Hosting amateur and collegiate tournaments and championship events is one of the hottest areas in sports business right now. And, cities, states and regions across the country have responded to the new demand for high quality facilities and amenities by providing innovative production strategies and spectacular new facility construction.

In this special advertising section, we showcase some of the convention bureaus and sports commissions that are setting new standards for localities competing for these prize sports properties. From high school volleyball to NCAA championships, athletes, families and attendees have never had more and better choices for staging unforgettable events.
Youth sports defy economic slumps

Since the Great Recession of 2007, cities and events organizers have learned one truth — that youth and amateur sports tourism is recession resistant.

The dollars parents spend for their kids and themselves to travel to sports tournaments and championships flow unabated, regardless of the economic climate.

“Parents will forgo a regular family vacation to make sure their child and his or her team go as far as possible in league play,” said Don Schumacher, executive director of the National Association of Sports Commissions (NASC). “Those families spend nights in hotels, fill restaurants and take in the local sights while attending a tournament. As cities and organizers have come to realize that these dollars don’t go away, we’ve seen a shift from nonprofit events to more profit-minded organizations.”

The NASC began in the late 1980s as an affiliation of sports commissions that came together to discuss the rising cost and competitiveness of bidding for amateur sporting events. It formally began operations in April 1992 with 15 members and a $35,000 budget. Today, the NASC, the only trade association for the sports tourism industry, has an annual budget in the low millions and expects to reach 700 members by the end of 2014. The NASC’s goal is to deliver quality education, networking opportunities and event marketing and management knowledge to members.

“Since the NASC’s founding, sports tourism has experienced steady, sustainable growth, even after 9/11 and after the recession took hold in 2007,” Schumacher said.

According to the NASC annual study, in 2012, sports tourism was responsible for $8.3 billion in direct spending nationwide. One year later, sports tourism grew to an estimated $8.7 billion.

That recession-resistant quality of sports tourism can be a double-edged sword for cities, Schumacher said. Cities that land tournaments are filling hotels and restaurants and bringing new dollars to town. On the other hand, profit-minded event organizers are demanding — and getting — higher and higher bidding fees from cities to host those events, along with commissions and rebates for hotel rooms booked.

“Those profit-minded owners are primarily focused on youth events, such as boys baseball or girls fast-pitch softball,” said Schumacher. “But college sports organizers are hardly immune. Even colleges and universities are driving harder and harder bargains with cities, and some cities are complaining about the pressure.”

Every year, the numbers of traditional sporting events increase and, every year, new sports, such as Tough Mudder obstacle races, come online. And every year, cities grapple with how best to analyze the costs of hosting events versus the real dollars a city can hope to bring to the community.

“When a city compares what an event will cost in bidding fees against what the city hopes to generate in taxes on hotel rooms and in visitor spending in the local economy, very often a true economic analysis will not have taken place,” Schumacher said. Cities are often inclined to overestimate the positive economic impact of an event.

The NASC recommends that cities look only at the estimated direct spending from an event to create a fair cost analysis as opposed to a more vague economic impact analysis. The association provides its members with a formula for those calculations.

“A direct spending analysis is safer,” Schumacher said. “You can estimate the number of people who came to town for an event and more directly add up how much they spent on hotels and restaurants. But an economic impact projection tries to calculate how much the waitress then spent at the grocery store and how much the grocery store cashier spent somewhere else and on and on. That’s where you get in trouble. No one’s going to ever come up with a low economic impact number.”

Schumacher cautions that even direct spending figures are still estimates. “A city can show that new dollars came into the city,” he said. “You can’t pinpoint precisely where the money came from.”

The downside to overestimating dollars spent, Schumacher said, is that event organizers use a previous host city’s economic impact estimate to drive up the cost for the next round of bidding.

“There’s a lot of profit-making,” said Schumacher. “And it’s placed on the traveling teams and the people traveling to support those teams. Organizers will offer teams bargains on registration fees, then recoup their costs by demanding hotel room rebates and commissions. Organizers are turning a $100 hotel room into a $150 room and the cost of that room is out of the hands of the hotelier, the city and the parents. If anyone gets blamed for the cost, it’s the hotel and city, not the event organizer. We’ve got to get a handle on room rebates and commissions. We’ve got to have hotels and cities push back.”

It’s not uncommon, he said, for a family with kids in sports to spend $900 attending a single tournament. Cities and organizers are relying on the good will of those parents to continue. But, if room rebates and commissions continue, he warns that participation in youth and amateur events may decline.

“People coming to see a friend run a marathon or parents coming to see their kids play soccer will stop coming because the rooms are simply too expensive for them,” Schumacher said. “And that may be the undoing of the seemingly recession-resistant sports tourism industry.”

Schumacher recommends that cities begin building some of their own events. Homegrown events, created and owned either by a sports commission or in partnership with local leagues and teams, generate plenty of advantages. Cities don’t have to pay bid fees, rebates or room guarantees. City-owned events can act as “quality of life” events for its own residents, as well as attract visitors. And, most importantly, the event doesn’t leave town when another city makes a higher bid.

“I don’t ever see a day when cities don’t bid on events,” Schumacher said. “But the big trend in the sports tourism industry now is toward more and more communities building their own. In the end, that trend may be the one thing that puts a lid on bid fees.”
Get in the Game

Since 1992, the NASC has been regarded as the most trusted resource for the sports tourism industry and represents more than 2,000 members from nearly 700 organizations worldwide.

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Columbus builds reputation as sports hub

Columbus is a city on the rise, building a national reputation as a premier sports destination, with spectacular growth in the number of tournaments and championships hosted in recent years.

“We want visitors who come to a sporting event in Columbus to become an ambassador for our city and share all that we have to offer,” said Linda Shetina Logan, executive director of the Greater Columbus Sports Commission. “Columbus is a sports-loving town and that’s reflected in the variety of events hosted here.”

