



Sarasota offers sports properties an ideal environment with a mix of world-class facilities, wide, beautiful, beaches perfect for competition and leisure, training facilities and cultural richness. That makes the area a popular year-round choice for sports ranging from polo and rowing to baseball and volleyball and everything in between.

Sarasota: A Year-Round, Multi-Sport Destination

With \$178 million in economic impact and more than 108,000 hotel room nights generated by sports tourism in 2016, Sarasota County Sports Commission Director of Sports Rob Wells knows his region is on the rise when it comes to being a destination for a wide array of events.

"I think what makes us great are the venues that we have to offer for the sports that we cater to," Wells said. "We've become known as a rowing destination by hosting the World Rowing Championships. We also have great baseball facilities with the Baltimore Orioles and soon to be Atlanta Braves and their spring training. To be able to combine that with our world-class beaches — Siesta Key was just ranked as the No. 1 beach in the United States by Trip Advisor — we have everything from the venues you need for events and training to the hotels and the beach and cultural activities."

Sarasota also has a key alliance with the Bradenton Area Sports Commission, which is a 50-50 partner in the World Rowing Championships. Wells said this year's event in September at Nathan Benderson Park is poised to be the biggest yet with WRC officials expecting more than 1,700 athletes from 60 countries. The Bradenton Times reported that more than 41,000 fans are expected to attend over eight days with an economic impact of up to \$25 million and ticket sales exceeding \$1 million.

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ROB WELLS | Sarasota County Sports Commission Director of Sports

Sarasota and Bradenton also partner on 20 other events throughout the year, according to Wells. Bradenton's IMG Academy features a state-of-the-art, multi-sport complex that spans 450 acres and helps bring a bevy of activity to the region.

"Through our partnership with IMG Academy we have hosted several soccer clubs from around the world and even the Oakland Raiders for a week," Wells said. "Having such an elite training ground as IMG Academy to combine with our luxury hotels allows us to do this."

Professional baseball has a long history in Sarasota, dating back to 1924, and that relationship will only continue to grow in the future. Ed Smith Stadium and the Buck O'Neil Baseball Complex at Twin Lakes Park currently play host to the Baltimore Orioles. Wells noted that the Atlanta Braves are finalizing negotiations with the goal of having them join the

Orioles in the area by the spring of 2019. The Braves will base their operations out of North Port in the West Villages.

Baseball will provide another boon for the region this year with the Wilson Premier Championship East set to begin on June 22. The three-week high school baseball event will feature three separate tournaments, one each for teams composed of 2018, 2019, and 2020 graduating classes. Based out of the Orioles spring training complex, this premier event and all of its games are scheduled to be played at three sites in the Sarasota/Bradenton area.

The region benefits from favorable weather throughout the year and Wells emphasized the timing of the Wilson Premier Championship East to dispel what he considers a myth about summertime in Sarasota.

"We do have great year-round weather," he said. "It's not hard to convince people to come between September through May. One of the things I constantly fight is people have this opinion that Florida is too hot in the summer. I'll look and see where they were the year before and they were in Houston. The weather is a lot better in July in Florida than in Houston. It's just educating people."

"We're suitable to host events year-round. Wilson is a testimony to that because they start their event the last week of June and run through the first two weeks in July."

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