

Game 7: Heat's hottest ticket

■ Buy a ticket, get to a TV or follow along on your smartphone. Just don't miss Saturday night's Heat-Celtics Game 7.

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Trial lawyer Garrett Biondo is the incoming president of the Dade County Bar Association. He's also a Miami Heat season-ticket holder who refuses to miss a big game.

But when it comes to Saturday's Game 7 — arguably the biggest home affair in Heat history — he can't be both.

At the same time the Heat and Celtics decide the Eastern Conference championship Saturday, Biondo will be about a mile south for his swearing in — at the Bar association's black-tie gala, held at the Mandarin Oriental.

Think he's disappointed? Imagine the 300 or so others in attendance who *aren't* being recognized at the event.

Biondo is a good sport. He's asked the hotel to set up big-screens outside the banquet hall, so as soon as the program ends, they can all go watch the second half.

"Truthfully, I'd absolutely be at the game if I wasn't at the dinner," Biondo said. "I'm sure there are quite a few others in the same boat."

CONFLICTED

From weddings to graduation parties to *quinceañeras*, there are dozens of long-standing events Saturday falling on a night of can't-miss basketball. Thousands of conflicted Heat fans will spend the evening mulling how far they're willing to push the boundaries of acceptable social behavior.

Can I watch the game on my phone? Is it OK to skip the cake-cutting to seek out the hotel bar?

The answer to the latter: Depends on how big a sports fan the bride's father is.

For the uninitiated, Game 7s make people do some convention-bending (and budget-busting) things because they're so rare, and their outcomes so final. If the Heat wins, it's on to the NBA Finals. A loss? Golf season.

"It's probably the most nerve-racking, but at the same exciting, game you can possibly play," said Marlins legend Jeff Conine. "As an athlete or entertainer, there's no way you can match the electricity of a Game 7."

"It's do or die."

Conine had the privilege of playing in — and winning — two such contests with the Marlins. The first was in 1997, when the franchise beat the Cleveland Indians at home for the world championship, in extra innings no less. The other was in 2003, when the Marlins, on the road, snatched the National League pennant from the grasp of the long-suffering Chicago Cubs.

Both times, the game wasn't just the hottest event in town, but also the nation's most compelling sports story.

That's why Heat-Celtics (Part 7) all but sold out in just a few hours Friday, and why courtside seats are fetching as much as \$17,500 on the secondary market. The team will likely release some previously held tickets on Heat.com as the game draws nearer, spokeswoman Lorrie-Ann Diaz said late Friday.

"I wouldn't say it's a perfect storm, because you don't have a lot of tourists in town," said ticket broker Michael Lipman. "But for summertime, you couldn't get any better. People want to go out, and this is going to be the event of the night."

As of Friday afternoon, the average sales price for Saturday's deciding game on StubHub.com was around \$375 — the highest price point of any NBA playoff game this year, said Joellen Ferrer, the website's spokeswoman. Prices could fall through the day Saturday because of the hundreds of seats still listed on the site, she added. On Tiquiq.com, another online scalping service, the average price was nearly \$700 — a 28 percent increase over Game 6 in Boston, a company spokesman said.

Clearly, fans are willing to pay to witness history. The Heat hasn't hosted a Game 7 since losing to Detroit in the 2003 Eastern Conference Finals.

The team has themed the evening "Defend This House," and will distribute white T-shirts at the door with that slogan. Aside from that, little else will be different from an organizational standpoint.

"When it comes to big games, our mantra has been to do what you've always done — just do it better," said Michael McCullough, the Heat's chief marketing officer.



Top 5 places to watch the game

1. Duffy's Sports Grill, 3929 NE 163rd St., North Miami Beach
2. The Clevelander, 1020 Ocean Dr., Miami Beach
3. Foxhole, 1218 14th Ct., Miami Beach
4. Will Call, 700 NE Second Ave, Miami
5. Nearly any restaurant or bar in Miami-Dade County

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HEAT PLUS EATS

Bars and restaurants, on the other hand, are going all-out.

At the Fontainebleau Miami Beach, extra TVs are going in at Bleau Bar and Gotham Steak. A 48-inch TV will be rolled into the bar area at Scarpetta.

Likewise, the tony Ritz-Carlton Key Biscayne will add screens to restaurants and bar areas for the game.

But local flack Aaron Gordon, the vice president of Schwartz Media, has no such luck. Gordon, whose firm represents the Arsht Center, has *Lion King* tickets Saturday night, bought by his parents.

Not even Game 7 will derail this long-planned family outing.

"I have my DVR set to record the game," Gordon said. "It's going to be an unconventional double-header."