The sports commission works with grassroots sports groups, local businesses, colleges and universities, government entities and the city’s professional sports teams in its efforts to keep Columbus’ sports community strong.

This summer, Columbus hosted more than 10,000 athletes and fans for the USA National Fencing Championships. In the spring, the NCAA held its Division III Outdoor Track and Field Championships here.

The calendar for Columbus over the next 12 months is packed. The city will host the USA Diving Winter National Championships; NHL All-Star Celebration; and Big Ten’s women’s swimming and diving championships, wrestling championships and softball championships. The NCAA Men’s Basketball second and third rounds are scheduled for March and the National Collegiate Women’s Gymnastics Regionals are set for April.

In the last 10 years, Columbus has hosted more than 50 NCAA championships and 25 Big Ten championships in every field from baseball and basketball to rifle and synchronized swimming.

In 2013, the city hosted the FIFA Men’s World Cup qualifying match between the U.S. and Mexico for the fourth time in a sold-out 24,000-seat Crew Stadium, which was the first soccer-specific stadium built for Major League Soccer as home of the Columbus Crew.

Central Ohio also hosted the PGA’s prestigious international golf tournament, the Presidents Cup, at Muirfield Village Golf Club. Muirfield Village, home of the Memorial Tournament presented by Nationwide Insurance and a course designed by Columbus native Jack Nicklaus, became the first in the world to host the Presidents Cup, Ryder Cup and Solheim Cup.

“Columbus brings thousands of visitors in a year,” said Logan.

“WHY COLUMBUS IS THE CITY THAT CROWNS CHAMPIONS.”

Whether it’s a FIFA World Cup Qualifier, The Presidents Cup in golf, the NHL’s All-Star Celebration or NCAA Basketball, Columbus continues to shine as a city for championship events. With great athletic facilities, thousands of hotel rooms and amazing fans, Columbus is a city on the rise and major sports destination. Let us show you why we’re perfect for your next event.
New venues ensure Sioux Falls’ success

Two newly opened, multi-million dollar sports venues have established Sioux Falls, S.D., as the premier sports destination in the Midwest.

“We have had so much growth that Sioux Falls has become recession-proof,” said Mattie Burnham, director of sales for the Sioux Falls Convention and Visitors Bureau. “And we already had so many youth sports here that we wanted to up the ante for the sports world in the Midwest.”

Anchored by the Sanford Pentagon, the newly completed Sanford Sports Complex is 162 acres of all things sports. Opened in September 2013, the Pentagon is a 160,000-square-foot facility with the premier NBA-sized Heritage Court as the epicenter of the nine basketball courts. Outfitted with state-of-the-art equipment, the Pentagon, designed to evoke a 1950s gymnasium, turns back the clock for fans. The Pentagon, which has already hosted several college and professional exhibition games, is home to the NBA D-League Sioux Falls Skyforce.

The Fieldhouse on the complex grounds is the premier indoor sports facility for athletic training, soccer, baseball, softball and football with 62,000 square feet of indoor turf. The Sanford Fieldhouse, which is also used for athletic rehabilitation, is the future home of the National Institute for Athletic Health for athletic rehabilitation, is the future home of the National Institute for Athletic Health. The Sanford Fieldhouse features an 8,000-seat arena and convention center. The center shares grounds with the Premier Center open fall 2014 • Qualify for a complimentary site visit! VisitSiouxFalls.com/SeeForFree

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Sioux Falls is easy to access, served by a newly renovated airport, with five major carriers, and two major Interstates. New hotels and restaurants and plenty of attractions, from the downtown Sculpture Walk at Falls Park to indigenous history center to Native American arts and culture, ensure visitors are engaged and enjoy their visit beyond their sports experience.

The Outdoor Campus, a learning and outdoor center run by the South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks Department, is ideal for learning to canoe and kayak, fly fish or snowshoe. The campus is adjacent to the Sertoma Butterfly House and near the Great Plains Zoo, Delbridge Museum of Natural History and U.S.S. South Dakota Battleship Memorial.

“We call ourselves a ‘big small city,’” said Burnham. “We’re easy to access in every way and we have plenty to see and do for our sports visitors.”
OKC is full package: great facilities, fun

Oklahoma City is more than you might expect.

For starters, Oklahoma City is the only city hosting three NCAA Division I championships in 2014, said Sue Hollenbeck, director of sports business for the Oklahoma City Convention and Visitors Bureau.

"After the Final Four, there are five big championships in college sports," said Hollenbeck. "Oklahoma City is hosting three of them."

In addition to its longstanding role as host of the NCAA Division I softball championship, Oklahoma City hosted Division I wrestling in March and is slated to host Division I volleyball in December. Oklahoma City, home to the Amateur Softball Association, has hosted the Division I Women's College World Series every summer since 1990.

The city's already world-class softball stadium is undergoing a $20 million renovation, growing from 9,000 seats to 13,000, and adding an upper deck and an underground complex that will include dugouts, locker rooms and meeting spaces.

"We have continuously built a softball empire here in Oklahoma City," Hollenbeck said. "Softball is one of the fastest growing sports. We actually get calls in September from people wanting tickets for the next summer."

Oklahoma City is also headquarters for USA Canoe/Kayak. The Oklahoma River, running near downtown, serves as the training site for Olympic flat-water canoeing and kayaking and as a training site for USRowing. The city is also building a whitewater center on the river that is scheduled to open in 2015.

In addition to facilities, Oklahoma City offers a hidden gem of a downtown.

"It's walkable, it's safe and it's affordable," said Hollenbeck. "Downtown offers a wide variety of things to do and gives visitors real local flavor with our restaurants, bars, shopping and activities. When you come to Oklahoma City, you get the full package – a great, well-run event in outstanding facilities along with a great vacation. I think that comes as a surprise to people."

