

Athletic administration cracks down on reserved stadium seating

By Taylor Forrest
Staff reporter

Students who have attended basketball games this semester might have encountered a few rule changes and possibly even a security officer asking them to vacate their seats and move to the student section.

As of 2017, the athletic administration has enforced that no individual is allowed to sit in the upstairs stadium seats in historic Stewart Field House unless they are season ticket holders. Students, visitors and community members have been asked to abandon the reserved seating area during home basketball games. According to the athletic administration, this change came as a result of a few season ticket holders bringing to their attention that people were sitting up in the stadium seats without paying for them, essentially de-valuing what they had paid for.

Although, Matt Shelton, athletic director, said that while this enforcement is new for adults and community members, it is not something new for students.

"I have only been here since last April, but everyone that I have talked to has said that this rule has been enforced for students for as long as they can remember," said Shelton. "From what I understand from Coach Kirkland, it was only students that weren't allowed up there, but we have now expanded that to basically anybody that doesn't have a season ticket."

Scott Nuss, assistant athletic director, reiterated that enforcement has not always been a top priority regarding the seating.

"For years we have sold those as season ticket holder kind of seats, but it has never been enforced," said Nuss. "In the past it has kind of been, if the season ticket holder isn't there and doesn't sit in their designated seat, then it's wide open, it has never been enforced. But by the letter of the rule, the ones that are allowed to sit up there are the ones that have paid for them."

Shelton said that the only other individuals that are allowed to sit in the stadium seats, besides season ticket holders, are guests of the athletic director, athletic administration, and board of trustee members.

Similarly, season ticket holders for football have designated seating in Richard L. Jantz stadium that is just privy to donors. Although, the reserved seating rule has always been enforced for the football stadium.

Both Shelton and Nuss said that the new rule enforcement inside Stewart was necessary to create value for the seats that are sold.

"They [the seats] have no value to season ticket holders if we allow anybody to sit up there and they are paying for them," said Shelton. "Basically we felt like we had to draw a line in the sand that said if you don't pay to sit up here, you can't sit up here."

rule enforcement in January. Cisneros said that he had no idea the rule was in place.

"We sat up there last year and nobody ever asked us to leave last semester either," said Cisneros. "We had no idea it

arisen from students is that the stadium seats largely remain empty and are not being used because booster club members do not always attend the games regularly. One such student was Kyle Robinson, business management sophomore. He said that he and his friends went upstairs to see because the student section was crowded, but that Teresa Nichols, security officer, asked them to leave as soon as they sat down.

"Teresa was really nice about it, she was just doing her job," said Robinson. "But honestly it's kind of stupid because most of our boosters aren't even there. I understand wanting to have a good student section, but I don't want to be forced to be in the student section either."

According to Nuss, there are approximately 25-30 season ticket holders, although some of them have seating behind the scorer's box rather than upstairs. Shelton acknowledged that he understands that a lot of the stadium seats are not being used and he said that is something the athletic department is hoping to work on in the future.

"We know that we need to do a better job of expanding who buys tickets to sit up there because obviously it's quite empty," said Shelton.

The ultimate goal of the athletic department is to create value for the stadium seats for the season ticket holders, but they also want to provide an atmosphere with a thriving student section.

Nuss said, "I just want them [students] to all sit together regardless of what team they are on, what group they are in, and what organization they participate in. Just for two hours sit together, enjoy the basketball game, make a little noise and be a cohesive unit that people can't stand to play in front of."

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Top: Signage has been put up on both ends of the balcony to signify that the seating is reserved for season ticket holders. (Garrett Chapman/Staff photographer)

Bottom: Students cheer for the men's basketball team from the student section. (Taylor Forrest/Staff photographer)

The decision was made at an athletic director's meeting that involved Shelton, Nuss and Jeanice Lowry, assistant to the athletic department. When the decision was eventually made by the athletic administration to enforce the reserved seating in late December, they had to figure out a way to communicate the rule change. Nuss said that while they published it on social media and the Jinx tale, it was first pushed to students during finals week and he acknowledged that probably wasn't the best timing. Signage has also been posted on the upstairs stadium seats to deter individuals who haven't paid from sitting up there.

Yet, students still have had issues arise with being kicked out of the stadium seats. Uly Cisneros, business management sophomore, was one student that was asked to leave the upstairs reserved seating since the

was a rule. We were honestly shocked and baffled when we were asked to leave."

Although, students are not completely prohibited from the upstairs stadium seats. Shelton said that students are able to purchase season tickets for \$250 or they can pay to sit up there on a per game basis for \$10 each game.

"We pay to go to school here and to go to games. I feel like you should be able to sit where you want," said Cisneros. "We pay quite a bit of money to go here, I don't think I should be told where I am able to sit and I don't think that we should have to pay money to get into a school function."

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