

GEORGIA HISTORICAL SOCIETY



GEORGIA BUSINESS HISTORY INITIATIVE

Sharing the Stories of the Businesses that Built Georgia



GEORGIA
DOME





The Georgia Dome

A PROFILE IN GEORGIA'S BUSINESS HISTORY

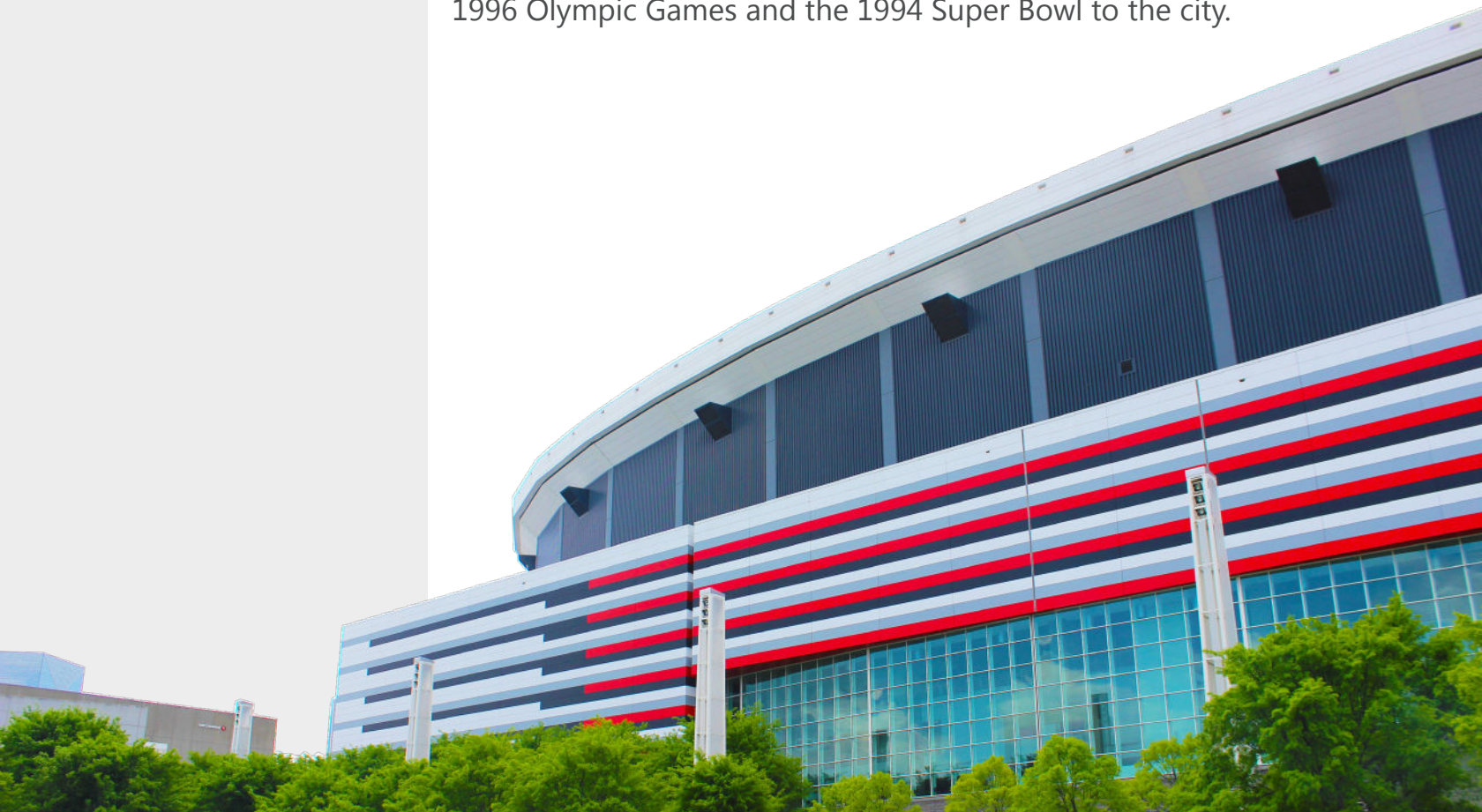
Simply put, the Georgia Dome changed Atlanta. *Atlanta Journal Constitution* sports columnist Mark Bradley put it best: "The Dome changed Atlanta and Atlanta's sports. The Dome made us a destination for every major event. Without the Dome, there'd have been no Super Bowl here, no continuing SEC championship, no Final Four beyond the Omni's 1977 one-off. There'd have been no Olympics." Building the Georgia Dome made it possible for Atlanta to bid for major, world-class events.