The city is big enough to offer a variety of fun for visitors, but not so big it is indifferent to visitors.

"When you come to Oklahoma City for a tournament, everyone's excited you're here," Hollenbeck said. "People greet you at the airport, people hang banners everywhere, everyone knows why you're here."

Hollenbeck attributes Oklahoma City's success to its history of overcoming adversity and the unexpected. In the 1889 Land Run, the area grew from a few souls to 10,000 residents in a single day. The city suffered one of the worst modern tragedies with the bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building and economic turmoil in the oil bust of the 1980s.

"We believe in 'teamwork through adversity,'" said Hollenbeck. "We know we will achieve our goals only if we do it together. And that's the spirit that carries us today."

The city hosts more than 25,000 runners annually for the Oklahoma City Memorial Marathon in honor of the 168 people killed in the bombing.

Most recently, Hollenbeck pointed out, was Oklahoma City landing an NBA franchise.

"Nobody ever thought a city our size could support an NBA team," she said. "Nobody but us. A group of businessmen got together and decided, 'If we build it, they will come.'"

The Chesapeake Energy Arena was finished in time for Hurricane Katrina in 2005. The city played host to the New Orleans Hornets, successfully filling seats for the next two years. In 2008, the Seattle SuperSonics left the Northwest to become the Oklahoma City Thunder.

"From youth and amateur sports to the NCAA to Olympic hopes to professional teams, we cover the gamut," said Hollenbeck. "We want to do all of the things we do and do them better than anyone else. Who would think 'rowing' when they think Oklahoma City? Oklahoma City IS the unexpected."
Raleigh’s Trademark: Key Partnerships

Through a combination of strong partnerships with more than 20 local organizations and a wealth of world-class facilities, Greater Raleigh has emerged as one of the nation’s leading destinations for sports events.

“The key to our success is our host partners,” said Scott Dupree, executive director of the Greater Raleigh Sports Alliance (GRSA). “That’s our trademark. That’s what makes Raleigh such a great sports town. It’s all about teamwork and partnerships. We have so many teams, colleges and universities, venues, municipalities and clubs that not only host championship events, but host them incredibly well.”

Greater Raleigh and surrounding Wake County are coming off a successful spring, hosting a slew of major events.

In March, Greater Raleigh and North Carolina State University welcomed the second and third rounds of the NCAA men’s basketball tournament at PNC Arena, marking 2014 the third time the area hosted March Madness events in the last 10 years. According to Dupree, the tournament generated more than 19,000 hotel room nights and $4.2 million in direct visitor spending.

Right on the heels of the basketball tournament came the first ever Rock ‘n’ Roll Raleigh Marathon and ½ Marathon in April.

“The Rock ‘n’ Roll Raleigh Marathon and ½ Marathon was an inaugural event for us and a major success,” said Dupree. “We had 12,500 registered runners from 49 states and seven nations.”

Rock ‘n’ Roll Raleigh generated more than 7,400 hotel room nights and $8.1 million in total economic impact, according to a study by San Diego State University. More than 18,000 visitors came to Raleigh for the event. The Greater Raleigh Sports Alliance (raleighsports.org, @raleighncsports) has a five-year contract with the Rock ‘n’ Roll Marathon Series and Dupree expects even more success over the next four years.

In June, the Greater Raleigh Sports Alliance brought in the Ironman 70.3 Raleigh for the second consecutive year. Registration

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Greater Raleigh hosted numerous competitions this year, including NCAA men’s basketball, the Rock ‘n’ Roll Raleigh Marathon and ½ Marathon and Ironman 70.3 Raleigh.
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FRISCO TAILOR-MADE FOR SPORTING EVENTS

Frisco, Texas, goes hand in baseball glove with youth and amateur sports. Frisco, 20 minutes north of Dallas, is one of the fastest growing cities in America, with a population that skew young. In 2011, Men’s Journal magazine named Frisco “the best place in America to raise an athlete.”

“Being the home to four major sports teams that have affiliations with the NBA, NFL, MLB and NHL provides us the opportunity to have quality well-managed venues to use for our youth and amateur sporting events,” said Marla Roe, executive director of the Frisco Convention and Visitors Bureau.

While FC Dallas plays professional soccer at Toyota Stadium, the complex features 17 tournament soccer fields for youth and amateur players. In addition to soccer tournaments, the complex serves as the site for such diverse sports as USA Ultimate disc football and flag football.

The Dallas Stars and the NBA D-League Texas Legends practice and play at Dr Pepper Arena, Roe said, but the 6,000-seat arena is more than just ice and basketball events. The state-of-the-art arena’s flexibility means it’s frequently reconfigured to fit other tournaments, as varied as gymnastics and trampoline championships.

In July 2016, the Cowboys will open the Dallas Cowboys World Headquarters and Training Facility on 91 acres in Frisco. A 12,000-seat multi-use indoor stadium will anchor the facility. The Cowboys have already partnered with the Frisco high schools to allow them to play both regular season and championship football games in the stadium.

“The partnership between the Cowboys, the city of Frisco and the Frisco Independent School District to build a multi-purpose facility will not be just a great addition for the local teams, but an optimal facility for any sports organizer in the country that looks at Frisco to host its next event,” Roe said.

Frisco is also in the midst of breaking ground on the PIT (Performance Training Center), a 60,000-square-foot indoor soccer facility. In addition to youth soccer games and tournaments, FC Dallas will use the PIT for training.

Frisco is in the midst of breaking ground on the PIT (Performance Training Center), a 60,000-square-foot indoor soccer facility. In addition to youth soccer games and tournaments, FC Dallas will use the PIT for training.

