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\$ COST CHAMPIONSHIP OF A BC\$ - \$155,411

By ANDY STAPLES The Tampa Tribune

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GAINESVILLE - The Bowl Championship Series national title game and its \$17 million-a-team payout didn't exactly fill the athletic department coffers at the University of Florida. After counting every incoming and outgoing penny related to the Gators football team's January trip to the greater Phoenix area, athletic department officials discovered winning the national title cost the department \$155,411.

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That number climbed even higher, senior associate athletic director Greg McGarity said, after the department spent \$150,000 to send the team to Washington to meet the president and \$100,000 for championship rings. It's not that McGarity is complaining. He'll gladly spend hours dissecting line items in exchange for the thrill of a national title. But McGarity, who has seen two football and two men's basketball national titles in his 15 years at Florida, knows too well a fact most members of a celebrating fan base don't even consider.

Championships aren't cheap.

"There's a price to pay," McGarity said, "for winning a national title."

Athletic departments can break even on the back end of a title thanks to merchandise sales and increased licensing revenue, but McGarity - who estimates the Gators lost \$100,000 on last year's men's basketball national title and \$200,000 on this year's - said that could take a year. In the short term, departments have to cough up cash.

When your friendly neighborhood newspaper reports that the BCS title game gives each team \$17 million, that doesn't mean someone hands Florida athletic director Jeremy Foley a giant novelty check after the final whistle sounds. The money goes to the Southeastern Conference, which gives Florida a share plus a travel adjustment determined by multiplying the number of miles traveled to the bowl site by \$200. According to a copy of Florida's BCS game budget obtained by The Tampa Tribune, Florida received \$2,243,600 of the \$17 million to help cover bowl expenses.

That sounds like a lot of money, but the Gators shelled out \$991,024 in salary supplements to football coaches and staff members, \$819,521 for charter flights to transport the team, coaches, band, cheerleaders, athletic department staff and guests, and \$85,086 for team meals in a budget that included 40 line items. Even after receiving \$700,000 more in bowl revenue than they expected, officials still fell more than \$100,000 short.

So who pays for all this? At Florida, the athletic department is funded entirely by donors, revenue from licensing, the SEC's television contracts and other private sources. Last year, Florida's department reported revenues of \$82.4 million to the U.S. Department of Education. At another public school without such a generous fan base, taxpayers may have had to foot the bill.

This week, SEC athletic directors began discussing a plan proposed by Florida's Foley to adjust their formula to more accurately reimburse conference teams that must travel to the West Coast to play in bowl games.

"When you play a bowl game in Phoenix or when you play a bowl game in Pasadena [Calif.], which LSU could have done, the expense is a little different than going to New Orleans or Orlando or Miami - specifically the charter transportation," Foley said in an interview last month. "The league is working on that formula, and I think we'll get some [additional] money back. We'll probably end up breaking even on that bowl."

Of course, the exposure and positive vibes from winning a national title essentially are priceless. So maybe a few hundred thousand dollars isn't such a bad investment.

"We want," McGarity said, "to deal with that problem every year."

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