



GENARO MOLINA Los Angeles Times

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



GENARO MOLINA Los Angeles Times

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."

nathan.fenno@latimes.com
sam.farmer@latimes.com

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 future of the franchise. And that future 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 Minnesota.

Summary: Gabriel completes 15 of 24 passes for 268 yards and two touchdowns in a 24-24 tie that improves Rams' record to 1-9-1.

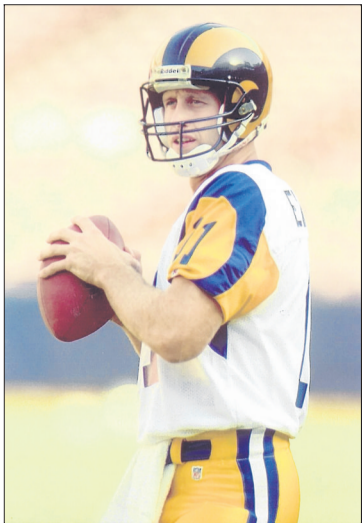
"All through that rookie year, up until the last four games, I was a backup quarterback and also a backup receiver and tight end. I learned a lot about pass routes before I got to play because I was running them. [An assistant coach] came to me and said, 'Look, Coach [Harland] Svare is not really happy 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 [receiver] 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. Pittsburgh Steelers at the Coliseum.

Summary: Jaworski completes six of 13 passes for 79 yards, with an interception in a 10-3 victory. In the fourth quarter, he rushes for the game-winning five-yard touchdown 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 honestly, 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 remember 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 defensive 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 quarterback draw was a designed play, straight up the middle to the per-



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."

gary.klein@latimes.com

Drivers are cordial ahead of NASCAR Chase finale

Contenders are getting along outside the cars heading into final Sprint Cup race.

GEORGE DIAZ ON MOTOR RACING

MIAMI BEACH — None of the NASCAR Chase contenders threw a chair at one another Thursday afternoon.

You rock, sportsmanship and civility!

A reporter at NASCAR's Championship 4 news conference referenced the recent UFC 205 media spectacle, when Eddie Alvarez and Conor McGregor got into a chair-tossing spit-spat, and asked how these four friendly combatants would be able to start the fire Sunday when racing for the Cup title.

"Right now we're outside the car," Joey Logano said. "We might as well get along."

And so, no inanimate objects were destroyed when Jimmie Johnson, Carl Edwards, Kyle Busch and Logano came together in

competitive chumminess at the Loews Miami Beach Hotel.

The meet-and-greet was the last mandatory pit stop for the contenders after the lineup was finalized last weekend, when Logano and Busch raced their way into the mix in Phoenix.

They've been forced to make nice, more or less, for a series of media appearances Monday and Tuesday in New York, including the "Jimmy Kimmel Live" show. It's the nice break in a sport where rivalries can be triggered in a split second.

A wrong twist or turn can ruin somebody else's day. Or season.

Not so much this time around in the Chase lottery.

After sorting out the final four from 16 Chase contenders, all of the ornery suspects have been eliminated. That would be you, Kevin Harvick, Kurt Busch and Tony Stewart, and even Matt Kenseth, assuming Logano stays in that mix.

Every sport is driven by rivalries. NASCAR is no different, but the dynamics

Sprint Cup Series finale



Busch



Edwards



Johnson



Logano

The 2016 NASCAR champion will be determined this weekend:

THE RACE: The Ford EcoBoost 400 at Homestead-Miami Speedway, the final race of the season.

WHEN: Sunday, 11:30 a.m. PST (TV: Channel 4).

THE COMPETITORS: Four drivers have survived a whittling-down process over the final 10 races of the season, from the top 16 drivers in the points race to the final quartet: Kyle Busch, Carl Edwards, Jimmie Johnson and Joey Logano. Whoever has the best finish at Miami will be the 2016 Sprint Cup champion.

of the Chase and the four guys who ended up on the big stage have no acrimonious history.

"It's really the four," Johnson said. "There's really nothing lingering. I'm not saying there won't be at the end of Sunday night. If you changed a couple of people

out it could have definitely been different."

Johnson has always been one of the good guys in the garage. Ditto for Edwards. Logano doesn't have to deal with fending off his most contentious dance partner, Kenseth, as they did last year when payback trumped

everything.

Busch, who has no problem being front and center if acrimony calls, doesn't have Harvick as his competitive foil.

"These guys are easy to get along with, easy to talk to, easy to have a good time with," Busch said.

You'd think they were prepping for a play date instead of making frantic left-hand turns at Homestead-Miami Speedway, as Sunday afternoon dovetails into evening, with these guys trying to become the last man standing after a 36-race grind comes to an end.

Mind games? What's the point?

"I don't think anything I'm going to say to these guys is going to make their car slower on Sunday," Edwards said. "There's really no point, even though it may be entertaining to you guys."

So kumbaya it is, but it will only go so far on Sunday. The switch will flip soon enough, when the handshakes and the pressers and the chumminess are all over, and everyone gets down to

the business of winning.

Logano and Edwards are racing to become first-time Cup champions. On the other end of the spectrum, Johnson chases history, trying to become only the third driver in NASCAR history to win seven titles. Richard Petty and the late Dale Earnhardt would make nice company.

And then there's Busch, the defending champ, who needed a waiver to qualify last year after he suffered serious leg injuries racing in the Xfinity Series the day before the 2015 Daytona 500. Busch missed the season's first 11 races before scrambling back not only to qualify, but win the whole thing.

"It's different, for sure," Busch said. "Last year I was a part-time champion so this year I hope to become a full-time champion."

Chippiness noted.

A touch of competitive bravado at last.

Although flying chairs remain an optional accessory.

gdiaz@orlandosentinel.com