The Los Angeles Rams and New England Patriots will battle for NFL supremacy Feb. 3 in Super Bowl LIII at Mercedes-Benz Stadium, just a stone’s throw from the Georgia Institute of Technology campus. But among the many companion events to the big game will be the NFL’s fourth annual “1st and Future” competition, which has the potential long after the 2019 Super Bowl cheers have subsided to be life-changing for athletes ranging from professionals to youth participants.

On Feb. 2, Georgia Tech will host this year’s “1st and Future” at the Ferst Center for the Arts on the Tech campus. Presented by Arrow Electronics and designed to spur innovation in player health, safety, and performance, the event will feature — much like Georgia Tech’s annual InVenture Prize competition — a “Shark Tank” style format in which teams compete similarly to the ABC-TV program. “1st and Future” started in 2016.

Two competition categories are available this year: the NFL Punt Analytics Competition and the Innovations to Advance Athlete Health and Safety Competition. The original field will have been narrowed down considerably by judges, with the remaining teams earning a spot to make their presentations at Ferst before a panel of judges that will include new Georgia Tech football coach Geoff Collins and Scheller College Business Analytics Center Managing Director Keith Werle. Cash prizes will range from $20,000 to $50,000, with winners and second-place finishers also to receive Super Bowl tickets.

Although admission is by invitation only, the event will be livestreamed starting at 9 a.m. on NFL.com. More than 100 Georgia Tech faculty, along with student winners from our recent Georgia Tech Sports Innovation Challenge hackathon, were among those invited.

Yellow Jacket fans love our sports teams, and the opportunity to partner with the NFL to advance collaborative innovation in athletics, particularly around safety and performance, is one we wholeheartedly endorse. 1st and Future’s innovative spirit dovetails with the energy that propels Georgia Tech’s robust startup culture and spurs the entrepreneurial drive for which the Institute is well known.
An embodiment of those traits, our **Advanced Technology Development Center** (ATDC), is located on campus in Tech Square, one of the nation’s most exciting entrepreneurial ecosystems. ATDC will provide expertise that will help prepare the entrants and finalists to polish their presentations. Programs such as InVenture, **CREATE-X**, **Capstone Design Expo**, **Convergence Innovation Competition**, **Ideas 2 Serve**, **Invention Studio**, and **Tl:GER** also allow our students to flex their creative and entrepreneurial muscles.

Research institutions such as Georgia Tech are already key players in efforts to prevent athletic injuries and shorten recovery time once an injury does occur. Lessons learned from research also have application in other fields, such as pediatric medicine and our military’s efforts to keep service members safe and healthy.

I have been fortunate to serve at various levels of the NCAA, which governs college athletics, including my current role as chair of the NCAA Board of Governors, the Association’s highest governing authority. The health and safety of college athletes are among the organization’s top priorities. In 2014, the NCAA in partnership with the U.S. Department of Defense launched the most comprehensive clinical study of concussion and head trauma ever conducted. The **NCAA-DOD CARE Consortium** study encompasses more than 30 NCAA member institutions across all three divisions. Nearly 40,000 student-athletes and military academy cadets are participating, which is yielding a rich database that has the potential to inform the current understanding and NCAA policymaking on head injuries/trauma well into the future.

The large majority of previous concussion studies have concentrated almost exclusively on male athletes, and most have involved football players. One advantage of the CARE Consortium study is that of the approximately 3,300 concussed participants examined, 40 percent are female.

Through this kind of painstaking fact-gathering and innovative efforts such as the NFL’s 1st and Future, standards of care have improved dramatically in the past few years. Georgia Tech is proud to be at the forefront of enhancing the safety of the thousands of NCAA student-athletes.

**G.P. “Bud” Peterson**
**President**