Opened in 1992 with a price tag of \$214 million, the Georgia Dome proved to be a shrewd investment and partnership for the city of Atlanta, Fulton County, and the state of Georgia. The Dome served the people of Georgia and beyond for an impressive 25-year-history. This account highlights many of the Dome's best moments, but to understand why the Dome has meant so much to Georgia we must consider the context of its origin, the people who made it possible, and the politics involved in getting the project off the ground.

Origin of the Georgia Dome

The Georgia World Congress Center Authority (GWCCA) was established in 1971 to oversee development of an international trade and exhibition center in Atlanta that today is known as the Georgia World Congress Center. Since then, the GWCCA campus has undergone several expansions, including the addition of the Georgia Dome in 1992, the largest rigid cable-supported domed building in the world at that time. The plan to build the Dome was generated out of two specific goals: to make Atlanta the premier convention city of the South and to ensure that the Atlanta Falcons continued to call the city home.

Building a state-of-the-art stadium could be a game-changer for whether professional sports teams stayed in their current city. Rankin Smith, founding owner of the Atlanta Falcons, threatened to move the team to Jacksonville, Florida, if Atlanta did not present a deal for a new stadium by 1991. From 1966-1992 the Falcons shared a home field with the Atlanta Braves at Atlanta-Fulton County Stadium, which could seat just over 60,000 for a football game. The Georgia Dome would seat 72,000 and would give Atlanta the ability to bring the 1996 Olympic Games and the 1994 Super Bowl to the city.



The People who made it Possible

The plan for the Georgia Dome was constructed out of public and private partnerships. Slated to be built next to the Georgia World Congress Center in downtown Atlanta, the Dome appealed to city, state, civic, and business leaders. The two major political forces behind the project were Atlanta Mayor Andrew Young and Georgia Governor Joe Frank Harris.

Political Maneuvering

Young, a civil rights leader, was the first black Congressman to be elected in Georgia since Reconstruction. During his tenure in Congress, he successfully secured federal funding for Atlanta's transportation systems, including MARTA, Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport, and highway improvements. As Mayor of Atlanta, Young brokered a deal between local members of The Concerned Black Clergy and the state regarding the Dome project. The proposed location of the Dome displaced local communities in the heart of Atlanta. The neighborhoods most affected by construction of the Dome were Vine City (home to Martin Luther King, Jr.'s last residence) and its sister community, English Avenue. Young negotiated the relocation of three predominantly African-American churches to help win community support. A housing trust of \$10 million was also established to provide revitalization efforts of those displaced communities. The city, county, and state agreed to move forward with the Dome project, each contributing funds and avoiding direct taxation of Georgia's citizens. The Dome was partially funded through monies gained via a one-cent sales-tax increase on hotels and motels in Atlanta and surrounding areas.



The Georgia Dome under construction in 1991.



A Home for Fans

The Dome opened in 1992 and had hosted 10 million visitors by 1998, just six years after opening. After two decades, the Dome hosted 1,400 events, 39 million guests, and generated \$7.4 billion in revenue for the state. In 2017, its final fiscal year, the Dome had an economic impact on employment by supporting over 5,000 jobs and accounted for \$492.6 million in revenue.

The Dome was built to be a versatile venue, but its initial purpose was to serve as the new home for the Atlanta Falcons. The Falcons played 256 home games in the Dome, which was also briefly home to the Atlanta Hawks and the Georgia State Panthers football team. The SEC football championship game, the Chick-fil-a Peach Bowl, and the Atlanta Football Classic were also annual events. Many high school football programs had dreams come true when participating in one of many Georgia High School Association football championship games from 2008-2016. Each year the *Honda Battle of the Bands* event brought top marching bands from Historically Black Colleges and Universities from across the nation to vie for grant money and prizes, but most importantly bragging rights.



Top: Michael Turner of the Atlanta Falcons carries the football in a 2010 game versus the Tampa Bay Buccaneers. Above: Marching bands compete at the Honda Battle of the Bands



National and International Events

Beyoncé (left), The Rock (bottom), and many more famous faces have performed at the Georgia Dome.

The Georgia Dome was the only venue in the world to host the Olympics, the Super Bowl, and the NCAA Final Four basketball tournament. It also hosted many of the nation's highest-grossing music tours and a slew of other highly entertaining events.

One of its first major events was Super Bowl XXVIII in 1994 between the Dallas Cowboys and Buffalo Bills. It would host a second Super Bowl in 2000.

