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NFL ends lockout, restaurants relieved

Beef O'Brady's, Buffalo Wild Wings expect to see sales return

July 25, 2011 | By [Alan Snel](#)

Restaurants that rely on NFL Sundays for an important chunk of their sales were celebrating Monday when news broke that the National Football League players will sign a labor settlement with team owners to end the 132-day owners lockout.

"It's an absolute relief," said Aaron Carricato, owner of two Beef O' Brady's units in Tampa. "The NFL season for us is by far our busiest season."

Carricato said that if the lockout scrubbed the 2011 NFL season, his Sunday restaurant sales would plummet 40 percent. Beef 'O' Brady's, a Tampa, Fla.-based family sports pub chain, has 217 sites in 23 states.

"Without football it would have made a humongous difference," he said. "We love 25 weeks of football and crave it the other 27 weeks."

For the owners of five Beef 'O' Brady's restaurants in Florida's Panhandle and Mississippi, the end of the lockout means they won't have to continue a free beer promotion that was introduced in April when the labor stoppage was about 35 days old.

[The five restaurants gave away free Bud Light](#) to customers starting at 4 p.m. on each day of the lockout. Those five units added a minute every day for the free beer for each day that there was no labor agreement. For example, on Day 40 of the lockout, customers were given free beer for 40 minutes starting at 4 p.m.

Another chain that reached out to its customers during the lockout was Minneapolis-based Buffalo Wild Wings. The 740-plus-unit casual-dining chain [introduced TV spots during the NCAA college basketball tournament](#) games asking viewers to help "save our season" by visiting Buffalo Wild Wings' Facebook page and adding their names to an online petition.

"The end of the NFL lockout is a huge help for us," said Chris Kulig, general manager of a Buffalo Wild Wings store in a suburban community outside of Tampa. "That's a primary source for income on the weekends."

Kulig said his restaurant has an NFL promotion called, "Countdown to NFL Fridays," when the restaurant gives away free T-shirts, toy footballs and gift certificates to drive traffic for NFL Sundays.

"It helps people get excited about the season. To know the NFL is coming back is great," Kulig said. "Now that we have a season, people can get interested in NFL fantasy leagues."

He noted that Sunday sales increase 10-15 percent during football season.

Previously, NRN reported that Stephen Anderson of Miller Tabak & Co. estimated that 10 percent of Buffalo Wild Wings' sales are tied to NFL broadcasts, and David Tarantino of Robert W. Baird & Co.



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wrote that cancelled NFL games could erode the brand's average weekly sales by as much as 15 percent during the season.

Buffalo Wild Wings plans to hold a conference call to discuss its second-quarter earnings report Tuesday

Brand columnist Denise Lee Yohn, who writes on the restaurant industry, compared the NFL to an "ecosystem" that gives economic life to communities:

"Professional sports are interwoven into everyday life, including restaurants," Yohn said. "When a lockout happens, it shows how fragile the ecosystem is."

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