

# Sports suite and ticket vendor expands nationally

By John Manasso  
STAFF WRITER

What if a company couldn't afford a suite at Turner Field or Philips Arena, or couldn't use that many tickets, but wanted access to suites at both arenas?

That's the idea behind **Sports Shares**, which came to Atlanta in January, and offers member businesses suites at a variety of sporting events and concerts.

Atlanta is the second market for Sports Shares, which began in Denver in 2005.

For now, Sports Shares members can buy tickets for five Georgia venues but eventually they might have access to those across the country.

For as little as \$5,000 — but potentially more than \$400,000 depending on the number of tickets and events a member signs up for — companies can buy tickets to events at Turner Field, the Georgia Dome, Philips Arena and possibly the Tour Championship at East Lake and The Masters, the latter two of which cost extra.

Tim Stolz, vice president of sales for Sports Shares' Atlanta office, worked for 10 years at Philips Arena where he was senior director of premium seating, meaning that he sold suites.

"We heard a lot of excuses and reasons why companies wouldn't renew suites and tickets," he said.

"We would hear that they had too many tickets left at the end of the season. They were not using everything. Someone's trying to run around at the end of the day, trying to give them out and they end up getting used by friends and neighbors and not for a business reason."

A suite can involve anywhere from 12 to 30 tickets for events numbering in the triple digits a year.

Sports Shares' model believes that by offering smaller memberships and more variety, companies — and smaller ones at that — can make more efficient use of the tickets than the upfront cost of a six-figure suite. Stolz said companies that have bought memberships in Atlanta include **Microsoft Corp.**, law firms **Powell Goldstein LLP** and **Holland & Knight LLP**, and accounting firm **Porter Keadle Moore LLP**.

On Oct. 1, Sports Shares will open in Dallas, where it bought a 20-year lease to a suite in the new \$1 billion Cowboys stadium. It has a list of 24 cities in which it plans to be and members will have the opportunity to upgrade to buy tickets for suites in cities other than where they are based, including high-demand national events like All-Star Games. It also is exploring the possibility of purchasing suites overseas, such as those at soccer's English Premier League.

Tyler Tysdal, the company's CEO, also is one of three managing directors at Denver-based private equity firm **Brand Journey Capital**, which is one of Sports Shares' main funders. Tysdal, a graduate of **Harvard Business School**, also serves as a managing director of

another private equity firm, **Mantucket Capital**, which has \$1 billion in assets.

On its Web site, Brand Journey lists its investment strategy as innovation, "potential for category or segment leadership" and "brands that inspire consumer passion."

A co-owner of the company is former NFL wide receiver Ed McCaffrey, who won Super Bowl titles with the San Francisco 49ers and Denver Broncos.

Another member of the company's leadership is Atlanta native Todd Lindenbaum, who attended **Lovett School** and founded a similar company, **One Suite Sports**, three years ago. That later merged with Sports Shares.

Tysdal said in addition to his firm, Sports Shares has been funded by other private equity and venture capital firms — seemingly a necessity with much of the banking and financial world in crisis.

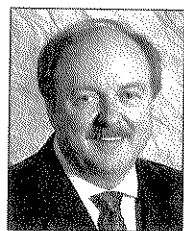
"We're actually right now going through our next phase of growth," Tysdal said. "We're in discussions with some other investors for the next phase of growth. There might be some high-profile names in the financial world and the world of sports."

Lindenbaum said the company is viewed as "a great partner," and not a competitor for suite holders, by the arenas from which it buys suites.

"We're starting long-term suite leases," he said. "We spend a lot of money on catering. ... As we grow our membership, we plan on owning multiple suites in each venue."

"We're real complementary to what they're doing. We're finding an organic clientele for clients that have been priced out because of high entry costs or who can't justify a full suite."

Bernie Mullin, the former **Atlanta Spirit LLP** CEO who now runs the consulting firm **The Aspire Group Inc.**, said the danger actually is that the venues might convince Sports Shares clients to buy a full suite. Instead, he likened the concept to ticket brokers, like **Ticketmaster**.



Mullin

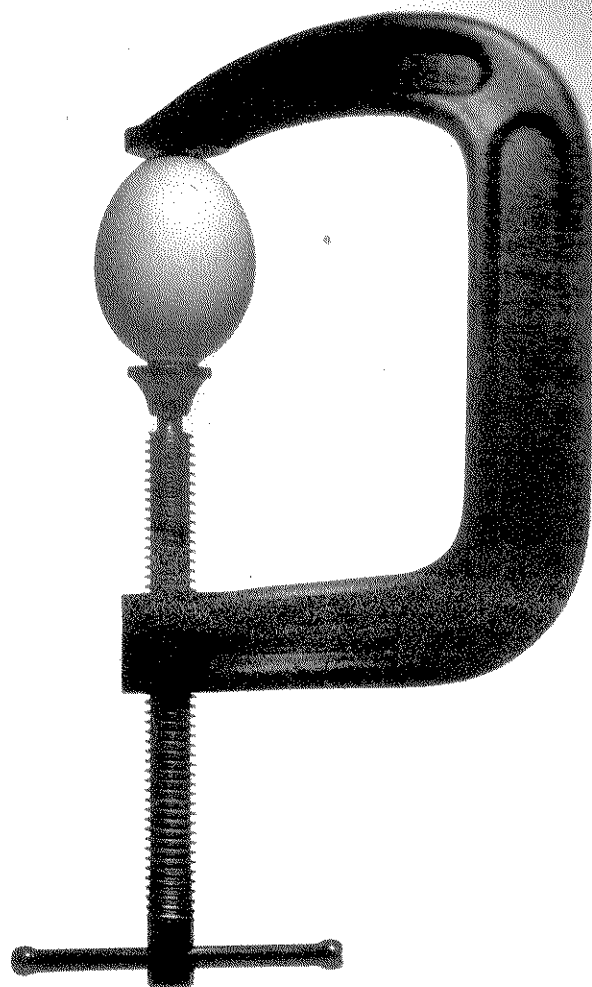
The Aspire Group Inc.

"To be honest, they're like the brokers," Mullin said. "Ninety percent of what they do is providing a service and they're helping the venues. If [the venues] can't [sell], other people will come into the space because they think there's a profitable business model."

Lindenbaum also said Sports Shares is providing referrals to the venues. He said the company recently sent a lead to Denver's Pepsi Center, home of the NBA's Nuggets and NHL's Avalanche, because the company was interested in a full-time suite.

Said Tysdal: "In our model one thing to understand is it's multiple venues and then it's increments of two tickets, so that's pretty [unusual] for the venue to sell that. That's a reason why it really helps diversify and broaden the base of customers for the venue."

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