“IT’S A WONDERFUL ADDITION TO OUR INVENTORY OF SPORTING EVENTS AND IS HIGHLY FEATHE,” Roe said. “Families that can’t make the trip will be able to log in from home and watch their kids play soccer.”

Toyota Stadium, home of the MLS FC Dallas, features 17 tournament soccer fields for youth and amateur competitions.

State-of-the-art Dr Pepper Arena is frequent site for basketball and hockey tournaments, along with gymnastics and trampoline competitions.

The complex will feature five indoor fields, one of which is regulation size, and a regulation-size outdoor field.

Also in the works for Frisco is a new swim and tennis facility, scheduled to open this year. Frisco Aquatics, a local swim club affiliated with USA Swimming, is building the first 16-foot National Aquatics Center, which will host an Olympic-sized competition pool for training and for state and national swim meets. Volley’s Tennis Club is breaking ground on a new venue that will feature 12 outdoor and five indoor tennis courts.

Tournaments and championships come to Frisco because of the quality and volume of facilities, said Roe, and because Frisco is both sports and youth friendly. Almost half of the city’s fast-growing population is under the age of 18, which means the city has a great mix of things for visiting players and their families to do when the tournaments are finished for the day, from go-karting to indoor skydiving to games and food at Dave and Buster’s.

“The vision the city government has with its master plan of parks, residences, retail and sports is great,” Roe said. “A big driver of our success has been our exemplary-rated school district, which has attracted young families — including some Cowboys players and their families — which, in turn, has brought us exemplary sports facilities for both youth and amateur sports and professional teams. And the quality of our facilities cultivates our tournaments and championships.”
Intersport events wow fans, TV audience

For nearly 30 years, Intersport has been building live sports properties from scratch, using its unique set of capabilities to create seamless, nationally televised events that benefit athletes, host communities and sponsors.

“We’re traditionally known for our television production and sponsorship marketing divisions,” said Drew Russell, vice president of sports properties for Intersport. “The live sports properties division combines both of those elements to showcase all of our great capabilities.”

Since its founding in 1985, the Chicago-based company has been a leader in sports and entertainment marketing, with expertise in sponsorship strategy and activation, experiential marketing, media production and digital and social media.

Intersport’s eight live sports properties include Under Armour All-America Football and the Hockey City Classic.

The Under Armour All-America Game, which brings together the best and brightest in high school football talent, showcases the innovation and expertise for which Intersport is known. Since the inaugural contest in 2008, the Under Armour game has seen several of its participants become NFL professionals, including first-round picks Julio Jones, A.J. Green, Trent Richardson and Jadeveon Clowney.

For the Under Armour game, Intersport flies elite players and coaches from across the nation to Orlando for a week of televised practices at the ESPN Wide World of Sports complex, culminating in a nationally televised game at St. Petersburg’s Tropicana Field.

In addition to a one-of-a-kind experience for a nationwide audience, Intersport weaves together a week of unique travel experiences for the players, along with an annual community service project.

“Last year, the student-athletes spent the day putting together bicycles with kids from the local Boys and Girls Club,” said Russell. “These young athletes realize that someone along the way has given them a hand. This is an opportunity for them to give back.”

The week makes an impact on the host city, bringing players, coaches, families and staff members to Orlando.

“We fill 2,500 to 3,000 room nights in Orlando over the course of the week,” Russell said. “Now in its second year is Intersport’s Hockey City Classic, 18 days of hockey-related events that culminate in a college doubleheader. The inaugural event, which took place in Chicago, marked the first-ever hockey game played at Soldier Field, home of the NFL Chicago Bears. We wanted everyone to have a chance to be a part of this experience,” Russell said. “We wanted the city — the entire state — to embrace this event, not just as a spectator, but as a participant. We had everyone from the six-year-old Mites to the Chicago Blackhawks seniors on the ice.”

The nearly three-week festival was capped with a double-header played by the University of Notre Dame, Miami University (Ohio), University of Wisconsin and University of Minnesota.

“We sold tickets in 47 states,” Russell said. “Chicago is a great tourism city, but in January and February, it’s cold, making it a downtime for visitors. With the Hockey City Classic, we brought in 4,000 hotel room nights — a major increase for that time of year.”

Russell estimated the classic brought Chicago $18-20 million in direct spending. Of the 52,000 attending the outdoor games, about 25 percent were visitors to Chicago.

“Our business is built on relationships,” he said. “We have strong relationships in every market with sports commissions, sponsors, the local media and community leaders. We believe in getting things done the way we want them done — and that’s in a first-class manner — and we believe that’s why cities and sponsors continue to want to do business with us.”

Intersport expects to double the number of its live sports properties within the next five years, Russell said.

“We want to put innovation and creativity together to bring more events to life,” Russell said. “The key to our success has been our focus on giving people what they want — unique experiences — not only on-site, but across the nation from a television perspective. Our heritage is that we create content and experiences that engage passionate audiences. That’s why we will continue to grow.”
Palm Beach County Sports Commission’s motto is “Just Bring Your Game,” and with good reason.

Event organizers will find it easy to love the variety of world-class facilities in Palm Beach County, but will also find themselves blown away by the sports commission’s dedication to serving their event.

“When an organization decides Palm Beach County is the best location for an event, then our work has only begun,” said George Linley, executive director of the Palm Beach County Sports Commission. “We can help an event owner handle all business aspects of managing the event so the owner can focus strictly on the sports-specific components of their tournament.”

The Palm Beach County Sports Commission offers a wide range of services to event organizers, free of charge. The commission can handle marketing and public relations, as well as operational and logistical support. It can find volunteers, source equipment and manage operations from concessions to parking to security. It will assist in identifying local sponsors for an event, help organizers develop event layouts and work as a liaison between the event organizers and the venue management to keep planning flowing smoothly. It even works to keep organizers on budget.

