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February 2026

SportSEvents

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2026

READERS' CHOICE AWARDS

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multi-venue events

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new pickleball?

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Jordan Tillotson, MADE Hoops

2nd Place - Best Community Engagement by a Sports Event: 2025 Revolutionary 5-Mile Run

2nd Place - Best Long-Term Partnership Between Planner & Destination



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EDITOR'S PLAY•BY•PLAY

United by sport

With so much discord and division in the world these days, I'm looking forward to the Winter Olympics, happening this month in Milan and Cortina, Italy. The Games offer a welcome opportunity for people to set aside differences and come together to support their national teams as they compete against the world's best amateur athletes. They serve as a reminder of the unique power sports have to unite communities.

There's also something distinctly different about watching the Olympics compared to professional sports. While elite athletes may earn money through sponsorships or receive bonuses from their home countries or sporting federations, the competition itself is rooted in national pride and personal achievement rather than salaries or prize money. That spirit—the idea that sport can be about something bigger—is what continues to make the Olympic Games so compelling.

That sense of meaning was definitely top of mind as I was researching the Olympic flame for this month's "Game Changer," our new back-page department that pays tribute to iconic gear, moments, or people from the world of sports. The flame has long symbolized unity, tradition, and perseverance, values that certainly resonate today. Turn to page 50 to read more.

Of course, Olympic sport isn't the only thing on the menu for this issue. We also take a look at padel, a fast-growing racquet sport that's giving pickleball a run for its money. Invented in Mexico in the late 1960s, padel blends elements of tennis and squash and has been popular in Spain and Latin America for decades. And it's now gaining traction in the U.S. Turn to page 22 to read Virginia-based freelance writer Keith Loria's story on the sport's rise.

From emerging to established sports, this issue also provides practical guidance for planners. We spoke with representatives from the United States Fight League to gather advice on hosting safe and successful mixed martial arts events, with their tips appearing on page 26. And for organizers managing competitions across multiple facilities, Alabama writer Paige Townley shares valuable lessons in her story "Moving parts," on page 19.

As you'll see from the eye-catching cover, this issue also features the winners of our annual Readers' Choice Awards. These honorees help make the sports event and tourism industry as dynamic as it is. Flip to page five to read associate editor Helen Jacob's roundup of this year's winners, and thank you to everyone who submitted nominations and voted.

Finally, we round out the issue with our regular state spotlights, packed with practical information and venue suggestions for planners looking to host events in Nevada, Texas, West Virginia, and Wyoming. Wherever your next event may take place, we hope this issue offers both inspiration and insight as you plan for the months ahead. ■



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LINEUP

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Meet the 2026 Readers' Choice Awards Winners
Photo © Getty Images.



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TROPHY TIME

MEET THE WINNERS OF THE 2026 READERS' CHOICE AWARDS

BY HELEN JACOB

Each year, *SportsEvents* magazine celebrates excellence and innovation in the amateur sports event industry through our annual Readers' Choice Awards. These awards honor the planners, venues, destinations, and events that set the standard for outstanding organization, creativity, and community impact. From state-of-the-art facilities to visionary planners, these All-Stars embody what it takes to make every sporting event a success. On the following pages, you'll find the winners across our 10 categories. Congratulations to all the winners, and thanks to everyone who participated, whether by submitting nominations or voting for your favorites.

VENUES



► **2**

Virginia Beach Sports Center

Virginia Beach, Va.

The Virginia Beach Sports Center is recognized for its elite facility design and consistent delivery of

national-caliber events. Spanning 285,000 square feet, the venue features 12 basketball courts, 24 volleyball courts, and a rare 200-meter hydraulic banked track. The venue is a top-tier destination for NCAA-level and high school competitions. The facility offers seating for more than 5,000 spectators and multiple multipurpose rooms, allowing for flexible event configurations. The Sports Center regularly hosts high-profile events, including national wrestling championships and indoor track and field competitions, and maintains strong bookings throughout track season. Developed through a decade-long sports tourism strategy with the City of Virginia Beach, the venue drives year-round economic impact by attracting visitors during traditionally slower seasons. It's also located mere steps from the Convention Center and Boardwalk, making it a coastal experience.

