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## EVENTS

By Dawn Reiss

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The Super Bowl is biggest sporting event in the United States. Everyone knows it's practically a national holiday.

After Thanksgiving, it's the second largest food consumption day in America, according to the United States Department of Agriculture. In 2011, Super Bowl XLV played between the Pittsburgh Steelers and Green Bay Packers, became the most-watched American television program in history with a 111 million viewers. Last year, 110.5 million viewers watched. This year's Super Bowl— XLVIII— between the Denver Broncos and the Seattle Seahawks at MetLife Stadium in East Rutherford, N.J. will be the first cold weather Super Bowl ever played outside.

Trying to orchestrate such a colossal sporting event is hard enough without having to make contingency plans for inclement weather. Here's a look at what Mary Pat Augenthaler, Vice President of Events for the NFL had to say about what it takes to plan and host a Super Bowl.



### **Plan Ahead, Be Flexible on Game Day**

"I'm the classic type A and it's all about the details," jokes Augenthaler, during a phone interview just days before Super Bowl XLVIII. "But you can do all the planning in the world and everything you can possibly do, but at some point you just have to let it go and be flexible. Nothing every works out exactly as you planned it."

Augenthaler should know. This is the 18<sup>th</sup> Super Bowl she's helped planned for the league. A 1991 graduate of Boston College, Augenthaler started out at a small sports marketing agency called Sports Link. A few years later, after also working as a New York City fundraiser for Boston College, the wife of her former Sports Link boss, who worked in the events department at the NFL, helped open the door for Augenthaler who was initially hired as the NFL's Manager of Television Events in 1996.

Although ever Super Bowl brings unique challenges, one thing remains constant. "A key characteristic is being able to think on your feet," she says. "You do everything you can beforehand, but when it comes to execution you have to become the most flexible person in the world."

In Indianapolis, for Super Bowl XLVI, that meant planning for cold weather outside of the domed Lucas Oil Stadium. "We worried about the weather all week long and it was 50 degrees, so you just never know what you are going to get," Augenthaler says. "Anyone who works on multiple games, you take a piece of each Super Bowl with you. There's always a learning experience."

### **Accelerated Planning, Multiple Contingencies**

After the NY/NJ Host Committee were awarded Super Bowl XLVIII in May 2010, planning began almost immediately. "Because it is the first cold weather Super Bowl that is not being played in a dome, planning was accelerated," Augenthaler says. "It had to be, because we needed contingencies for contingencies."

That means, for the first time, the Super Bowl might not be played on a Sunday in the event of a mega snowstorm that threatens public safety, with a contingency plan to play the game anywhere from Friday, Jan. 31 to Monday, Feb. 3. "We would need 24 hours to move the game time. We need 36 hours to move the day. We need 48 hours of notice or prep time," National Football League Executive Vice President Eric Grubman told the New Jersey Star-Ledger, who also said 18 hours is the amount needed for a full cleanup of snow from the stadium and parking lots.

But Augenthaler says the NFL is going to try to keep the Super Bowl on its original game day unless it is absolutely necessary to make a change. "We all live or work in New York or New Jersey, we are cold weather people," she says. "When it snows you keep going. We have a sort of similar model for the Super Bowl. If we do get some weather we are going to manage it. Football is played outside during the season and we are going to do the same for the Super Bowl."



## **The Plow Plan**

Each morning, during a senior executive meeting call, Augenthaler says the NFL is getting daily updates from a meteorologist to help with weather planning.

If it does snow, the New Jersey Department of Transportation (NJDOT) and New Jersey Turnpike Authority (NJTA) have 821-agency owned or contractor trucks ready to plow within a 30-mile radius of the Meadowlands Sports Complex, with another 2,400 statewide trucks available, if necessary. Brine will be used to pre-treat roads before a storm arrives and the two agencies will add liquid calcium chloride to the rock salt if temperatures fall "well below the freezing mark."

In New York, more than 6,000 sanitation workers are expected to work for the York City Department of Sanitation to help clear road with 440 salt spreaders, 36 snow melters, and more than 2,000 plowable garbage trucks and 230 front end loaders.

