Scores of people work behind the scenes to make game days a reality at Carter-Finley Stadium.

Few fans have a better seat at Carter-Finley Stadium than Jack Moorman ‘01 MPA. He is perched high above the 35-yard line in a glassed-in booth that provides protection from the rain, cool air on hot days and television monitors where he can catch replays or check scores. Yet Moorman pays little attention to the game. As chief of campus police at NC State, he’s here to work. He uses his seat in the command center on the fourth level of the stadium to scan the crowd through binoculars. He studies a television monitor fed by cameras that zoom in to take a closer look at potential problems, from fights in the stands to fans needing medical attention. “Sometimes a couple of touchdowns will be scored and I won’t even have realized it,” he says.
Moorman is part of a team of people—some contractors, some university employees—who make football games at Carter-Finley possible. From preparing the field to handling traffic to cooking the food to keeping track of the messages on the scoreboard, scores of people come together to make game day happen. Fans don’t see most of it, but it’s a carefully choreographed countdown where attention to detail is paramount. And it doesn’t all happen in the stadium. On game day, there’s even a small group at work inside Reynolds Coliseum, connected to Carter-Finley by more than five miles of fiber-optic cable, putting together highlight reels and other images that will be shown on the football stadium’s large scoreboard. NC State Athletics granted NC State magazine full access to a couple of football games last fall so we could tell the story of the team that works behind the scenes to make home games a great experience for Wolfpack fans.

Much of the work to prepare Carter-Finley takes place before football season begins. Groundskeepers tend to the field, 1.4 acres of Bermuda grass. Army ROTC members spend two weeks installing padded back seats for season ticket holders who pay a premium for the comfort. Ushers attend a cookout where they learn about new rules for each season, such as a new ban last season on smoking and umbrellas in the stadium.

Once the season gets underway, the work for the next game begins immediately after the previous one. Reports on everything from arrests to ticket scanner problems to parking are submitted to Adina Stock ’03, ’05 mr, assistant athletics director for operations. Stock forwards the reports to Athletics Director Debbie Yow by noon Sunday. Repairs are made on Monday. If a screw is loose on a seat, it is tightened. If a small liquor bottle is jammed in a toilet—an all-too-common problem—it is taken care of. The fleet of golf carts used to get workers around the stadium and grounds is charged. The field is mowed.

SETTING THE STAGE
Every Tuesday before a home game, a meeting in Vaughn Towers brings together representatives from every aspect of putting on game day. Most of the nearly 40 people attending are men, but the varying attire—from suits to athletic shorts and T-shirts—shows a range of responsibilities from security to concessions to ticket sales. A mural of past NC State football greats on the wall behind them includes images from each decade back to the 1920s. Running the show is Stock, a former NC State gymnast who oversees operations for athletic events.

“Amy leftover items from last week?” Stock asks. She lets everyone know that a “card stunt” from the previous week’s game, where the fans used heavy-stock cards placed on their seats to spell out “THIS IS OUR STATE,” had been “officially retired.” The stunt had been a hit, making great halftime visuals for ESPN, but a handful of fans then turned their cards into heavyweight paper airplanes and launched them onto the field or into the stands. One of the cardboard airplanes resulted in an injury that required stitches, and Moorman and his officers spent much of the second half watching for fans
constructing or launching paper airplanes. “The signs are extremely dangerous,” Moorman says, weighing in during the meeting.

“It’s retired,” Stock says. “That was the last time.”

This week’s game is against Central Michigan. It’s also Parents and Families Weekend, an annual event that brings about 3,000 mothers and fathers to their first NC State football game. “They will have a lot of questions, so help them,” says Brian Kelly, associate athletics director for ticket sales and operations. Much of the meeting deals with small details, like a lock that wouldn’t open at one gate last week. Of greater concern is that the football team arrived 20 minutes early last week for the Walk of Champions, so few fans were present to cheer on the players as they walked from the buses to the locker rooms.

Later in the week, the video boards, the public address system and the ticket scanners are checked and checked again. The CO2 canisters, which are used to create a plume of smoke as the Wolfpack runs out of the tunnel, are filled and tested.

