

# Arena Football League announces name for Atlantic City team

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ATLANTIC CITY — The Atlantic City Blackjacks will try to deal out the hits in the Arena Football League instead of taking them this season.

The franchise announced the official team name Thursday during a ceremony at Ocean Resort Casino's Ovation Hall. The Blackjacks also unveiled their logo, which is based on the jack from a deck of playing cards, while announcing they will wear red-and-black uniforms — again from a deck of playing cards — with gold trim.

“Who would have thought there could be anything associated with blackjack, and you wouldn't have to go into your pocket?” Mayor Frank Gilliam said with a laugh. “But this is very exciting news for the city of Atlantic City. This town needed a team that we can wrap our arms around and call our own. And it's not just Atlantic City's team. It's the region's team. And we're all 100 percent behind it.”

Trifecta Sports and Entertainment CEO George Manias, whose company is operating the franchise, said the team received over 2,000 submissions in its name-the-team contest.

The Blackjacks were among five finalists, along with the Gamblers, High Rollers, Jackpot and Royals. The Blackjacks received 36 percent of the vote, narrowly beating out the Gamblers with 31 percent.

The team name was unveiled via a video that showcased the Atlantic City Boardwalk and some of the amenities the city has to offer before showing a blackjack dealer with the announcement that Atlantic City was “doubling down” on its franchise and is “all in” with the Blackjacks.

“That video gave me goosebumps,” Arena Football League President John Adams said. “I've been associated with the league for 15 years, and I'm very excited about the future in Atlantic City.”

Team merchandise will be available within a few weeks, when the team will also unveil its official uniforms. The Blackjacks will hold open tryouts March 30 in Pitman, Gloucester County, then will begin training camp in Atlantic City in early April. Coach Ron James has said he plans on bringing 35 players to camp and will have a regular-season roster of 24 players.

They already have their quarterback.

Among the approximately half-dozen players who have been assigned by the AFL to the Blackjacks is Warren Smith, a Lacey Township High School graduate who has been playing indoor football the last six seasons and spent last year as a backup for the Arena Bowl champion Washington Valor.

“As soon as I heard Atlantic City was getting a team, I reached out to coach James,” Smith said. “I live about 40 miles away and always wanted to play near home.”

The Blackjacks open the season April 27 against the Philadelphia Soul at the Wells Fargo Center and will have their first home game at Jim Whelan Boardwalk Hall on May 4 against the Columbus Destroyers, the league's other expansion team.

Thursday's announcement was the next step in what has been a long process that began about six months ago when Ron Jaworski, chairman of the AFL's Executive Committee, approached Gilliam with the idea of trying to bring a team to town.

Jaworski, 67, the former Philadelphia Eagles quarterback, has a long relationship with the Atlantic City area. He owns Blue Heron Pines Golf Club in Galloway Township, brought the Maxwell Football Club awards to Atlantic City, and holds a celebrity golf tournament in the area every year.

In 2015, as owner of the Soul, he staged a game between the Soul and now-defunct Las Vegas Outlaws at Boardwalk Hall that drew an announced crowd of 6,514.

"I've always been bullish on Atlantic City," Jaworski said. "And I've always believed this area can support an Arena League football team. This is going to be exciting for Atlantic City and the region, because now they have their own team."

**Note:** The Blackjacks were assigned eight additional players to their inaugural roster: WR LaMark Brown (Kansas State/Minnesota State), WR Tyron Laughinghouse (Saint Augustine University), K Mark Lewis (Florida International/University of North Carolina), LB Nick Haag (Assumption), DB Keiron Jones (Southeast Louisiana), DB Kiante Northington (Eastern Kentucky), QB Drew Powell (Livingston College) and DB Pasquale Vacchio (Buffalo State).