



**NFL COMMISSIONER** Roger Goodell, center, picked up a shovel and joined Rams owner Stan Kroenke (in sunglasses) and Inglewood Mayor James Butts at Thursday's groundbreaking.

## Rams break ground on ritzy Inglewood stadium

The \$2.6-billion venue is expected to open in time for 2019 NFL season, host the Super Bowl in 2021.

BY NATHAN FENNO  
AND SAM FARMER

The idea came into focus for Stan Kroenke, the billionaire Rams owner and real estate developer, during a predawn drive around Inglewood's Hollywood Park racetrack in the summer of 2013.

It grew into an audacious plan to transform 298 acres into one of the world's premier sports and entertainment districts with a \$2.6-billion stadium as the centerpiece.

On Thursday, Kroenke stepped out of a black SUV on the site bustling with massive earth-moving equipment and the project took a ceremonial step forward.

With more than 100 invited guests in attendance — politicians, media, members of the Pro Football Hall of Fame and even NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell — Kroenke and others plunged shiny silver shovels into a pile of dirt and extolled the virtues of a privately financed stadium that's expected to cost more than any other.

"This thing is going to be unbelievable," Kroenke said. "I don't think people really understand the scale of this."

On a piece of land that's 3½ times the size of Disneyland, the stadium will be surrounded by a development that includes a performance venue, hotel, hundreds of thousands of square feet for retail and offices, homes and a lake with waterfalls.

"We had to get it right and this is getting it right," Goodell said of the NFL's return to Los Angeles after a two-decade absence.

The 70,240-seat stadium — able to accommodate 25,000 extra people in standing-room areas behind the end zones — is scheduled to open for the 2019 NFL season and will host the Super Bowl in 2021.

Rams officials already have been in talks with the NCAA about hosting future Final Fours, in addition to discussions about being a site for a College Football Playoff



**JACK YOUNGBLOOD** was among the former Rams greats who heard nothing but great things about the team's future home.

championship game and playing a role in the LA 2024 Olympic bid.

Much of the low-slung, wave-shaped stadium will be covered by a transparent roof, but the building will remain open on the sides. It will be set 80 to 90 feet into the ground — 10 feet shallower than originally planned — with about 175 feet above ground.

"For the first time, we have a true indoor/outdoor venue. ... It's totally unique in the world," said Mark Williams, who heads the sports and entertainment division at stadium architect HKS.

While infrastructure work has been underway for more than a year and a half, the start of excavation this week is the latest sign of progress on the project.

The process is expected to take six to eight months.

The City of Inglewood approved grading and excavation permits for the project in recent weeks.

The Federal Aviation Administration has been reviewing the stadium's design for more than a year because of concerns that the structure would conflict with radar at nearby L.A. International Airport.

"We have worked with the FAA on potential solutions both from a materials perspective and potential solutions that don't impact the design of the building," said Kevin Demoff, the Rams' chief operating officer.

"We've had really productive conversations with them throughout the year."

"I think we're making good progress, but there's always work to do to make sure that we get a building that they're very happy with."

The FAA has declined to comment on the status of negotiations, though an agency spokesman said it is pausing approval of six large cranes for the project until the design issue is settled.

There haven't been significant changes in the latest renderings of the stadium from the images presented to NFL owners in January.

In a 30-2 vote, they chose the Inglewood project over a competing concept in Carson backed by the San Diego Chargers and Oakland Raiders.

Demoff said that Kroenke "wants to make sure that this building is everything that he stood up in front of the NFL owners and said it would be."

Added Demoff: "For all of us who have been around the NFL in Los Angeles and understand what it means to the city, to the NFL, this is a monumental day."

"This is not just another groundbreaking. This is kicking off the next era of the NFL."

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## They have been in Goff's position

**Quarterbacks**, from D1

who began his career in 1986. "Once

he starts concentrating on each

play individually, he'll be fine."

Ferragamo, who helped lead

the Rams to a Super Bowl during

the 1979 season, said "everybody

has been waiting" for the chance to

see Goff.

"Hopefully," Ferragamo said, "it will give a little flair and a little bit of hope and pizzazz to the fans."

Gabriel, the Rams' top pick in

1962, expects Goff will settle in

quickly.

"You're always nervous until you take the first hit," Gabriel said,

"You're thinking to yourself, 'Boy if I

don't play well, I'm not going to

play the rest of the year.'"

That should not be an issue for

Goff.

The Rams traded six picks for

the chance to move up to the top of

the draft to select him. He is the fu-

ture of the franchise. And that fu-

ture begins Sunday.

Gabriel, Jaworski, Ferragamo

and Everett recalled this week

their first starts and how it shaped

their futures as NFL quarterbacks.

**Roman Gabriel**

**First start:** Nov. 25, 1962 at Minne-

soota.

**Summary:** Gabriel completes 15 of

268 yards and two

touchdowns in a 24-24 tie that im-

proves Rams' record to 1-9-1.