At MetLife Stadium, the Super Bowl snow removal plan includes a crew of 1,600 workers, double the typical 800 workers for Giants and Jets games. In the seating areas, a fine-tuned system of snow chutes can direct snow to designated areas where it will then be loaded into Aero snow melters that can melt up to 150 tons of snow per hour. In the parking lot, 30 front-end loaders, 12 haul trucks, and six plows with salters can be used to clear snow, which can then be melted by a large Aero snow melter that can melt up to 600 tons of snow per hour.

"The difference here is the contingency planning isn't just rain, but inclement weather," Augenthaler says. "With plows and people to shovel, we are ready since we are supposed to get a storm. Every time it snows it's a chance to test ourselves."

## **Watch Traffic Patterns, Plan for National Security**

During the season, the NFL tested warming equipment during Jets and Giants games. They also watched crowd patterns and how they parked since the number of parking spots to 12,000, from 28,000 for a Jets or Giants game. "It was a constant study, how people flowed in and how they flowed out," Augenthaler says. "This is the first mass transit Super Bowl where people can take a train to the Super Bowl. That helps us bring more people on campus. Whether they are going to take it, is another story. It's been complicated, very large puzzle."

The Super Bowl is designated a "Level 1" national security event by the Department of Homeland Security, which means it is the type of event most likely to be targeted by terrorists. With 77,000 fans anticipated on attending, Augenthaler says DJs in seven warming tents also called "welcome pavilions," where added to "make it more dynamic" and maintain a fun atmosphere while moving people through security check points. Those checkpoints include 130 magnetometers, akin to the scanners that people walk through at the airport.

Two and a half miles of chain-link fencing, varying from 6 to 8-feet tall, is being used at least 300 feet from the stadium to help create a secure perimeter. The entire area will be guarded by 4,000 security personnel the NFL hires to supplement the federal, state, city and county law enforcement officials from more than 100 agencies, says Brian McCarthy, Vice President of Communications at National Football League.



## How They Keep in Touch

Like anyone who is planning a major event, Augenthaler and her team use multiple forms of technology to keep in constant communication. That includes using Yammer, a private social network collaboration tool to collaborate with team members, Microsoft's Sharepoint to talk internally and with key vendors, and many WebEx meetings, Augenthaler says. That also includes sending employees to the league's [superbowl.com](http://superbowl.com) app so everyone can keep current on the constant updates. "And texting, too," Augenthaler says. "That's a big one." Since it's difficult for everyone to meet, Augenthaler says four times a year she has series of in-person planning meetings.

"You don't need to be the smartest person in room, but you have to have instincts and wear a lot of different hats," she says. "You've got to be able to speak to everyone from executives and VIPS to the guys on the loading dock."

## New Ideas

Besides being the first outdoor cold weather Super Bowl and the first to have access to mass transit, this year, the NFL changed up its fan party. The league swapped out the NFL Experience for the Super Bowl Boulevard, where 13 blocks on Broadway in the middle of Manhattan—between 34<sup>th</sup> and 47<sup>th</sup> streets from Times Square to Herald Square—will be blocked off for NFL fans. The four-day outdoor festival-like event from Wednesday through Saturday includes a concert every night, player autographs, a Vince Lombardi Trophy display and a 60-foot-high, 180-foot long, eight-lane toboggan run that costs \$5 per ticket, with proceeds going to MillionTreesNYC, a tree-planting initiative in New York. When they started planning Augenthaler say they had a "clean piece of paper" and were asked "What can you cook up?"

Augenthaler says that's when they decided: "Let's do it as big and as bold as the market we are in. This bigger and better than the NFL Experience. It's unprecedented, especially for this city."

But that also meant "nuances I've never experience before," she says. "You are on city streets that are only so wide with the subway beneath you." The planning stages included working with Mayor Bloomberg and now Mayor de Blasio administrations and ultimately extending the festival three more blocks to 47<sup>th</sup> street, instead of ending it, as was originally planned, at 44<sup>th</sup> street.

"Everyone has embraced being outside and making the experience as memorable as possible," Augenthaler says. "For an event planner it's hard to say, you're done. You always sleep with one eye open and a finger on everything. It's a lot of hard work, but it's all worth it."

*(AP Photo/Mark Lennihan)*