“We pride ourselves on our high level of event servicing,” Linley said. “We want you to have as successful an event as possible. We want to help you grow it and we want to make sure you come back. We connect all the dots for you to make life as easy as possible.”

In addition to services, the Palm Beach County Sports Commission offers financial incentives to bring events to town.

“Those incentives help rights holders offset their costs to come here and to come back in the future,” Linley said. “When we invest in tournaments and sports events, not only financially but with our time and service, that investment comes back to us in big benefits to our county and economy.”

When the PGA hosted the Honda Classic in March, 190,000 people, including star players Tiger Woods and Phil Mickelson, came through the county, along with millions of dollars.

“We felt it was worth the investment,” said Linley.

Palm Beach County Sports Commission
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See Palm Beach, Page 42
Birmingham knows more than football, regularly hosting events as varied as bass fishing tournaments to USA Wheelchair Rugby. Some of the city's outstanding venues include, from left, the Birmingham Crossplex for swimming and track, the Birmingham-Jefferson Convention Complex and Barber Motorsports Park.

Birmingham sports expertise goes wide, deep

From professional Grand Prix races to youth soccer, Birmingham has deep experience hosting any sports event. “Although Alabama is known for our football, we go way beyond that,” said David Galbaugh, director of sports sales and marketing for the Greater Birmingham Convention and Visitors Bureau. “We’re gymnastics championships, we’re marathons and tennis and golf and bass fishing.”

The key to all that variety can be summed up in one word — facilities. Barber Motorsports Park, with its 2.3-mile track, is home to the Honda Indy Grand Prix of Alabama every April, and is comparable to the best of European Grand Prix racing. The annual event attracts more than 80,000 fans from 43 states and three nations. The park’s museum houses the world’s largest collection of motorcycles.

The Birmingham area also features one of the nation’s premier golf courses, Shoal Creek Golf Club, which is the annual host of Regions Tradition, a major tournament on the PGA’s Champions Tour.

The Lakeshore Foundation strengthens the area’s strong ties to the U.S. Olympic Committee and the Paralympic movement as one of the few combined Olympic and Paralympic training sites in the U.S. The barrier-free athletic complex features Paralympic training and competitions in wheelchair basketball and rugby, track and field, power soccer, wheelchair tennis, marksmanship and swimming.

Lakeshore Foundation is headquarters for USA Wheelchair Rugby. In March, the facility held the Lakeshore Cup, a women’s wheelchair basketball tournament with teams from Australia, Japan and the U.S. As headquarters to the SEC, Southwestern Athletic Conference and Gulf South Conference, Birmingham frequently hosts college and university events. The NCAA awarded the city five championships over the next four years, including the College Cup, which is the Final Four of men’s soccer. This year, the city hosted the NCAA women’s gymnastics championship. In 2015, University of Alabama-Birmingham will be the site for Conference USA’s men’s and women’s basketball championships.

“People always think of the SEC for football, but the conference has strong programs in a lot of sports, including gymnastics and golf; and we regularly host those championships, too,” Galbaugh said.

The city and surrounding region cooperate seamlessly to handle events bigger than any one facility, Galbaugh said. “All of our local entities work well together from our professional facilities to our high school stadiums to create well-run, dynamic experiences for our visitors,” he said. “We run the gamut. We are very enthusiastic about sports of all kinds in this town and we can handle anything you bring our way.”

Whether you run, jump, swim, serve, tumble, cheer, or wrestle, you’ll find state-of-the-art facilities and some of the nation’s most passionate fans at the Birmingham Crossplex. With more than 750,000 square feet of athletic accommodations—one of only eight hydraulically banked Mondo Super X tracks in the world—as well as VIP suites and seating for 5,300, you’ll find everything you need to perform at the top of your game.

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Maryland growth in sports facilities ensures quality events for owners

Centrally located in the Mid-Atlantic region, close to most of the nation’s major Eastern cities, Maryland is the ultimate destination for sporting events.

“It’s a ‘one-tank-of-gas’ destination,” said Terry Hasseltine, director of Maryland Sports, Maryland’s sports commission. “Not only is it easy to get here, but you can drive from mountains to beaches and hit every basketball court, soccer field and field hockey pitch in between.”

Youth and amateur sports organizers have responded. Maryland, for example, has become the epicenter of lacrosse in the U.S., so much so that lacrosse is the official state team sport.

Over Memorial Day weekend, the state welcomed the NCAA Divisions I, II and III Men’s Lacrosse Championships, the NCAA Division I Women’s Lacrosse Championships and the U.S. Women’s Lacrosse National Tournament, while simultaneously hosting the Columbia Invitational, a 685-team youth soccer tournament.

“In those three days, we welcomed more youth and college athletes than many states and cities do in a year,” Hasseltine said. “And that’s just one example of the volume of tournaments and championships we bring to Maryland.”

Maryland is a four-season sports state with venues from mountains to cities to waterways. Garrett County in western Maryland’s mountains will host paddlers from 40 countries in the International Canoe Federation Slalom World Championships in September. This summer, Ocean City kicked-off the 10th anniversary of the Dew Tour with five days of skateboarding and BMX competitions in front of record-setting crowds.

And, in July, Maryland hosted the inaugural International Crown, a premier global women’s golf tournament with a $1.6 million purse. The USA brought teams from the eight top-ranked nations to Caves Valley Golf Club in Owings Mills, just outside Baltimore.

“Sports tourism has grown exponentially over the last decade,” Hasseltine said. “And Maryland has grown along with it, offering more fields, more venues and more quality experiences to athletes than ever before.”

