

Birmingham builds impressive sports portfolio



Greater Birmingham offers a wealth of outstanding sports facilities that attract top tournaments and events, such as the USGA's U.S. Women's Open and the International World Games. From left, Barber Motorsports Park annually hosts the Honda Indy Grand Prix of Alabama. The Birmingham CrossPlex is a hub for youth and amateur sports, including volleyball, track and swimming events.

Greater Birmingham has been a hive of youth, amateur, Olympic and professional sports activity in 2017. So far, the Alabama city has hosted the Senior Olympics, a college conference championship, NCAA D-II championships and a Davis Cup matchup pitting the U.S. team against Switzerland, where players, including Jack Sock, Sam Querrey and Steve Johnson, swept Team USA to a 5-0 win.

The next global sports event on the books for the Birmingham area is the USGA 2018 U.S. Women's Open at Shoal Creek Golf Club, one of the nation's premier courses.

"We're expecting more than 80,000 spectators and a minimum of 13,000 room nights over the course of the week," said David Galbaugh, vice president of sports sales and marketing for the Greater Birmingham Convention and Visitors Bureau. "We have golfers from South Korea and other parts of Asia so we're expecting press from all over the world. VIPs alone will account for about 4,000 room nights. We'll have another 2,300 dedicated people serving as volun-

teers for the tournament."

The Birmingham area also has a long history with NCAA and Olympic sports.

In June, Birmingham hosted the 2017 National Senior Games, the largest multi-sport championship in the world for seniors. The championships, which lasted two weeks, brought 12,000 athletes and 25,000 visitors to the city, and \$36 million in economic impact. Sports include basketball, tennis, track and field, triathlon and volleyball, as well as pickleball and horseshoes.

Three of the athletes were more than a century old. The games included a men's singles match in the 90-99 age category.

In March, Birmingham hosted the NCAA 2017 Division II National Championships Festival, which brought more than 1,000 student athletes on 250 teams from across the U.S. to compete for national championship titles in wrestling; swimming and diving; and track and field. Division II is the only NCAA division to have national championship festivals, which are Olympic-style events with several championships taking place in a single

community over several days.

Birmingham also played host to a number of Conference USA championships throughout 2017, including the NCAA men's and women's basketball tournaments that determined the C-USA teams to play in March Madness. Starting with the 2017 Indoor Track & Field Championships, Birmingham culminated with Women's Soccer Championships and Women's Volleyball Championships in August.

Already known for its world-class facilities, the Birmingham area in May brought online the state-of-the-art Hoover Metropolitan Complex.

"The new complex will allow us to capitalize on youth sports in a revolutionary way," said Galbaugh.

The new Hoover Met Complex combines the 10,000-seat Hoover Metropolitan Stadium, former home of the Birmingham Barons, with a multi-use indoor facility, The Finley Center, to expand the area's inventory of facilities for basketball, volleyball, baseball, softball, rugby and lacrosse. The complex

makes space for other sports, as well, including dodgeball, futsal, wiffleball, flag football and kickball.

In addition to 11 basketball courts and 17 volleyball courts, the 154,000-square-foot facility offers an indoor climbing center and full-service food and beverage.

In Phase 2, the complex will install five NCAA regulation outdoor fields for soccer, football, lacrosse or rugby; five regulation baseball/softball fields; and 16 tennis courts.

Galbaugh and his team are already working toward to 2021, when the city will host the International World Games, which are recognized by the International Olympic Committee. The multi-sport World Games have taken place every four years since 1981.

"We expect more than 4,000 athletes from 112 nations participating in 36 sports over 11 days," said Galbaugh. "This is the first time the Games have been in the U.S. since the inaugural event in Santa Clara, Calif., in 1981. Birmingham plans to deliver nothing less than an outstanding World Games."

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Greater Birmingham Convention & Visitors Bureau

Greater Raleigh: A Premier Sports Event Destination

With an extensive track record of hosting successful sporting events, along with 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 tourism.

"The key to our success is our host partners," said Scott Dupree, executive director of the Greater Raleigh Sports Alliance. "That's our trademark. That's what makes this 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 making a name for their abilities, so well, in fact, that the National Association of Sports Commissions named the GRSA the Sports Tourism Organization of the Year for 2015.

The NCAA announced championship

sites spanning academic years 2018-19 through 2021-22, and 13 events will be hosted in Greater Raleigh. "March Madness" is returning to PNC Arena for the fifth time since 2004, and the Town of Cary was awarded four Baseball Division II World Series and four College Cups (two men's, two women's).