In 1996 Atlanta hosted the Olympic Games. The Georgia Dome was an integral piece of executing the Games. The Dome hosted two major, highly anticipated Olympic events: basketball and gymnastics. A curtain was draped across the fifty-yard line cutting the Dome in half, with basketball on one side and gymnastics on the other. The USA's men's basketball team, dubbed "The Dream Team 3", and its women's gymnastics "Magnificent Seven" competed and found success in the Dome.

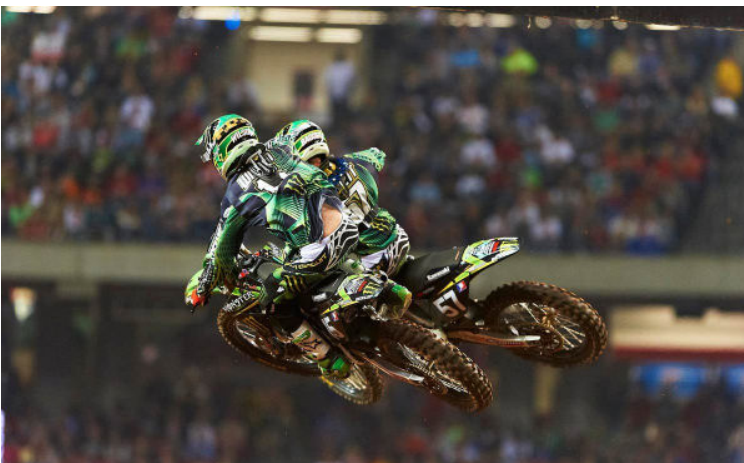




Events held at the Georgia Dome, top to bottom: NCAA Final Four basketball tournament, Guns N' Roses in concert, Monster Energy AMA Supercross, and the Chick-fil-A Peach Bowl.



During the 2008 SEC Men's basketball tournament, a tornado ripped through downtown Atlanta. While the quarterfinal game was in overtime, the Dome's cable roof structure began to sway fiercely and debris fell from the ceiling. The roof held up but was heavily damaged. The roof was repaired and ready for its next event just nine days later, a testament to the dedicated staff who worked at the Dome.



Other popular sporting events hosted at the Dome include Monster Energy Supercross, WrestleMania, and Monster Jam. Supercross was a fan favorite for over two decades and set attendance records at the Dome. In 2011 the Dome hosted "The Biggest WrestleMania Ever" and saw the return of Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson before more than 71,000 fans. Monster Jam required the Dome's staff to cover the entire floor with dirt and was the final event hosted there in 2017.



The Dome accommodated musicians with large fan bases who could sell upwards of 50,000 seats for a single concert. Many popular artists played the Dome including: The Rolling Stones, U2, Sir Elton John, Beyoncé, and Taylor Swift, to name a few. Two of the most notable tours to go on stage at the Dome include the 2016 Guns N' Roses reunion tour, *Not in This Lifetime...* and Taylor Swift's *1989 World Tour* in 2015.

Saying Goodbye

In 2012, the GWCCA announced plans to build a newer, larger stadium with a retractable roof. In March 2017, the Dome officially closed its doors and was demolished later that year, marking the end of an era. Mercedes-Benz Stadium opened in August 2017, becoming the third home of the Atlanta Falcons. Although the Dome was replaced, its memory will endure through the millions of fans and staff who brought life to it for over 25 years. The Georgia Dome played an integral role in elevating and promoting the city of Atlanta and the state of Georgia as a world-class destination.



Discussion Questions to Consider

1. How did Andrew Young, as mayor of Atlanta, help to facilitate building the Georgia Dome?
2. How did the Georgia Dome help to attract out-of-state visitors to Georgia?
3. Evaluate the economic impact of the Georgia Dome.

Georgia Standards for Excellence

SS8H12 Explain the importance of developments in Georgia since the late 20th century.

a. Explain how the continued development of Atlanta under mayors Maynard Jackson and Andrew Young impacted the state.

c. Evaluate the short-term and long-term impacts of hosting the 1996 Olympics on Georgia's economic and population growth.

d. Analyze Georgia's role in the national and global economy of the 21st Century, with regard to tourism, Savannah port expansion, and the film industry.

SS8CG6 Analyze the role of local governments in the state of Georgia.

SS8E2 Evaluate the influence of Georgia-based businesses on the State's economic growth and development.

c. Evaluate the economic impact of various industries in Georgia including agricultural, entertainment, manufacturing, service, and technology.



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Images throughout the publication are courtesy of the Georgia World Congress Center Authority (GWCCA).

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