Maryland, the epicenter of lacrosse in the U.S., regularly hosts college, youth and amateur tournaments in several sports often with hundreds of teams.
Pittsburgh’s dedicated to quality sports

Pittsburgh has long been associated with success in professional sports, but, in recent years, the city has made a name for itself at every level of competition. “We’ve established ourselves as a professional sports town and it naturally follows that people would turn to us for amateur and youth sports as well,” said Craig Davis, CEO and president of VisitPITTSBURGH. “We’ve done a great job in recent history of creating venues and resources to appeal to the youth and amateur sports market.”

Case in point — the East Coast Volleyball Championships for high school girls’ club teams. The tournament, which attracts 5,000 girls and their families, is a great way to end the season for teams not competing in the USA Volleyball Championships.

Pittsburgh offers some of the world’s best professional sports facilities that can be used for amateur and youth sports.

“After East Coast played here once, they decided they had to be in Pittsburgh every year,” Davis said. Now in its seventh year in Pittsburgh, the tournament’s annual estimated economic impact is $2.2 million.

Pittsburgh is successful because of the quality and diversity of its venues. The David L. Lawrence Convention Center, for example, is column free, which means it can be configured to house any number of indoor sports under a single roof, including volleyball, basketball and cheerleading competitions.

Pittsburgh offers some of the world’s best professional sports facilities that can be used for amateur and youth sports, as well, including Heinz Field, home of NFL’s Steelers; PNC Park, home of MLB’s Pirates; and Consol Energy Center, home of NHL’s Penguins.

“We also have colleges and universities in Pittsburgh with tremendous facilities of their own,” Davis said. Those include the new 12-acre Petersen Events Center, both at the University of Pittsburgh. Robert Morris University’s Island Sports Center boasts Olympic and NHL regulation-sized hockey rinks.

With the leadership of the Penguins, Pittsburgh has built a strong infrastructure for hockey and is able to host substantial, multiple youth tournaments, from locally grown annual hockey tournaments to USA Hockey National Championships.

“In recent years, we’ve been able to showcase Pittsburgh as a true hockey town,” Davis said. In 2013, the city hosted the NCAA Men’s Frozen Four, which brought 18,000 people to the city, along with $10 million in spending. The city also hosted the NHL Winter Classic in 2011 and the NHL Entry Draft in 2012.

“Bottom line, Pittsburgh is successful because of its recent investments in venues,” Davis said. “It makes it easy for us to host sporting events.”

Another key to Pittsburgh’s success is location. It is less than a six-hour drive or 90-minute flight, from most of the U.S. population.

On tap for August is the USA Gymnastics’ premier event, the P&G Gymnastics Championships, in Consol Energy Center. VisitPITTSBURGH anticipates that the four-day event, with 15,000 athletes, fans, coaches and judges, will result in an estimated $12.6 million in direct spending.

The city will host the Atlantic 10 Conference Cross Country Championships this year and, in 2015, will welcome the second and third rounds of NCAA Men’s Division I Basketball Championships.

Pennsylvania has more golf courses per capita than any other state and Pittsburgh was recently named the second-best U.S. city for public golf. For the past three years, the city has hosted the Constellation Senior Players Golf Championship at the iconic Fox Chapel Golf Club.

In 2016, Pittsburgh will again welcome the USGA’s Men’s U.S. Open Championship at the renowned Oakmont Country Club. Oakmont was site of the U.S. Women’s Open in 2010 and the Men’s Open in 2007.

The competition ends, Pittsburgh offers a compact, safe, walkable, affordable and action-packed downtown with more than 100 restaurants, nine live theaters, scores of attractions and plenty of nightlife. More than 2,500 hotel rooms representing all brands and prices are within walking distance of the convention center, Consol Energy Center, Heinz Field and PNC Park.

“Sports are a big thing in this city — at every level,” Davis said. “It’s ingrained into our very being. And our residents want nothing more than to invite athletes and their fans, from youth to professional, into our city and show them our level of commitment and dedication to sports.”

Pittsburgh, long known for its professional teams like the Pittsburgh Pirates here at PNC Field, is a natural for hosting youth and amateur competitions.
Elizabethtown Sports Park has pro flavor

Elizabethtown Sports Park plays like the pros. Set on 150 acres, this Kentucky complex sets the gold standard for outdoor youth sports as one of the largest and most comprehensive in the country.

The professionally managed complex, with 12 baseball and softball fields, 10 natural grass soccer and football fields, two full-sized synthetic turf fields and a diamond for physically disabled athletes, is built with many of the same features as professional sports.

With stadium-quality lighting, tournaments can last into the night, and professionally designed drainage and irrigation systems keep the fields playable when the weather fails to cooperate. There's even a WiFi tower for parents and coaches to set up live streaming. The artificial turf fields stretch the tournament season from mid-March for softball to December for soccer and football.

Players feel like they're in the big leagues when they leave their covered, brick dugout to take the field. Each of the diamonds has a warning track to protect outfielders, bullpen for relief-pitcher warm ups and wireless scoreboard.

Elizabethtown Sports Park is built to keep fans and families happy. For younger fans, the park has four play-grounds with cool-water misting stations. Parents love that all the seating is shaded. And restless fans can take advantage of the three-mile walking path that surrounds the complex.

"We want our players to be treated like rock stars," said Janna Clark, the park's sports and sales director. "We want them to feel they're playing like the pros. For many families, this is their vacation and we want them to feel that it's worth every minute. Parents are spending their money on sports travel rather than other kinds of travel. The youth sports travel market is a very important, very special market to us."

Those families and players are responding. In only its second year of operation, Elizabethtown Sports Park is booked, with 50 events scheduled from mid-March to December, bringing thousands of athletes and families from every state to Elizabethtown.

Jacksonville has big city amenities along with small-town hospitality

Big enough to host a Super Bowl, yet small enough to make every visitor feel important, Jacksonville has honed the art of sports and sports tourism.