PICKING UP THE PACE
The pace quickens on Thursday. By 8 a.m., a facilities crew member in a golf cart pulls a string along one of the sidelines, the first step in repainting the field markings that look dull and faded in the morning dew. Workers with a contracted cleaning service stock the bathrooms. A forklift unloads 180,000 plastic cups off the back of a tractor-trailer. Mary McLaurin is getting an early start setting up the concession stand she runs for Crosswave Discipleship, one of dozens of nonprofits that staff concessions stands in return for a percentage of the proceeds. By 9 a.m., the tractor-trailer with the plastic cups has been replaced by a Coca-Cola truck delivering pallets filled with bottles of water. Four workers are using leaf blowers to clear the concourse of debris.
“The atmosphere is crazy, but everyone is excited. It’s like controlled chaos.” —Dave McLaughlin, kitchen supervisor

Daryl Liles ’98 is slowly driving the paint sprayer on the field. Liles is the turf supervisor at Carter-Finley, and he works on the outer lines first, periodically leaning over to make sure he’s following the twine line, and then outlines the numbers and paints the hash lines. It will take him five hours to finish. His brother, Derek Liles ’98, as is slowly driving the paint sprayer on the field. Liles is the turf supervisor at Carter-Finley, and he works on the outer lines first, periodically leaning over to make sure he’s following the twine line, and then outlines the numbers and paints the hash lines. It will take him five hours to finish. His brother, Derek Liles ’98, the facility supervisor at Carter-Finley, is filling in one end zone with a paint gun. The brothers work with six other members of the facilities crew, loading and unloading the wooden boards containing the yard line stencils, gathering white paint splatter on their legs.

In the kitchen, the prep work for Saturday’s game begins at noon. The kitchen staff works from an extensive checklist, slicing zucchini, cucumbers, squash and celery for vegetable trays and honeydew melon, cantaloupe, pineapple and strawberries for fruit trays. Much of the prep work must be done in advance because there won’t be time—or space—to get it all done in the few hours before the game, says Mark Turner, an executive catering chef with the university’s dining operation. The kitchen is cramped, and cooks have to be careful not to bump into each other. The walk-in freezer is stuffed, requiring carts of food to be rearranged each time someone needs to retrieve something. “We make the impossible possible,” Turner says.

GAME DAY

Kickoff is scheduled for 3:34 p.m. But Kathy Gardner is manning her post outside the Murphy Center by 7 a.m. She works for Staff One, the company NC State contracts with to provide ushers, and right now her job is to make sure cars don’t drive into the Murphy Center lot, which is reserved for the recreational vehicles that some fans stay in overnight. Dave McLaughlin, one of the kitchen supervisors, arrives a few minutes later and gets to work preparing 200 pounds of sirloin that will be served in Vaughn Towers. “Game days, that’s what I look forward to,” says McLaughlin. “The atmosphere is crazy, but everyone is excited. It’s like controlled chaos.”

Out on the concourse, a contractor unloads crates of lemons, frozen lemonade and pretzel dough at concession stands. More cooks and other workers head to the kitchen after they are dropped off in a van shortly before 9:30 a.m. In the kitchen McLaughlin brushes barbecue sauce on trays of beef brisket, while Turner grabs a banana for himself. “You’ve got to eat something during the day,” he says. Outside, ice is loaded on golf carts to deliver to concession stands. More cooks and other workers head to the kitchen after they are dropped off in a van shortly before 9:30 a.m. In the kitchen McLaughlin brushes barbecue sauce

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concessions photograph by Ted Richardson, kitchen and elevator photograph by Justin Cook
the public address announcer what to say and when to say it and gives Pray and his team direction on when to air certain promotions or when to capture scenes of fans for the video screen.

Down in the bowels of the stadium, the Liles brothers and their crew gather for a lunch of macaroni and cheese and barbecue chicken. A John Deere mower becomes a table, while one of the workers sits and eats in the back of a utility truck. Their work is mostly finished until game time, when they will break into teams of three to raise and lower the net behind each goal post for extra point and field goal attempts. One of those teams will set off the CO2 canisters that mark the team’s entrance into the stadium.

CROWD CONTROL

Stock, who has been strolling through parking lots and the concourse, makes her way to Gate 7 to meet with the ushers from Staff One. Some of them are swapping stories from last week’s game against Clemson, talking about the empty whiskey bottles they found in some sections. A Staff One supervisor has a surprise for Stock. “Is it chocolate?” Stock asks. It is, in chocolate chip cookies, and Stock is appreciative. “This is a funky game because I eat breakfast and I can’t eat again until 3:30,” she says.

Stock reminds the ushers that it is Parents and Families Weekend and that some fans may need help finding their seats. She gets a laugh when she says she hopes students will be better behaved because their parents are there. “You’re laughing because you know it’s not going to happen,” Stock says.