All-Star Indoor Venue

Honors an indoor facility that provides exceptional resources, organization, and experiences for amateur sporting events, tournaments, and participants.

► **1**

Cedar Point Sports Center

Sandusky, Ohio

Cedar Point Sports Center has earned the top spot by building on the momentum of a highly successful 2024 and continuing to raise the bar in 2025 through measurable growth across key performance indicators. While nationally recognized as a premier youth sports tourism destination, the venue also remains deeply committed to serving its local community through expansive programming. In 2025, Cedar Point Sports Center hosted 10 summer camps, six of which sold out, welcoming more than 515 participants. During the 2024–2025 school year, the facility offered 23 youth programs spanning volleyball, basketball, Pre-K classes, homeschool physical education, climbing, and archery tag, engaging more than 1,000 participants. Beyond athletics, Cedar Point Sports Center demonstrated remarkable versatility by hosting non-sporting events such as craft shows, business symposiums, a gaming expo, and a food tasting competition, further solidifying its reputation as a dynamic, community-centered venue.



► **3**

Rocky Mount Event Center

Rocky Mount, N.C.

The Rocky Mount Event Center operates on excellence and athlete-focused experience. In the most recent fiscal year, the venue generated \$25.8 million in economic impact, supporting local hotels, restaurants, and small businesses while strengthening the regional sports tourism economy. At the core of the facility is a 75,000-square-foot field house featuring 16 volleyball courts that can be converted into eight basketball courts, making it one of the most versatile indoor venues on the East Coast. This flexibility allows RMEC to host volleyball tournaments, basketball championships, and cheer and dance competitions that attract thousands of athletes and families annually. The venue was also voted as one of the nation's top three volleyball facilities in *SportsEvents'* Ultimate Volleyball Facilities competition. Family-friendly amenities, including a Player's Lounge and a Game Day Adventure and Arcade, enhance the guest experience. The facility's dedicated staff is known for exceptional hospitality, which further distinguishes RMEC as a premier indoor sports destination.

All-Star Outdoor Venue

Recognizes an outstanding outdoor facility that consistently delivers top-tier amenities, service, and playability for athletes and event organizers alike

Courtesy Visit Fairfax



1

Patriot Park North

Fairfax, Va.

Situated in Fairfax County, Virginia—just minutes from Washington, DC—Patriot Park North is a premier baseball and softball destination designed to host high-level competition. It features six fully turfed and lighted diamonds, including four adjustable 90-foot fields and two adjustable 60-foot fields, allowing for maximum flexibility across age groups and divisions.

The facility boasts an impressive lineup of top-tier amenities, including on-site concessions, temporary fencing, portable pitching mounds, and spacious warm-up areas. Both teams and fans enjoy covered and wrapped dugouts, electronic scoreboards on each field, and a press box complete with a 360-degree observation deck. Rounding out the experience is a unique baseball- and softball-themed playground, making Patriot Park North a great venue for players, coaches, and families.

Courtesy BarbenMcMurry Architects



2

Rocky Top Sports World

Gatlinburg, Tenn.

Rocky Top Sports World is one of the Southeast's premier sports destinations, offering a world-class venue set against the breathtaking backdrop of the Great Smoky Mountains. Spanning 80 acres, the campus features seven state-of-the-art synthetic turf fields lined for soccer, football, and lacrosse, with flexible configurations that can accommodate up to 14 youth fields. At the heart of the complex is a championship stadium with seating for more than 1,500 spectators, a press box, and fully lit playing surfaces, while bleacher seating and stadium lighting are available across most fields.

Rocky Top Sports World also includes team rooms, referee locker rooms, ample parking, and on-site dining at Champs Grill, along with picnic areas and nearby parks and campgrounds within walking distance. The venue also boasts impressive indoor facilities, featuring six basketball courts and 12 volleyball courts.

