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New way to watch Beef 'O' Brady's Bowl in St Petersburg

By Mark Albright, Times Staff Writer

The top ticket to the Beef 'O' Brady's Bowl St. Petersburg isn't in a luxury box.

It's a novel 720-seat hospitality suite set up on the 50-yard line right behind the Southern Mississippi bench. For \$175 a pop, fans get a field level view from a cafe setting flanked by bleacher seats.

Touted as a first in college or pro football, the Bud Light Lounge is a new way to overcome Tropicana Field's baseball stadium layout.

"We own seven bowls, but this is our first on-field lounge," said Brett Dulaney, executive director of the Dec. 21 bowl, which this year features Southern Mississippi and Louisville. "The floor is elevated six feet so you see over the players."

"Unlike other bowls stuck with old ways of doing things, we started from scratch, so we want to try new things," said Carlos Padilla, sales manager of the bowl game owned by ESPN. The sports network limits the Tropicana for a crowd of 30,000 and points the cameras at the permanent seating rather than line the sideline with portable bleachers.

A full buffet comes with the \$175 ticket. It's pub fare and dessert, much of it from the menu at Beef 'O' Brady's, the Tampa-based chain and bowl title sponsor.

Does the lounge sound like something from a golf event? The inspiration was hospitality buffet tents like Hooters Owl's Nest and the two-story Outback Steakhouse Billabong Club set up by the 18th green at pro tournaments.

Skeptics take note: The lounge is almost sold out.