"We are dedicated to making every visitor feel like the big fish in a small pond," said Katie Mitura, director of marketing and product development for Visit Jacksonville. "People think of Jacksonville for our pro teams, but we're also a hub for youth and amateur sports travel."

The University of North Florida's Hodges Stadium is a dedicated track and field venue featuring a Monotrack SX surface, which gives Jacksonville the ability to host large-scale track events, said Mitura. Hodges Stadium is one of only seven U.S. facilities to receive certification from the International Association of Athletics Federations.

The city regularly welcomes the NCAA's Eastern track and field preliminaries, along with Florida high school and Amateur Athletic Union events.

"We have the USATF Junior Olympics coming in 2015, as well as the USATF Masters Outdoor Championships," said Mitura. "In keeping with Jacksonville's strong soccer following, the city regularly hosts youth and amateur tournaments at Putnam Park Fields, home of Jacksonville FC. The 120-acre park features 12 year-round soccer fields and a football field."

The state-of-the-art Jacksonville Equestrian Center routinely hosts regional and national events showcasing the best in horse competition. Regarded as one of the premier equestrian facilities on the East Coast, the 1,700-acre facility is home to rodeos, dressage, bull riding and barrel racing.

Some of Jacksonville's signature sporting events include golf's The Players Championship and Web.com PGA Tour Championship, both played at TPC Sawgrass; and, at EverBank Field, the TaxSlayer Bowl, formerly the Gator Bowl. EverBank Field also welcomes the annual match-up between University of Florida and University of Georgia in the classic SEC football rivalry.

Players feel like the big leagues at Elizabethtown Sports Park, a venue that treats every athlete like an All-Pro.
Massachusetts’ dedication means winning events

A passionate fan base for every sport, from fencing to the Frozen Four, historic and world-class venues and a dedicated and experienced events team ensure rights holders will find Massachusetts a blue-chip destination for every event at every level. “People think of Massachusetts for its professional teams and their facilities, such as our iconic Fenway Park, but we offer outstanding venues in communities across the Commonwealth for college, youth and amateur sports,” said Shannah McArdle, director of the Massachusetts Sports Marketing Office, a department of the Massachusetts Office of Travel and Tourism. Sports Marketing works collaboratively with regional tourism councils, communities, colleges and universities and venues to ensure premier events for rights holders. Event organizers know they will receive needed support from both local experts and a statewide team of dedicated sports marketing professionals.

“Basketball was invented in Massachusetts,” McArdle said. “And that, in itself, exemplifies our state’s long passion for sports. We bring an electric atmosphere and record numbers of fans to events at every level. We love nothing better than a good competition.” Massachusetts and its communities have a proven track record for handling a wide variety of events. The NCAA has awarded Massachusetts several major championships over the next few years, including Division I championships in men’s hockey, fencing and men’s volleyball, along with the Division II Field Hockey Championship.

In addition to hockey, Massachusetts’ communities are well known for their quality venues in ice skating circles, having hosted the U.S. Figure Skating Championships this year and, in 2016, welcoming the ISU World Figure Skating Championships. Boston is home to a popular stop on the PGA Tour, the Deutsche Bank Championship at the Tournament Players Club of Boston. And, the state has a long history of hosting gymnastics competitions, including the USA Gymnastics America Cup and USA Gymnastics Women’s Visa Championships.

“Massachusetts brings excitement to every sporting event it hosts, whether that’s basketball and lacrosse or rowing and water polo,” McArdle said. “Our dedication and our rich sports tradition ensure every event here is a winner.”
Myrtle Beach: Ready to play ball with new center

Tournament organizers can walk into the Myrtle Beach Sports Center in South Carolina ready to play ball, knowing the 72,000 square feet of column-free space is already set up and staffed.

The sports center will be a one-stop shop for event organizers. The Myrtle Beach Sports Center's staff will set up events for organizers and provide ticket takers, scorekeepers and other event staff. Organizers can take advantage of plentiful hotel rooms, and, in the off-season, reduced rates.

"Sports tourism is a natural fit for Myrtle Beach," said Mark Beale, director of the center's marketing and business development. "What's better than coupling your beach vacation with your kid's sports tournament here. You're steps away from shopping and entertainment and you're steps away from the Atlantic Ocean."

The Myrtle Beach Sports Center, owned by the city of Myrtle Beach and managed by Sports Facilities Management, will open in March 2015. The center's bookings are already at 75 percent of Sports Facilities Management's first-year projections.

Myrtle Beach's centralized location is another natural draw for tournaments from all over the East Coast. "We're such an easy drive," said Beale. "Colleges bring their spring training here because they say, 'Why drive all the way to Florida when we can stop halfway?'" The Myrtle Beach Sports Center will bring basketball, volleyball, wrestling and other tournaments under one roof.

"We have wildly successful tournaments, with 350 teams, but until now, they've been scattered all over the city," Beale said. "With the center and our adjacent convention center, we can house most of them in one location. And having more facilities will allow tournaments, like the Winter Bump volleyball tournament, to double in size. The Myrtle Beach Sports Center will be able to handle 130 basketball teams on its own."

Twitter: @mbsportscenter
Facebook: Myrtle Beach Sports Center
Website: MyrtleBeachSportsCenter.com

Rocky Top Sports opens with a ‘wow!’

When Rocky Top Sports World in Gatlinburg, Tenn., opened in mid-July, the reaction from parents and athletes was “wow!”

“We had an amazing opening weekend,” said Lori McMahon Moore, Rocky Top’s director of marketing and business development. "We had four tournaments going on the first week — basketball, volleyball, lacrosse and seven-on-seven football."

Bookings for Rocky Top Sports World already far surpass first-year projections, said Moore. She's expecting about 40,000 athletes and spectators to use the youth sports complex in the first 12 months.

