



## They went to the football championship on the cheap, thanks for Dallas-based Fan Plan

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University of Alabama fan Casey Barksdale got to see his Crimson Tide play in the College Football Playoff National Championship in Atlanta, stayed four nights in a hotel and ate and drank better than the 36-year-old Dallas investor can typically afford.

This \$3,000 experience of a lifetime cost him \$210.

No, it wasn't a Groupon.

It was courtesy of Dallas-based Fan Plans.

At the beginning of the season, Barksdale bought three \$70 "plans" that would pay off \$1,000 apiece if 'Bama made it to the championship on Jan. 8. If it didn't, that money would go up in smoke.

The Tide made it to the big game, and so did he.

"I was nervous after we lost to Auburn," Barksdale says. "But things worked out."

University of Georgia fan Steve Rebillot made an early season investment on his alma mater making it to the big game. His chance at the championship game only cost him \$29, since the Bulldogs were considered a longshot for being one of the last two teams standing.

When the Dawgs came in ahead of the pack, Rebillot used his \$1,000 reimbursement toward a \$2,300 ticket.

“Sadly, I only bought one [plan] for \$29,” says the 37-year-old lobbyist from Washington, D.C. “I don’t know what I was thinking. If you’re OK with being out \$29, why not \$58?”

Colin Angelotti bought four plans for \$400: two for his alma mater, Ohio State, and two for Alabama, hoping for an OSU/Bama matchup at the championship.

“That way, I’d be able to cash in on both and get \$4,000,” he says. “When Alabama got in over Ohio State, I became a big fan of Georgia.”

The 25-year-old construction manager for a general contractor in Columbus, Ohio, used his \$2,000 for airfare and to explore Atlanta. He watched the game at a bar near the stadium and shared his good fortune by buying a few drinks.

## **The Moose and the sports exec**

I wrote about Fan Plan in October because Dallas Cowboys great Daryl Johnston and Terry Leiweke, whose family is a big name in sports, were staking their professional reputations on this newfangled idea.

Johnston, who is on Fan Plan’s board, and Leiweke (pronounced lie-wiki), its president, used the national championship as a beta test to see whether or not its proprietary risk-management platform actually worked.

Unlike traditional polls that rank the best teams after each weekend’s action, Fan Plan’s index is forward-calculating — taking into account 16 risk factors, including injuries and upcoming schedules.

It’s kinda like playing the futures stock market.

“Some savvy Georgia fans got a great deal after the loss to Auburn,” says Johnston. “Not only loyal but shrewd.”

Fan Plan needed to sell enough plans for teams that would fall by the wayside during the season while keeping enough holders in the game to make it interesting.

Halfway through the football season, TCU was considered to be one of 15 teams still in the hunt. But Fan Plan’s index factored in the Horned Frogs’ tough upcoming schedule and priced TCU’s plan at the \$20 minimum.

One hundred Froggies thought they knew better than the computer.

They didn’t.

“We were a little nervous on that one,” Leiweke says.



## Sweating bullets

Clemson fans, who paid \$433.32 before the team's loss to unranked Syracuse, were dismayed to see the price for its plan drop to \$21.83 the following Monday.

Johnston baited Clemson fans to take advantage of the toppled price. "My Syracuse Orangemen made it much more affordable for Clemson fans to buy a Fan Plan."

Those who stepped in were feeling pretty cocky on New Year's Day.

Johnston and Leiweke were sweating bullets.

"This is classic," says Leiweke. "Our biggest exposure was Clemson and Oklahoma. Between the two of them, we'd sold 80-plus plans — so that's \$80,000 that we'd have to pay out if they made it to the final. Our two smallest exposures were Alabama and Georgia.

"When Georgia took Oklahoma into overtime, blocked a field goal and scored a TD, our risk went down by \$25,000."

By the end of Sugar Bowl's third quarter, the duo was ebullient.

"Clemson was our biggest exposure, having sold 55 plans. We'd be out \$55,000 if they won. But Alabama came out and just hammered them.

"Now I know what a sports book operator feels like. They do this every day, for God's sake."

All this might sound like gambling, but it isn't. The Texas attorney general's office says so.

Fan Plan sold 525 plans covering 40 teams at an average price of about 50 bucks — \$25,000 or so all told, Leiweke says. It had to make good on \$20,000, so it made a 20 percent margin, about what they'd expected for their first time out.

It went well enough for Fan Plan to add next season's four playoff semifinal games, one of which will be held at the Cotton Bowl.

"From the business side, our numbers worked and our engine proved itself," says Johnston. "But the most important thing is, I couldn't be happier for the Bulldog and Crimson Tide fans who enjoyed a weekend in Atlanta at the National Championship Game thanks to Fan Plan. I know we made some dreams come true, and that's what this is all about."

Next year, Barksdale plans to buy a few more teams in addition to Alabama that he thinks might have a chance at the championship game — just to make the football season more interesting.

"A lot of people bet on games to give them a reason to watch the games. This does that, except it's legal."



## How Fan Plan works

Fans buy a prize indemnity package for a specific team at a real-time price that's based on where things stand for that team and expectations for it given the games ahead.

If the team actually makes it to the big game, the plan holder can pay for tickets, travel or other expenses associated with going to the big game and be reimbursed up to \$1,000 for each plan bought.

Fan Plan doesn't guarantee tickets. You have to buy those on your own or go through a ticket aggregator that works with Fan Plan.