Located just four miles from downtown Gatlinburg and less than 10 minutes from Great Smoky Mountains National Park, Rocky Top Sports World offers a true destination experience.

Courtesy Little League Baseball and Softball



3

Howard J. Lamade Stadium

South Williamsport, Pa.

Howard J. Lamade Stadium stands as one of the most iconic outdoor venues in youth sports, best known as the centerpiece of the Little League Baseball World Series. Nestled into the side of Bald Eagle Mountain in the Nittany Mountain range, part of the Appalachian Mountains, the stadium offers a dramatic natural setting. With a capacity of approximately 45,000, including the terraced hills beyond the outfield fence, Lamade Stadium allows thousands of fans to watch games at no cost from the surrounding hillside.

From the hill above the stadium, where players catch their first glimpse of the field, the view is considered a defining moment of the World Series experience. Adjacent to Lamade Stadium is Little League Volunteer Stadium, completed in 2001 to accommodate the tournament's expanded 16-team field. Both venues are located within the Little League International Complex, which also includes secure team housing and dining facilities, creating a unique, self-contained environment for athletes from around the world.

All-Star Multisport Complex

Celebrates a complex that successfully hosts a wide range of sports and events, demonstrating versatility, efficiency, and excellence in event management.

Courtesy City of Virginia Beach - VBCVB



1 Virginia Beach Sports Center

Virginia Beach, Va.

The Virginia Beach Sports Center captured the All-Star Multisport Complex title for a second consecutive year, continuing to set the standard for scale, versatility, and community impact. The 285,000-square-foot facility features 12 basketball courts that convert to 24 volleyball courts, a 200-meter hydraulically banked track, and 29,000 square feet of turf, allowing it to host a wide range of local, regional, and national events. Located less than a

mile from the Oceanfront, the venue welcomes more than 80,000 athletes and hosts approximately 70 tournaments annually, drawing participants from all 50 states and 43 countries over the past year. The Sports Center serves as home to six local basketball, futsal, and volleyball clubs while maintaining strong partnerships with youth and adult organizations. Beyond athletics, it supports graduations, expos, concerts, and corporate events, generating significant economic impact year-round. Purposefully designed with input from sports planners and tourism leaders, the venue operates as both a premier competition site and a pillar of the Virginia Beach community.



2 Western Sports Park

Farmington, Utah

Western Sports Park earned this recognition by redefining what a modern multisport complex can be, not just through scale, but through intention. The 55-acre campus was purpose-built to serve athletes, officials, event organizers, and families with a seamless tournament experience. Featuring six full-sized soccer fields, including a 2,000-seat championship field; two arenas with more than 120,000 square feet of playable indoor space and bleacher seating; and flexible event buildings, the venue supports year-round, high-volume events across multiple sports. Designed with direct input from organizers and athletes, Western Sports Park features thoughtful details such as dedicated officials' facilities, sensory rooms, a convenient on-site concession store, training spaces, and an intuitive campus layout that ensures events run smoothly from start to finish.

Located 20 minutes from Salt Lake City International Airport and directly adjacent to Station Park's hotels, dining, and entertainment, the campus makes it easy for teams and families to play beyond game day. Built with tourism-generated revenue to strengthen the local economy and support off-season travel, WSP has positioned Davis County as a top, family-friendly sports destination. The goal was simple: build it for the future and create a place people want to return to year after year.

3 Erie Sports Center

Erie, Pa.

The Erie Sports Center has established itself as one of the largest and most comprehensive multi-sport facilities in the region, offering year-round competition and training opportunities across a wide range of sports. Situated on 60 acres just off Interstate 90, the complex includes 10 rectangular fields for soccer, lacrosse, and football, along with four diamonds for baseball and softball. All outdoor fields are maintained for summer competition, providing a high-level experience for athletes and spectators.

