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WKU-themed beer to debut next week

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A pack of Lexington's West Sixth Brewing's new 1906 Lager created in collaboration with WKU will debut next week outside E. A. Diddle Arena Thursday.

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Western Kentucky University-themed beer is getting a second chance.

Beginning Wednesday, the newly brewed 1906 Lager will be available at WKU athletics events, in select retail stores and at restaurants and bars throughout Bowling Green.

1906 Lager is a “nice, easy, crisp drinking beer” with 4.2% alcohol, said Joe Kuosman, co-founder of West Sixth Brewing.

Eventually, it will be available across a broader swath of Kentucky, he said. West Sixth Brewing will brew the beer from Lexington before shipping it across the state.

1906 Lager was borne of a partnership between WKU and West Sixth Brewing that began months ago. Kuosman said that WKU approached his team with the idea.

“We distribute just in Kentucky so we try to do whatever we can to continue to grow our brand within Kentucky,” he said. “It just seems like a natural partnership.”

Chris Freeman, Hilltopper Sports Properties general manager, said WKU had been looking for a licensed beer partner for a while, but that COVID stalled progress. Last summer, when he was at a Hod Rods game, Freeman noticed a West Sixth Brewery advertisement and thought it would be a good fit.

“The synergy is there for their brand and our brand to meet,” Freeman said.

With bright red cans featuring iconic Hilltopper symbols like a red towel and a name based on the university's founding date, 1906 Lager is unmistakably WKU-themed.

But it isn't the first time the university has partnered with a brewery.

In 2015, Alltech Lexington Brewing and Distilling Company created two beers for WKU – the College Heights Ale and the College Heights IPA.

Alltech also leased space for a WKU brewing facility in Bowling Green to contribute to its then-developing undergraduate and graduate certificates in Brewing and Distilling Arts and Sciences.

However, in 2018 Alltech ended the brewing partnership, and with it, the leased space.

While it may seem strange for a microbrewery to partner with a university, Kuosman said that they see beer a little differently. Beer, for them, is at the center of a community, like in Germany's beer halls and Ireland's pubs.

“So the idea that beer is only for bars where people go to drown their sorrows, I think that's completely different. If you come to any of our establishments – there's four across the state – there's kids there, there's dogs, there's yoga classes, there's running clubs, there's community,” he said.

“Beer, in our mind, just helps lubricate the community interaction.”

The partnership is not so much about beer as it is about highlighting WKU as the center of the Bowling Green community’s brand, Freeman said. 1906 Lager is like a souvenir WKU fans can display to show off their team pride.

For the first few weeks after the Wednesday launch, 1906 Lager will be available in limited quantities at Kroger, Houchens stores, local liquor stores, bars and restaurants popular for their draft beer like Roosters and Double Dogs. It will be available at the first WKU men’s basketball game on Jan. 21 in Diddle Arena, Freeman said.

It will be around for at least a year, Kuosman said, possibly longer depending on the volume sold and WKU’s input.

The cans also include a Kentucky Proud marker, since many of West Sixth Brewery’s ingredients are sourced within the state. That Kuosman said that local angle could give 1906 Lager an edge over its light American lager competition, including Bud Light and Miller light.

“Obviously, we think ours is a lot better,” he said. “The fact that it’s made and produced in here in Kentucky I think definitely provides a fresher product at the end of the day.”

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