Raleigh welcomed runners for the fourth annual Rock 'n' Roll Raleigh Marathon and Half-Marathon in April. Nearly 8,000 registered runners from all 50 states and 11 countries hit the pavement and enjoyed the high-energy weekend and scenic course.

In June, IRONMAN 70.3 returned to



The NCAA's "March Madness" returns to PNC Arena in 2021

SEE GRSA, PAGE 22



Rock 'n' Roll Raleigh brings thousands from around the world for a weekend of running and music

A Sampling of Sporting Events in Greater Raleigh in 2017

- City of Oaks Challenge (volleyball)
- ACC Wrestling Championship
- MAPL Raleigh (volleyball)
- USA Table Tennis National Team Trials
- Humana Rock 'n' Roll Raleigh Marathon & 1/2 Marathon
- U.S. Adult Figure Skating Championships
- Deep South Classic (basketball)
- National Club Baseball Association World Series
- National Black Heritage Championship Swim Meet
- IRONMAN 70.3 Raleigh
- AAU Karate National Championships
- Atlantic Tire Championships, USTA Pro Circuit
- Great American Cross Country Festival
- SAS Championship (PGA Tour's Champions Tour)
- U.S. Soccer Women's National Team vs. Korea Republic
- John Wall Holiday Invitational
- USA Baseball National Event Schedule
- visitRaleigh.com Showcase Series (soccer)
- 12 N.C. High School Athletic Association State Championships



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Pro to pee wee, Palm Beach County grows baseball

The Palm Beach County Sports Commission is celebrating another banner year, with 2017 marking the sixth straight year of record-setting numbers for sports-travel hotel room nights. The county hosted a record 160 different events in more than 40 different sports. Those events pushed the county's sports room nights to 220,000 by August — 17,000 more than all of 2016.

Much of that surge can be attributed to the newly opened The Ballpark of the Palm Beaches, which has redefined Major League Baseball spring training in Florida.

The Ballpark is the spring home of the Houston Astros and the Washington Nationals, one of only two spring training facilities in Florida to house two teams.

"Amazingly enough, the other facility, Roger Dean Stadium, home of the St. Louis Cardinals and our own Miami Marlins, is also located here in Palm Beach County," said George Linley, executive director of the Palm Beach County Sports Commission.

"We have a quarter of the Grapefruit League housed right here in two top-quality venues."

While the two new teams have boosted spring sports tourism, particularly from Houston and Washington, D.C., the two baseball facilities are making a greater impact beyond the pros.

"We now have 26 diamonds in close proximity," said Linley. "We've seen an immediate payoff because of our new abili-



The newest jewel in an impressive crown of facilities, The Ballpark of the Palm Beaches, spring training home of the Washington Nationals and Houston Astros, gives the county a unique opportunity to host some of the world's largest baseball tournaments.

PALM BEACH COUNTY SPORTS COMMISSION



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ties to host very large baseball tournaments, some of the largest in the world."

For five days in June, Palm Beach County hosted the 2017 Palm Beach Classic, Prospect Select Baseball's national showcase. For the event, the tournament spread 270 teams and 5,000 athletes across fields at Roger Dean Stadium, The Ballpark and three other baseball complexes for play.

"We were able to use 30 diamonds in all," said Linley. "That tournament alone, which is the second largest high school-aged in the U.S., brought 10,000 total visitors and \$4 million in direct spending."

Two days later, the county hosted 80 teams for two weeks during the USA Baseball National Team Championships. The National Team Championships are a primary identifier for players to be considered for USA Baseball's national development teams in the 14U, 15U and 17U age groups. Team USA baseball returns to the Olympics in 2020.

"We are capable of hosting the largest baseball tournaments in the nation because of Palm Beach County's own two spring training baseball complexes located in close proximity," said Linley. "Prospect Select Baseball's Palm Beach Classic and the USA Baseball National Team Championships delivered 10,700 room nights and \$7.5 million in direct spending for our hospitality industry."

In October, the nation's most elite travel teams, 18 and up, will compete in Perfect Game USA's 2017 World Wood Bat Association (WWBA) World Championship at Roger Dean Stadium. That tournament, which attracts more than 1,000 scouts, will bring 85 teams and 600 athletes.

This year, Perfect Game has added a 14 and up tournament at The Ballpark. The additional tournament will bring another 70 teams with 1,500 athletes.