The facility's indoor dome is the largest multisport turf venue in the region, spanning 61,000 square feet and rising 70 feet high. It features a full-size FIFA-accredited turf field for soccer, lacrosse, and football, along with two additional fields for baseball and softball. The dome allows for weatherproof play throughout the year.

The Erie Sports Center also includes a 30,000-square-foot indoor arena with four wood courts, on-site concessions, and a licensed venue. With on-campus housing for up to 500 athletes, classrooms, meeting space, a commercial kitchen, and dining hall, the complex is well-suited for tournaments, camps, and large-scale events.



Courtesy Erie Sports Center

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Virginia Beach
LIVE THE LIFE

EVENTS

Courtesy SGT Bishop Evans JROTC Invitational



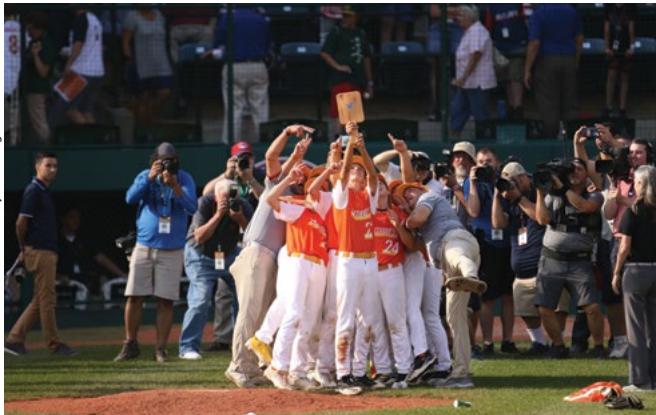
► 2

Little League Baseball World Series

The Little League Baseball World Series delivers a world-class competition while remaining accessible and family-focused. Held each August in South Williamsport, Pa., the event brings

together 20 teams from around the globe to compete for a world championship, celebrating youth athletics, sportsmanship, and international camaraderie. Over an 11-day span, the tournament features 38 games that attract fans of all ages and backgrounds. A hallmark of the Little League Baseball World Series is its commitment to affordability, offering free admission and free parking for all attendees. Beyond the action on the field, the event offers a diverse range of interactive experiences and entertainment options that appeal to both baseball enthusiasts and non-baseball fans alike. Visitors do not need prior knowledge of the sport to enjoy the atmosphere, making it an ideal all-day family outing. The combination of global competition, inclusive access, and memorable fan experiences continues to make the Little League Baseball World Series a signature event in youth sports.

Courtesy Little League Baseball and Softball



All-Star Sporting Event

Recognizes an established sporting event that sets the standard for planning, execution, and participant experience.

► 1

The SGT Bishop Evans JROTC Invitational

The SGT Bishop Evans JROTC Invitational earned this title for its meaningful mission and growing impact beyond traditional economic metrics. Named in honor of Bishop Evans, a Mansfield High School JROTC graduate who died in 2022 while serving with the Texas National Guard, the event was created to elevate JROTC programs often overlooked in school athletics. The Invitational was launched after Evans' former instructor, Sgt. Daniel Kinnel, partnered with Visit Mansfield to establish a premier North Texas drill meet worthy of long-distance travel. Since its inaugural event in 2022, the tournament has expanded from three participating teams to 20, with plans already underway to move into larger venues as interest continues to grow. While the event generates economic activity typical of sports tournaments, its primary focus remains on student development, leadership, and recognition. The Invitational has strengthened Mansfield's identity as a veteran- and military-friendly community while providing cadets a high-caliber competitive experience that honors service, sacrifice, and excellence.

Courtesy Champion Cheer Central



► 3

2025 Lake Erie National Cheer and Dance Championships

The Lake Erie National Cheer and Dance Championships earned the All-Star Sporting Event title following a record-setting year that highlighted its competitive excellence and community impact. Now in its 11th year, the annual event in Erie attracted a record number of teams and participants, drawing competitors and spectators from Pennsylvania, New York, West Virginia, Michigan, Ohio, and Canada. Held over a single weekend, the championships generated an estimated \$2.9 million in economic impact, providing a significant boost to local hotels, restaurants, and small businesses.

