

# Gladiator News

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## Gladiators hope fans flock to field

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**BRADENTON** - Edrick Sweeting is a believer in home-field advantage.

The Bradenton Gladiators president/receiver/safety is confident the team will thrive in its new environment at John Kiker Memorial Stadium on the campus of Southeast High.

The 1992 Southeast graduate and his teammates begin their 2006 Southern States Football League campaign at 7:05 tonight against the expansion Treasure Coast Pirates. Head coach Eddie Starling's Gladiators are attempting to rebound from a 4-7 season that ended with a 17-14 playoff loss against Fort Pierce.

Tickets are \$7, and children 5-and-under are admitted free. Parking is \$2.

After playing to average crowds of 200 or so most of last season at the Police Athletic League Sports Complex, Sweeting is hoping for a crowd between 700-800.

"Having that home-field crowd behind you elevates the team to another level," Sweeting said. "I think playing in a bigger arena will make our players feel they have to perform at a higher level.

"We're expecting a big crowd, and winning games will allow us to maintain that kind of attendance. It's very important for us to get off to a quick start and deliver a strong product because people enjoy following a winning team."

Sweeting said the Gladiators are reaching out to the community by distributing about 200 free tickets to various youth organizations and youth football players who attended a Gladiators summer camp.

For fans, tonight's game represents a chance to renew acquaintances with such former area high school standouts as quarterback Tony Hale; receivers Bon Bean and Mike Mills; cornerbacks Demetrius Craddock and Anthony Rawls; safety Thomas Jefferson; and linebacker Chris Peterson.

Sweeting and Starling also have high hopes for newcomers such as running back Joseph Patoray and defensive lineman D.J. Anneaud, a recent Southeast graduate.

The Manatee County School Board is charging the Gladiators \$125 an hour for use of Southeast's facilities for five home games, plus a custodial charge of \$22 an hour. Part of the cost is offset by a \$250 player fee.

Members of Southeast High's Junior ROTC program will operate the concession stands during regular-season home games and reap the profits from sales of concessions.

"Lack of parking and seating (at PAL) were complaints we got from our fans," Sweeting said. "They enjoyed the games, but they couldn't always see the action with people standing along the fence. This gives us more control over fans enjoying the games the way they want."

If it gives the Gladiators more control against opponents, Bradenton will have a team worthy of its aspirations.