"These are all great examples of the economic impact The Ballpark has created for us," Linley said. "Not to mention the fact that the Astros and the Nationals are currently two of the best teams in Major League Baseball. We like to joke it's because they did their spring training in Palm Beach County!"

In addition to diamonds, The Ballpark offers seven multipurpose fields built to FIFA specifications, which has allowed The Ballpark space to host 200-team soccer tournaments, as well as ultimate frisbee and lacrosse tournaments.

Golf

Palm Beach County also happens to be the Golf Capital of Florida. The NCAA has taken notice, selecting the PGA National Resort & Spa as site of five championships

SEE PALM BEACH SPORTS, PAGE 21

PALM BEACH SPORTS, FROM PAGE 20

from 2019-2022.

PGA Resort & Spa is also home of the Honda Classic, the only South Florida stop for the PGA Tour, played on the renowned Champion Course with its famed Bear Trap designed by Jack Nicklaus. The PGA National courses are home to other world-class golf events. A four-round tournament with 144 top intercollegiate golfers participated in the 24th annual NAIA Women's Golf National Championships in May at the PGA Resort.

Junior golfers from 30 nations teed up for the Optimists International Junior Golf Championships at the PGA Resort & Spa in July.

International Polo Club

The Florida Sports Foundation named the International Polo Club its 2016 Sports Venue of the Year.

"The International Polo Club is one of the most versatile facilities in Florida," said Linley. "Not only does this facility host world-class polo every year, it hosts some of the nation's largest amateur sports events, such as the world's largest field hockey tournament and a 220-team soccer extravaganza. Palm Beach County is fortunate to have Florida's top sports venue for 2016."

Coming full circle, Palm Beach County served as host for the 2017 NBBA Beep Baseball World Series, which brought 500 visually impaired baseball players from across the globe to compete.

"It was an incredible honor to host this event," said Linley. "It's only the second time in 42 years to play in Florida. From professional spring training to college to youth to Beep baseball, Palm Beach County is leading the way, bringing the best in every aspect of America's greatest pastime."



Palm Beach County hosted 500 visually impaired athletes from across the globe to compete in the 2017 NBBA Beep Baseball World Series.

PALM BEACH COUNTY SPORTS COMMISSION

Sports Facilities Management: The Sports Travel Shift

Youth and amateur sports facilities are following the lead of college and professional athletics by creating state-of-the-art venues with a focus on creating premium experiences for both athletes and fans.

"Just building a facility or complex doesn't equal success anymore," said Jason Clement, CEO and co-founder of Sports Facilities Advisory and Sports Facilities Management. "The youth and amateur sports landscape has undergone a transformation. It's less now about community recreation and more about sports travel. Facilities must be built well, managed well and marketed well, or they will be left behind."

SFA & SFM creates public and private sports projects, large and small, from concept to concrete, assisting clients with planning, funding, development, management and marketing.

"When we began in 2003, we recognized a need for a more sophisticated business model for the youth and amateur sports industry," said Clement. "Our goal is to foster the transformation in the sports travel arena by helping bring online top-quality training and tournament destinations, as



The Hoover Met Complex offers top-quality space for indoor sports, such as volleyball and basketball, and a 10,000-seat baseball stadium. Plans for phase II include outdoor fields for soccer, lacrosse and other sports.

SPORTS FACILITIES ADVISORY

well as to create viable and sustainable roles for traditional community recreation facilities."

The newest evolution in sports travel is seen in the Hoover Met Complex in Hoover, Ala., built adjacent to the Hoover Met Sta-

dium. The 154,000-square-foot multipurpose indoor facility, The Finley Center, offers space for volleyball, basketball and indoor soccer in a top-quality space for athletes. The complex also appeals to spectators with its indoor climbing facility and splash

pad. The facility is projected to bring millions of dollars to Hoover through sports travel-related spending, as well as serve the local community.

SFA & SFM is operating and managing the \$80 million complex to optimize the space for residents and visitors.

"It's a jewel for the Birmingham region," said Clement.

SFA & SFM partners with community leaders to create the best strategy for maximizing existing community facilities, as well.

The key is finding the best mix of programming for community facilities, as well as creating a less-costly operating system and revenue-generating opportunities, such as food and beverage offerings or corporate team building events.

"We're incredibly focused on our mission, which is to improve the health and economic vitality of the communities we serve," said Clement. "We help leaders plan responsibly, optimize and utilize existing facilities, and manage their sports, events, and recreation assets. A mistake in any one of these areas can be incredibly detrimental for a community. We're here to help."

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USA Baseball's National Training Complex is the home of amateur baseball in the U.S.