Alcohol is not allowed in Carter-Finley Stadium, but it routinely makes its way in. While ushers check bags of fans coming into stadiums, they are under strict orders not to pat down fans or touch them in any way. That makes it easy for fans to get alcohol into the stadium. The evidence is everywhere. There are “biospills”—Carter-Finley vernacular indicating a fan has thrown up—that must be cleaned up, or the tiny bottles that jam the urinals. For higher profile games, such as the one against Clemson the previous week, the police set up a holding area along the concourse where they can deal with fans who have had too much to drink before ejecting them from the stadium (with a responsible companion). “The later the game is, the more ejections you’re going to have,” Moorman says. “You’re only going to be so drunk by noon. By 7 p.m., you can be pretty drunk.”

Shortly after Stock meets with the ushers, Pray’s team of cameramen, gaffers and sound technicians—many of them NC State students—gathers in the production room to go over the plans for the game. Pray reads the entire script aloud, adding instructions about where cameras need to be at certain times and what sorts of shots to look for. “Team will come out,” Pray says. “Brandon, you know where you’ve got to be for that. Get the shot. They’ll head out. We’ve got a flyover. Team will take the field, and we will move into position to cover the game. Larry, stay out for the coin toss. If we’re receiving the opening kick, we’ll do the KFC Kickoff. In other case, once that kickoff is done, we’ll do CPI Lineups for our offense or defense as soon as that gets in. Do you all know who our starting tailback is, or do we just wait until he gets on the field?”

“Yeah, we just have to wait,” says a voice piped in from Reynolds Coliseum.

“We’ll play it by ear on the starting tailback, Josh,” Pray says. “Let’s see . . . so let’s play us some football.”

At 1:49 p.m., Stock, Moorman and others gather with the referees and chain crew in a room under the stands in the north end zone. This is an ACC-mandated meeting known as a "jails break."
Much of the work takes place outside the stadium, be it cleaning up after tailgating, above, or feeding the fans nearby.

Rey, who had been working in the kitchen earlier, asks a fan in the line as the NC State Clogging Club entertains other fans nearby.

Kicking things off

Pray and his crew are hard at work in the production room as the game begins. When a Wolfpack player returns an interception for a touchdown a few minutes into the game, Pray pounces a button, causing the word “touchdown” to appear on the scoreboard. Then, speaking through his headset, Pray tells one of his cameramen to get a shot of Mr. Wuf doing push-ups to celebrate the score.

As the game moves into the second quarter, the crew in the command center is dealing with an endless litany of minor problems. A biospill in Section 123 in the command center is dealing with an endless litany of minor problems, some are homeless.

Randy Moorman says. By halftime, the Wolfpack is up 14-0. “Lepidopteran games are easier,” Moorman says. “We’ll probably cut our staffing in the third quarter.”

Midway through the second half, work in the kitchen has slowed to a crawl. McLaughlin, still wired from a steady stream of coffee, says they got everything out on time despite some tie-ups with the ovens. Executive Chef Mack Bell pauses to take a phone call, then yells out to his staff that there’s more cleanup to be done. “We need to get dirties off the club level. Dirties will start rolling down soon.”

Winding down

With the game a blowout in favor of the Wolfpack, fans pour out of the stadium midway through the fourth quarter. Outside of Gate 11 it is a rag-tag bunch waiting to come into the game—day laborers who are hoping to be paid $4 an hour to join the crew cleaning up the stadium. “They can’t get work anywhere else,” says Larry Bell, who owns LPSC Cleaning Service. “Some of them have drug problems, some are homeless.”

Once the game is over, Bell directs his makeshift crew into the stadium and starts handing out dark bags to collect trash and clear bags to collect recyclables. He pairs the workers off, sending each down a row of seats to work their way around the stadium. “Don’t get your bags too heavy,” Bell shouts, struggling to bring order to their efforts.

By 7 p.m., there’s no trace of action left on the field. The only movement under the pink September dusk comes from the Liles brothers and the crew. They sweep the outer edge of the field, picking up empty bottles and trash. They move the field to get rid of anything loose, then blow the debris off and sweep it. They ascend Carter-Finley’s steps to take down the flags of each ACC school that sway atop the stadium. And with that, the only thing left to do is power down the scoreboard and lights.

That is until Sunday morning, when Stock, Moorman, the Liles brothers and all the other who make game day possible start planning for the one thing they can always count on—the next home game.