

## **Classic builds sports sponsors**

### **Annual gridiron clash gives companies play**

**By David Williams**

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The Southern Heritage Classic began in 1990 with one corporate sponsor: Coca-Cola.

The annual football game had 23 last year and stands as an example of how sports marketing is maturing beyond companies writing checks in return for hanging their corporate banners in stadiums.

"We see you as our partners," founder and producer Fred Jones said in his "State of the Classic" address during Thursday's corporate partners conference, hosted by First Tennessee. "We fully understand that for a partnership to work both partners must make the other one successful.

"Also we want to help you work with the other partners. We saw that last year with FedEx and Coca-Cola. They designed and produced the 15th anniversary Classic jacket. It just shows that there are many ways to activate your sponsorship and get the most benefit for your company."

Activating sponsorships was a theme of the day, and of speaker Dick Irwin, director of the University of Memphis Bureau of Sport & Leisure Commerce.

"Too many people buy a sponsorship and let it kind of sit there," Irwin said. "It's sedentary. It's a couch potato. It's something that they bought, not something that they use.

"But sports sponsorship is one of the most dynamic marketing communication vehicles that you can buy today. It beats the heck out of so many other mediums if utilized correctly."

He said sponsorships can be activated through in-store campaigns, event hospitality for a company's best clients, and on-site product placement.

Some of the SHC's most high-profile corporate partners described how they've made their sponsorships work.

FedEx uses the SHC football game and related events, in part, to boost company pride among employees with an appreciation reception, complimentary tickets and tailgating.

FedEx Express is the SHC's presenting sponsor.

John Burke, director of key accounts for Coca-Cola Enterprises Inc., Southern States Division, discussed his company's sponsorship as a revenue driver via retail promotions.

David Miller, First Tennessee senior vice president/director of marketing, said the bank's sports sponsorships tap into "the emotional attachment" that exists with communities and their sports teams and events.

Jones plans to have 2005 corporate sponsorships in place by July 15. He also said he's seeking a title sponsor for the game.

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