

# Special Spectators and General Mills Highlight All-Virtual Season, Hosting 6 VIP Game Days for Children Nationwide

*Seriously ill children and their families meet legendary coaches and players in VIP video calls, enjoying inside stories, laughs, surprise gifts and cameos*

DETROIT, MI, UNITED STATES, December 1, 2020 /EINPresswire.com/ -- [Special Spectators](#), along with its strategic partner General Mills, share highlights from the first half of their all-virtual 2020 season including the impact it's had on the seriously ill children the organization serves, as

well as a sneak peek at the exciting events still to come. Bringing the joy of Game Day into family rooms nationwide, the organization went all-virtual with its 2020 College Football season, launching with UNC in early November, following with events at Alabama and Arkansas. Families

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*General Mills Director, Jay Picconatto*

have continued to remark on the positive impact these experiences have on their children, as the season continues.

“When we found out we wouldn't be able to be at the games and give these kids the in person experience, we decided to focus on what we could do virtually and really elevate it into an amazing experience,” said General Mills Director, Jay Picconatto, “The kids have loved the opportunity to meet their favorite coaches and players. It's

an amazing feeling to see the smiles on their faces when they have the chance to talk directly with some of their football heroes.”

Together with their partners at General Mills, along with [Learfield IMG College](#), Special Spectators worked with everyone involved to re-imagine the seasonal experiences it has been curating and hosting for nearly two decades as a team of dedicated volunteers. General Mills'



Special Spectators and General Mills Launch All-Virtual 2020 Season

corporate support has now made possible a unique version of the organization's signature all-access day of football, which typically includes behind-the-scenes stadium and locker room tours, an exclusive hospitality area prior to the game, and an array of special touches.

For the 2020 all-virtual season, families are participating in in-home experiences that include video calls with coaches, legendary players and other celebrities, tailgate care packages showcasing select General Mills brands and their Tailgate Nation recipes, gift packages supplied by the athletic departments and Special Spectators and finally, every time, an invitation for fans to text encouraging notes of support to the children and their families. Each event has had its own special touches and memorable moments.

For example, the debut event at UNC on November 9th featured a video call with Head Coach Mack Brown, custom Tailgate Nation care packages from General Mills, and a number of exclusive UNC gifts.

In late November, Special Spectators and its partners at General Mills and Learfield IMG College hosted an experience for seriously ill kids and families from Children's of Alabama, huddling with Crimson Tide legend, Rashad Johnson and enjoying a surprise visit from a friend who is a fixture around Bryant-Denny Stadium -- Big AL.



General Mills Tailgate Nation



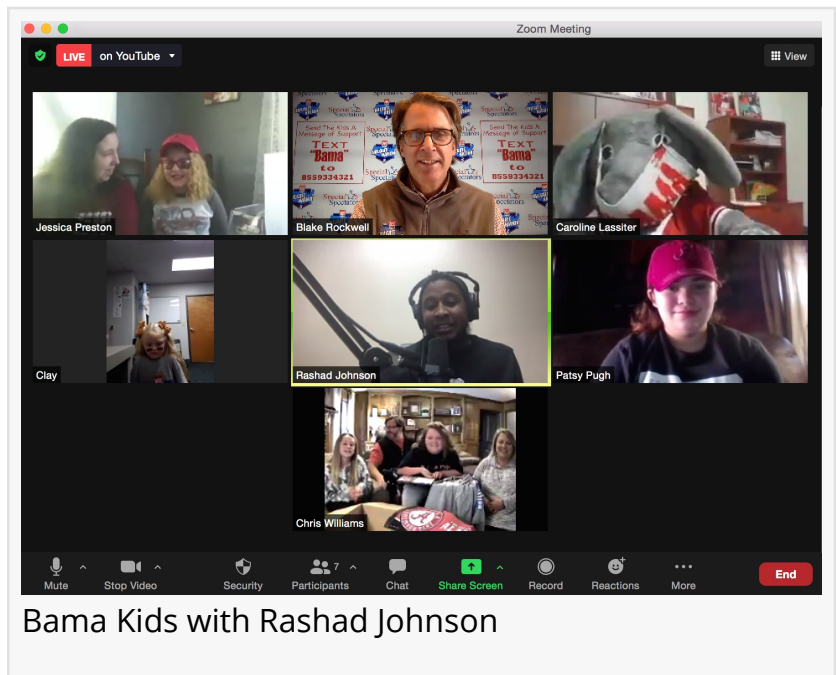
Learfield IMG College



Special gifts for the kids

“My daughter had the best time. She has gone through a depression and you made her smile,” said Jamie Pugh, mother of a very special Alabama spectator. “Thank you so much for making my baby smile!”