"All through that rookie year, up

until the last four games, I was a

backup quarterback and also a

backup receiver and tight end. I

learned a lot about pass routes be-

fore I got to play because I was run-

ning them. [An assistant coach]

came to me and said, 'Look, Coach

[Harland] Svare is not really

happy with what's going on. We're

going to scrimmage Monday and I

want you to play. We might play you

Sunday.' After the scrimmage he

came up and said, 'Look, you might

start next week as a receiver.' I

didn't know until the Friday before

that I was going to start the Viking

game at quarterback. I hit [re-

ceiver] Red Phillips early on a

crossing route. From then on,

everything slowed down and I said,

'I can play in this league.'

I had a relatively good game. I believed I

proved myself. I don't think we won

more than a game that year. The tie

was one of the only good things

that happened."

**Ron Jaworski**

**First start:** Dec. 20, 1975 vs. Pitts-

burgh Steelers at the Coliseum.

**Summary:** Jaworski completes six

of 13 passes for 79 yards, with an in-

terception in a 10-3 victory. In the

fourth quarter, he rushes for the

game-winning five-yard touch-

down on a quarterback draw.

"I lit it up [laughing]. It was year

three of my career. My first year I

didn't play a down and, quite hon-

estly, I wasn't ready. The second

year I got to play some. I felt I was

ready by the third year and I got

that start after James Harris got

injured. But it was the Pittsburgh

Steelers, a great football team with

one of the greatest defenses of all

time. If someone tells you they're

not nervous starting their first

NFL game, someone is lying to you.

I was nervous until I played in my

last game 17 years later. I remem-

ber we got the ball back and during

a timeout I was standing in the

huddle and looked at that defense,

Jack Lambert, Mel Blount, all

those guys, and thinking, 'Oh my

goodness. This is my first start.'

But I do remember going in with

great confidence. We were a defen-

sive team and it was going to be low

scoring. I knew I couldn't make

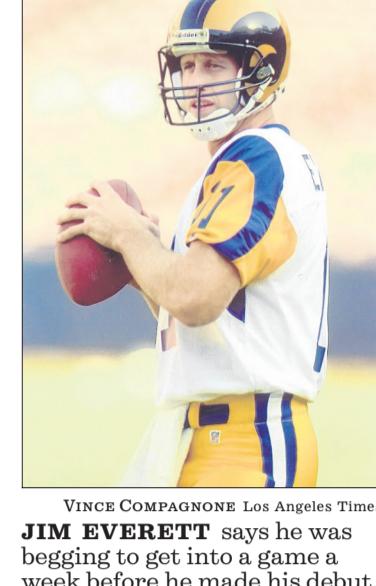
dumb mistakes and turn it over. It

was really my job to go out there

and not screw it up. That quarter-

back draw was a designed play,

straight up the middle to the peri-



VINCE COMPAGNONE Los Angeles Times

**JIM EVERETT** says he was begging to get into a game a week before he made his debut.

style end zone. You always want to get the first one under your belt, particularly if you win. Until it actually happens, you really don't know if you belong."

**Vince Ferragamo**

**First start:** Nov. 19, 1979 vs. Atlanta Falcons at Coliseum.

**Summary:** Ferragamo, starting in place of injured Pat Haden, completes nine of 22 passes for 171 yards and two touchdowns, with an interception, in a 20-14 victory.

"The situation was similar to what the Rams are facing. We were 5-6 and still had a shot at the playoffs if we caught fire. We just needed a spark. Sometimes changing the quarterback does that. I had two years of being an understudy that helped me. We were on 'Monday Night Football.' That was a big deal. I always really liked the stage and being under the bright lights. The timing was right. I was getting practice time so the receivers were ready for me. Game speed is entirely different but if you prepare you're ready to go. We practiced full speed and went full tilt. That helped me. [Atlanta] was a blitzing team and everybody on offense was looking for the ball. They didn't know who was going to get it. I was able to capitalize on the opportunity and I think it was finally, 'Hey, this guy may add up to something.' They were anticipating something from me and everyone was waiting. It was little bit overdue. When it finally hit, it was a big splash. Hopefully, Jared will get the same reaction."

**Jim Everett**

**Debut:** Nov. 6, 1986 vs. New England Patriots at Anaheim Stadium

**Summary:** Everett replaced Steve Dils in the second quarter with the Rams trailing, 13-0. Everett completed 12 of 19 passes for 193 yards and three touchdowns in a 30-28 defeat that ended with a Patriots touchdown pass on the final play.

"The week before I got in we lost, 6-0, at New Orleans. I'm like, 'Please, please put me in.' I'm begging. I'm telling the equipment guy, anybody, 'Please, anybody.' I could barely watch. [Against New England], I had a sense I was going in. The whole crowd was chanting, 'Everett' and [Coach] John Robinson could not hear himself think. My first completed pass was a touchdown to Henry Ellard. I ended up throwing a couple more touchdowns and handed it off a lot to Eric Dickerson. They weren't going to let me screw it up. I faked to Eric and scrambled back and hit Henry in the back of the end zone. Another one went to [fullback] Barry Redden, who I don't think caught a ball [for a touchdown] in a decade. That was a surprise to everyone."

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## Drivers are cordial ahead of NASCAR Chase finale