The complex, with an indoor facility housing six hardwood courts for basketball and volleyball and seven outdoor fields for soccer, lacrosse, football and band competitions, is owned by the city of Gatlinburg and Sevier County.

It’s the newest project to come online for the Sports Facilities Advisory and Sports Facilities Management, sister companies that helped bring Rocky Top to life, from the initial feasibility studies to marketing and management and operation of the complex.

"Youth sports is the fastest growing segment of the leisure travel industry," Moore said. "Right now is the premier time for Rocky Top to come into the marketplace. Families are turning tournament travel into a ‘sportcation.’ Rocky Top Sports World, combined with all the great attractions we have in the area, turns Gatlinburg and the Smoky Mountains into an ideal destination for teams."

Event planners nationwide are bringing tournaments for every season.

“Our six synthetic turf fields mean we can host tournaments from January to December,” said Moore. "Even if it’s snowing, the fields are playable. Rocky Top Sports World really opens the door for teams to compete at a higher level."

And, most importantly, Rocky Top Sports World, with its focus on kids aged six to 16, is creating a new generation of repeat visitors to Gatlinburg.

"The long-term results of Rocky Top Sports World extend for into the future, from repeat tournament guests to reunions and family vacations,” Moore said. "We’re creating a Gatlinburg-for-life visitor."

Myrtle Beach: Ready to play ball with new center

The Myrtle Beach Sports Center will enhance the sports tourism market in this South Carolina beach town.

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As the Pensacola Sports Association celebrates its 60th anniversary, PSA Executive Director Ray Palmer keeps one eye on the past and another firmly on the future.

“We’re really good at staying focused on what we do well,” Palmer said. “We’re always looking to grow, but with a firm eye on making sure we are going to be successful. That old under-promise and over-deliver mantra, we spend a lot of time focusing on that.”

Pensacola, on the other hand, is a city that always seems to have something to offer. The city’s success is in part due to the fact that it has the perfect blend of beauty and activity that combines to deliver a unique blend of beauty and activity that combines to deliver a unique blend of beauty and activity.

The upcoming Pensacola Marathon in November is a signature event and a case in point. The marathon in Pensacola, which serves as home to the famed Blue Angels Naval Flight Demonstration Squadron, has now evolved into the centerpiece of a full-scale holiday festival.

“We enjoy, not just partnerships, but cooperation with a multitude of groups — arts and culture and entertainment — and so this year we have a new conglomeration of events that are going to run about 10 days surrounding the Veteran’s Day weekend,” Palmer said. “We honestly would rather have more things than you can possibly do in Pensacola than be the lone event there that weekend.”

A myriad of adventures is just waiting to be had in this picturesque part of North Florida along the Gulf of Mexico. In addition to its breathtaking white sand beaches, Pensacola also boasts a bevy of cultural diversions, including the symphony, opera, theaters and museums.

“The history of Pensacola is significant and I think a lot of people aren’t aware of that until they get here, learn about it and explore,” Palmer said. “We’ve got a great lighthouse, beaches, the world’s largest Naval aviation museum and the Blue Angels.”

The city’s rich history and cultural heritage make it the perfect sports event destination.

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For 60 years, Pensacola Sports Association has helped event organizers create successful sporting events. From youth teams to nationally recognized events, we have the know-how and the facilities to attract participants and help your event run smoothly. When the competitions are over, you’ll find miles of sugar-white beaches, delicious coastal cuisine and a historic downtown, ripe for exploration. **Bring your event to Pensacola and see why Pensacola has been loved by explorers since 1559.**
each year for its hometown events, including the Capital City Half Marathon, with 15,000 runners, and the Nationwide Children’s Hospital Columbus Marathon, which is celebrating its 35th year. The 2014 Arnold Sports Festival, held in Columbus every March, is the world’s largest multi-sport fitness event with 175,000 sports fans and 18,000 athletes.

The city is home to more than 21 high school championships annually, one of the highest numbers for any individual city in the country, and will welcome back the Ohio High School State Football Championships to Ohio Stadium, home of the Ohio State Buckeyes football team.

In December, the NCAA awarded Columbus nine championships in seven sports from 2015 to 2018, one of the highest number of championships awarded to an individual city. Those events range from Division I Women’s Volleyball and Division II Women’s Basketball Eight to NCAA Rifle Championships. The city will host the NCAA Division I Men’s Lacrosse Quarterfinals in 2016.

“We’re fortunate to have NCAA Division I, II and III colleges based in Columbus,” said Logan. “They make our city a natural draw for the NCAA, which appreciates a city that hosts a great event and treats all the division levels as equally special.”

The North-American Gay Amateur Athletic Alliance Gay Softball World Series will return to the city in 2015. The city has booked the U.S. Senior Open for 2016 and the USA Track and Field Men’s and Women’s Half Marathon Championships for both 2016 and 2017.

All of those sports events translate into hundreds of millions of dollars in direct visitor spending in Columbus. Logan estimates that since 2002, the sports commission has brought in more than 240 new sporting events to Columbus that generated an estimated $500 million in visitor spending.

“Facilities are our strength,” Logan said. “Ohio State University has almost a mini-Olympic village of fantastic venues. We’re one of only a few cities to feature two 20,000-seat arenas. We work closely with our professional teams and colleges as their facilities set us apart and that’s what gives us the ability to host all of these events.”

Add to that Columbus’ long experience with handling major sports events, as well as a strong city infrastructure, plenty of hotel rooms and a fun, compressed downtown that’s convenient, affordable and walkable.

“Our city collaborates to make all of our community feel welcome and taken care of,” Logan said. “Columbus is big enough to handle large events; we roll out the red carpet to make our visitors feel like their event owns this city.”