The following day, families from Arkansas Children's Hospital spent time with the most decorated player in Razorback history, Darren McFadden who was joined in a surprise appearance by one of the most recognizable faces in college football for the last 25 years, Kirk Herbstreit. As with all of the 2020 events, there were



Bama Kids with Rashad Johnson

custom tailgate care packages showcasing select General Mills brands and their Tailgate Nation recipes, gift packages supplied by the athletic department and Special Spectators and finally, an invitation for fans to text encouraging notes of support to the children and their families.

In the coming days, Special Spectators and General Mills will host events at University of Texas, Iowa State and Florida. Here is a sneak peak of what is planned:

University of Texas on 12/1:

For this very special event on 12/1, families will participate in an in-home experience featuring former University of Texas standout Jackson Jeffcoat, tailgate care packages showcasing select General Mills brands and their Tailgate Nation recipes, gift packages supplied by the Texas Athletic Department and Special Spectators and finally, an invitation for fans to text encouraging notes of support to the children and their families. We are encouraging fans to text "Horns" to 855-933-4321, to create a message of support for the kids. The hosts will gather all messages after the event and present them to the families in a digital scrapbook. These messages will put a smile on a child's face on a tough day and distract them while they receive treatment.

Iowa State University on 12/3:

Families will participate in an in-home experience featuring Iowa State University legend Seneca Wallace, tailgate care packages showcasing select General Mills brands and their Tailgate Nation recipes, gift packages supplied by the Iowa State Athletics Department and Special Spectators and finally, an invitation for fans to text encouraging notes of support to the children and their families. We are encouraging fans to text "Cyclones" to 855-933-4321, to create a message of support for the kids. The hosts will gather all messages after the event and present them to the families in a digital scrapbook. These messages will put a smile on a child's face on a tough day and distract them while they receive treatment.

As always, fans are welcome to watch the live-stream on YouTube -- by visiting the Special Spectators channel here <https://bit.ly/3p6rNQ5>

The final event planned for the season will be at Florida on December 8 -- with details soon to be announced.

The 2020 Special Spectators Season with General Mills

11/9: UNC

11/19 : Alabama

11/20: Arkansas

12/1: Texas

12/3: Iowa State

12/8: Florida

"The collaboration with General Mills and our friends at Learfield IMG College has been phenomenal," said Special Spectators Founder and Executive Director Blake Rockwell. "The kids we serve are very much the heroes of their own households, so it is incredibly powerful to be able to find new ways to bring them joy during this very different season, with a special twist on our VIP Game Days, working with such caring, imaginative partners to do so."

Special Spectators is an entirely volunteer run 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that uplifts seriously ill children and their families nationwide, year in and year out, ultimately aspiring to be all year-round and offer experiences across additional sports. Founder Blake Rockwell has been recognized for his long-standing work with the children of Special Spectators on CNN Heroes. The organization has served over 10,000 patients, parents and siblings to date at nearly 450 Game Days, profoundly impacting the lives of seriously ill children by delivering the rare joy of Game Day and inviting them to what has often been described as the greatest day of their often challenging and stressful, and sometimes short, lives. The organization delivers on its mission as an entirely volunteer organization, with as many as 35-50 experiences in any given season. The all-virtual season reflects the organization's focus on adapting to the needs of the families it serves.

"Teaming with General Mills and Special Spectators to create virtual game day visits and memorable connections for these kids and their families this season has really been spectacular," said Bill Hirsh, vice president, national sales for Learfield IMG College, the multimedia rightsholder for the six universities engaged in the 2020 campaign. "While the pandemic created obvious on-field and in-person challenges we typically don't face, I'm proud of what we've been able to accomplish collectively in hosting VIP college football interactions for these kids."

About Special Spectators

Special Spectators partners with athletic departments, coaching staffs, athletes, local hospitals, student volunteers, network broadcasters, and corporate sponsors to serve these children and

families nationwide. The organization is entirely volunteer-based, with no paid staff and relies heavily on donations and in-kind support to fuel its calendar of events each year. Read more of Founder Blake Rockwell's story on CNN Heroes website, their Facebook or Twitter pages. To donate and help give even more seriously ill children a magical VIP game day, please [visit the website](#). There you can also find out more about what your donations cover -- everything from food, to tents and chairs, and transportation.

#### About Learfield IMG College

Learfield IMG College is the leading media and technology services company in intercollegiate athletics. The company unlocks the value of college sports for brands and fans through an omnichannel platform with innovative content and commerce solutions for fan engagement. The Learfield IMG College suite of services includes licensing and multimedia sponsorship management; publishing, audio, digital and social media; data analytics; ticketing, ticket sales and professional concessions expertise; branding; campus-wide business and sponsorship development; and venue technology systems. Headquartered in Plano, Texas, the company has long had the privilege of being an advocate for intercollegiate athletics and the student-athlete experience. Since 2008, it has served as title sponsor for the acclaimed Learfield IMG College Directors' Cup, supporting athletic departments across all divisions.

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