GRSA, FROM PAGE 19

Raleigh and attracted nearly 2,000 athletes from 40+ states and 20+ countries. Triathletes were welcomed by fans along the course throughout Wake county with a picture-perfect finish in downtown Raleigh.

"The GRSA is delighted and proud to have partnerships with two of the most respected and highly regarded brands in the sports event industry — IRONMAN and the Rock 'n' Roll Marathon Series," said Dupree.

Another signature event hosted in Greater Raleigh is the Deep South Classic, a girls basketball showcase held on 20 temporary courts in the Raleigh Convention Center. This event attracts more than 400 teams from around the U.S. and Canada to compete in front of hundreds of college coaches. The economic impact of this event is significant each year, bringing thousands of visitors, generating nearly 9,000 total hotel room nights and approximately \$3 million in direct visitor spending — a slam dunk for area businesses.

Greater Raleigh houses some of the finest sports facilities in the nation. Cary Tennis Park, one of the largest in the Southeast, recently added seven covered courts to allow for continued play during inclement weather. PNC Arena, with seating for almost 20,000 and 55+ luxury suites, has hosted NCAA men's and women's basketball tournaments, Stanley Cup Finals and the NHL All-Star Weekend. WakeMed Soccer Park in Cary is a 150-acre multi-use complex, home to Sahlen's Stadium (seating for 10,000), additional fields and an outstanding cross-country course.

Other venues include the Raleigh Convention Center, a multi-purpose state-of-the-art facility with more than 500,000 square feet under cover including a 150,000-square-foot exhibit hall; the USA Baseball National Training Complex in Cary, home of amateur baseball in the U.S.; WRAL Soccer Park in Raleigh, fresh off a multi-million dollar upgrade; Triangle Table Tennis, home to major events, including this year's USA Team Trials; Capital City BMX at Lions Park, a state of the art venue for one of the area's most popular sports; Walnut Creek Softball Complex, currently under renovation and scheduled to re-open in 2018; Triangle Aquatic Cen-

ter in Cary, a state-of-the-art venue for swimming; and many more facilities, giving Greater Raleigh the ability to host just about any event.

"For most rights-holders, the single biggest factor in selecting a site is the quality of the venue," Dupree said. "We are fortunate here in Greater Raleigh to have a slew of world-class facilities. Other factors that strengthen our bids include our superb host partners and our abundance of hotel rooms. We're convenient and have a great climate. But most of all, we have tremendous community support and we provide all our visitors with a dynamic experience. All these factors combine to make Greater Raleigh a premier sports event destination."



NCAA College Cup has had major success at Cary's WakeMed Soccer Park

Hershey Harrisburg region gives events big-time treatment

You won't find the Hershey Harrisburg region on a list of the largest markets in the U.S., but when events take place there, they get big-city type treatment.

With a suite of state-of-the-art venues,

solid infrastructure and a dedicated sports commission, Hershey Harrisburg is capable of hosting nearly any event. And drawing from major East Coast population centers, participation is always robust and venues

always full.

"Tournament organizers and national sports governing bodies love our geographic location," said Gregg Cook, executive director of the Hershey Harrisburg Sports & Events Authority. "We are an easy three-hour drive or less from New York City, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Baltimore and Washington, D.C. and everywhere in between. So we're easy to get to for tens of millions of people."

Until last year, Cook was a one-man operation within the Visit Hershey & Harrisburg tourism bureau, but in July 2016, he was promoted to lead the newly-formed Sports & Events Authority. The creation of the Authority is emblematic of the region's dedication to sports and events. Sports & Events is a new division of the bureau, focused on helping raise the profile of the events it hosts.

"The Authority is ready to assist organizers in establishing their event as bigger and better than their projection," said Alli-

son Rohrbaugh, who heads up the Authority's marketing and communication efforts.

Having hosted large events such as Mecum Auctions (PA Farm Show Complex & Expo Center), and U.S. Figure Skating Eastern Sectional Synchronized Skating Championship (Giant CenterSM), as well as nearly a dozen Pennsylvania high school sports championships, the Hershey Harrisburg Sports & Events Authority is aiming to build on those successes. Talks are progressing with at least one major national sports property as well for a golf exhibition that would feature some of the sport's biggest stars.

About 8,000 hotel rooms within a 15-mile radius and a modern and accessible airport help get the attention of event organizers.

Said Cook, "There are very few things we look at and say, 'they would never consider our market.' If we have the right venue to fit the event, there's no reason we can't pursue it."



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