were playing in London, just a seven-hour flight from their home in upstate New York, crossing the pond was a no-brainer.

"We were like, 'Hell, yeah, we're going to that game,'" Bonds said. "It was finally a chance to see our Devils in person."

By noon, ASU fans had already started lining up outside Boxpark Wembley, the indoor/outdoor entertainment area serving as the site of the tailgate, hosted by the ASU Alumni Association.

When the doors opened at about 12:45 for the 1 p.m. event, the line stretched at least 100 deep.

The inside of Boxpark Wembley felt like Mill Avenue on a Saturday night. ASU pompons rested on every table. Each fan received a maroon and gold scarf courtesy of the ASU Alumni Association, as well as a full meal, four drinks and two side dishes from any of the vendors.

ASU's marching band played the school fight song, and Sparky led the packed crowd — the 2,000 tickets for the event sold out — in chants of "ASU, ASU, ASU."

The food and drink options included burgers, pizza, Greek food, Mexican food, Thai, fish and chips, barbeque, Indian and, of course, tea.

It is England, after all.

Nick Creasman and his family sat down at a table on the second floor. This trip was truly a family affair for the Creasmans. Nick, who graduated in 2018 with a degree in computer systems engineering, was accompanied by six family members, including his grandfather, Ronald, who graduated in 1969 and his grandmother, Debbie, also a 1969 graduate.

Along with Nick's father, Scott, a 1998 grad, three generations of Creasman Sun Devil fans were on hand.

"We've traveled together to a lot of Pac-12 games," Nick Creasman said. "This was a really great opportunity to see something completely different. Leading up to it, it felt kind of surreal. Like we're really going to London?"

How far back does the Creasman devotion for Sun Devil football go? Debbie said her father-in-law had season tickets in 1956.

"Sometimes, you don't get to spend enough time with family to be able to spend time doing something like this; it's just amazing," Scott Creasman said.

For David Carrera and his wife, Dede, this was the ultimate double-dip of a road trip. David, who graduated from ASU in 1984, not only was able to watch his beloved Sun Devils, he got a chance to see his daughter, Eliana Carrera, who works as a student enrollment advisor at ASU London.

“When this came up and it was announced ASU was going to play Kansas ... I mean, your daughter is working for ASU London. We have to go. This is a trip we have to go on.”

Carrera, who estimated he’s had season tickets for about 25 years, joked that he’s had to watch his words when describing his trip.

“Do I say, I’m going to go to the ASU game and see Eliana?” he said. “Or, I’m going to see Eliana and then go to the football game? I think the latter is the best way, right?”

As the tailgate roared, ASU baseball coach Willie Bloomquist took it all in. He credited football coach Kenny Dillingham for energizing the fan base.

“To see this many people make the trek across the water and come over here for this has been really, really special,” he said.

As the tailgate winded down to its 4 p.m. closing, Sun Devil fans headed to the stadium, hoping the Sun Devils would reward their trip with a victory.

ASU did just that, beating Kansas, 24-17. Following the game, Dillingham called the London trip an “awesome experience” for his players.

“They just got to do something they might have never done in their life,” Dillingham said. “They’re literally going to remember this forever.”

In the end, it was ASU Athletics Director Graham Rossini who put a bow on the week.

“The presence of ASU fans all over London has been wonderful to see,” Rossini said. “We have a massive international presence as a university, with 141 international athletes from 41 countries.

“So, all of our sports benefit from the exposure of a game like today. (I’m) just really grateful for our fans making the effort and investment to be here.”

ASU London: Behind the scenes

[Follow along](#) as ASU News reporter Scott Bordow shares what it's like to be reporting on this week's events from London, and shares some tips, ideas and locations he discovers along the way.

Preview: [Students packed and ready for a 'once-in-a-lifetime opportunity'](#)

Wednesday: [Ribbon cutting, panel discussions mark the grand opening](#)

Thursday: [Student designs in chocolate, fashion take center stage](#)

Friday: [ASU London students jump in with a multiday hackathon](#)

Also Friday: [Event management students visit revered sports venues on study abroad trip](#)

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

Main image



Sun Devils fans pack Wembley Stadium in London for the inaugural Union Jack Classic where ASU defeated the University of Kansas in the Big 12 game, 24-17. Photo courtesy Sun Devil Athletics

Text image(s)



ASU Watts College of Public Service and Community Solutions students take the Tube to the Union Jack Classic at Wembley Stadium in London on Sept. 19. The students were in London as part of a [study abroad program](#) learning about the city's sports culture. Photo by Samantha Chow/Arizona State University



A crowd of fans walks toward Wembley Stadium in London for the Union Jack Classic on Sept. 19. The game marks the first FBS (Football Bowl Subdivision) game held in England and the second college football game played in London. Photo by Samantha Chow/Arizona State University



ASU fans attend Sparky's Touchdown Tailgate at BOXPARK Wembley before the Union Jack Classic at Wembley Stadium in London on Sept. 19. Photo by Samantha Chow/Arizona State University



ASU head women's basketball coach Molly Miller (center) poses for a photo with fans during the Sparky's Touchdown Tailgate held at BOXPARK Wembley before the Union Jack Classic at Wembley Stadium in London on Sept. 19. Photo by Samantha Chow/Arizona State University



The Creasman family, (from left) Ron, Nicholas, Scott and Anne, pose for a photo during the Union Jack Classic at Wembley Stadium in London on Sept. 19. Photo by Samantha Chow/Arizona State University



The Sun Devils celebrate during their winning game against the Jayhawks during the Union Jack Classic played at Wembley Stadium on Sept. 19. Photo courtesy Sun Devil Athletics

Gallery



ASU fans sing during halftime of the Union Jack Classic at Wembley Stadium in London on Sept. 19.



ASU fan Aaron Bailey high-fives a friend after a play during the Union Jack Classic at Wembley Stadium in London on Sept. 19.



ASU London students cheer for the Sun Devils during the Union Jack Classic at Wembley Stadium in London on Sept. 19.