

Giants, Jets pregame at new Meadowlands Stadium takes on a new look

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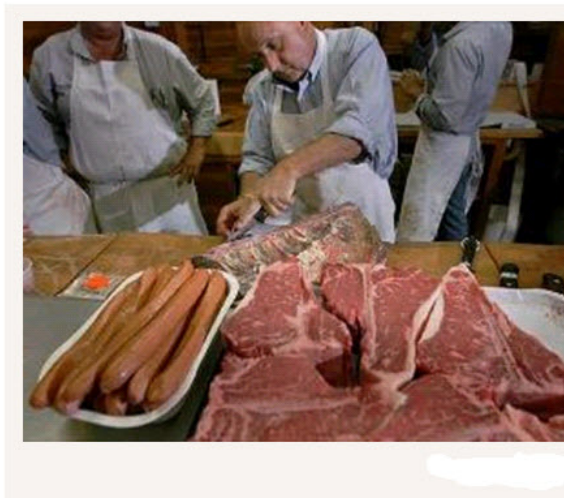
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For 34 years, pregame activities for Jets and Giants fans basically meant sitting on lawn chairs and grilling your own food in the parking lot.



LESLIE BARBARO/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Workers preparing the Bud Light party plaza. Verizon, MetLife and Pepsi will also sponsor sections.



But starting with Monday night's Giants-Jets preseason football game, that will change radically — the new \$1.6 billion stadium was designed with a 350,000-square-foot plaza surrounding the building.

For the first time, fans will be able to buy barbecue outside instead of grilling it themselves.

A 30-yard artificial turf field will be home to pee wee football games, as well as punt, pass and kick competitions for kids.

A band shell will be the site of concerts before games.

And 20 giant-screen televisions around the stadium's exterior will allow fans to watch earlier or later games.

"This is a huge area, and we want people to walk through it as if they were going to a fairgrounds, with all sorts of different activity," Jets Vice President Thad Sheely said. "It's an urban park, really."

Well, an urban park with lots of advertising. Fans will enter

the stadium through four corner gates labeled "Verizon," "Bud Light," "MetLife" and "Pepsi."

And for an estimated \$8 million apiece annually, all four corporate sponsors will try to get their money's worth by luring you into their corner.

"We want you to walk in and be energized," said Sheely, whose fans will be at the stadium Monday for what is labeled as a Jets home game against their stadium partners.

Sheely said that Pepsi, for instance, brought in a samba band and samba dancers to perform before Tuesday's U.S.-Brazil soccer game at the stadium. That area is also home to the field that will feature attractions, such as cheerleading events, Frisbee-catching-dog performances and youth football games.

The Bud Light corner features a "railgating" section that may prove ideal for the 8,000 to 10,000 fans expected to take trains to each game. Those fans — most of them traveling light and without grills — can now buy their barbecue, including a USDA prime, grilled steak sandwich for \$19 or an organic chicken kebob sandwich for \$10.

"We want to get them with the smell of the barbecue right as they get off the train," said operator Mark Lobel of the well-known Lobel's of New York butcher shop on the Upper West Side of Manhattan. "These people want it to be easy."

Lobel has another idea up his sleeve, though the logistics could be challenging. The shop may offer mixed-grill packages of hamburgers, hot dogs, steaks and sausages to tailgaters who want to cook up a barbecue feast but don't want the hassle of lugging a grill and fixings to the game.

"Fans could call ahead and reserve a tailgating space, say for 10 people; then when they arrive we bring them the food they've ordered in a cooler, and we have a Weber grill there for them to use," said Sheely, the Jets official.

Although Lobel said the do-it-yourself barbecue package is "something we're looking at very closely," he added that the main focus for now is on making sure the cooked-food sales operation runs smoothly.

The Jets and Giants are planning to feature former players in autograph sessions and question-and-answer segments, while the Verizon section will display gaming platforms, high-definition televisions and the latest technology. Sheely said the MetLife area will feature a giant scoreboard and clock, as well as a number of games and a chance to win football-related prizes.

The teams also have teamed up with Dan Biederman, who runs tours, concerts and other events at Bryant Park in Manhattan.

"Dan knows how to turn a place into an entertainment space," Sheely said. "We're going to try things you wouldn't expect, like offering chess where the queen piece is a cheerleader and the king is a quarterback or a coach. Plus there's three-dimensional sidewalk art — it's hard to explain, but you have to see it."

Check out Meadowlands Matters, John Brennan's new blog on sports business at northjersey.com/meadowlandsmatters. E-mail: brennan@northjersey.com