Beyond its financial contributions, the event demonstrated a strong commitment to community engagement. Participants and attendees supported a food drive that collected 1,853 pounds of food for the Second Harvest Food Bank, extending the event's impact beyond competition. The championships continue to grow in both scale and reputation, offering a high-caliber experience for athletes while delivering measurable benefits to the host community. This combination of competitive success, regional reach, and meaningful local involvement distinguishes the Lake Erie National Cheer and Dance Championships as a premier All-Star sporting event.

AMATEUR ATHLETIC UNION



2026 MEMBERSHIP YEAR

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► SPECIAL Feature

Best New Sporting Event

Highlights a newly launched event that has shown outstanding innovation, rapid growth, or exceptional impact within its first two years.



Courtesy Lightning Rod Energy Goalie Creator Game

► 1

Lightning Rod Energy Goalie Creator Game

The Lightning Rod Energy Goalie Creator Game by Two Goalies earned the Best New Sporting Event title for its innovative approach to hockey and family entertainment. Held at the Children's Health StarCenter in Mansfield, Texas, the inaugural event brought together top hockey content creators for a one-of-a-kind competition: an entire game played exclusively by goalies in full gear. The unique format drew hundreds of in-person attendees and thousands of online viewers, creating a dynamic and interactive fan experience. Beyond the ice, the event featured challenges, pyrotechnics, and family-friendly activities, ensuring entertainment for all ages.

The tournament culminated in the presentation of a large, highly coveted trophy, quickly establishing the Lightning Rod Energy Goalie Creator Game as a standout in the online hockey creator community. With its mix of high-level skill, creative competition, and immersive fan engagement, the event set a new standard for new sporting experiences, demonstrating how innovation and community connection can redefine what a sporting event can be. Its debut success promises to make it a must-attend fixture for hockey fans and content creators alike.



Courtesy Inspire Soccer League



Courtesy Isaac Petkac/Gannon Athletics

► 2

Project Inspire Soccer Fixture #2

Project Inspire Soccer Fixture #2 is praised for its pioneering role in creating competitive opportunities for athletes with intellectual impairments. Held September 13–14, 2025, at

HUB Sports Center in Liberty Lake, Wash., this second national fixture marked a milestone as the first league of its kind in the United States. The event gave athletes the chance to compete at the highest levels while fostering leadership, mentorship, and community engagement.

More than a tournament, Project Inspire is a movement. Fixture #2 featured dynamic soccer games that celebrated skill, determination, and sportsmanship, inspiring athletes, families, and fans alike. The event also emphasized confidence, resilience, and personal growth, showing the transformative power of inclusive sport.

Its success was made possible by HUB Sports Center's world-class facilities and by the support of USL Spokane, local businesses, volunteers, and civic leaders, who created a welcoming and memorable experience. With its competitive excellence and community engagement, Project Inspire set a new standard for inclusive sporting events, making Liberty Lake and the Inland Northwest leaders in promoting athletic growth, inclusion, and meaningful impact.

► 3

NCAA DII Men's Golf Atlantic/East Regional

The NCAA Division II Men's Golf Atlantic/East Regional made its Erie debut May 8–10, 2025, earning recognition for its high-level competition and local impact. Bringing together 20 of the nation's top DII men's golf programs—10 from the Atlantic Region and 10 from the East Region—along with four individual qualifiers, the tournament showcased elite collegiate talent across three days of intense play. Five-player teams and individual competitors vied for the opportunity to advance to the NCAA Division II National Championship at PGA National Resort later in May.

Although not a brand-new event, hosting it in Erie marked a first for the city, drawing national attention and providing a significant boost to the local economy. The tournament generated more than 500 hotel room nights and an estimated \$240,000 in economic impact, benefiting local businesses and hospitality partners. The NCAA DII Men's Golf Regional demonstrated that Erie can successfully host premier collegiate sporting events while delivering a world-class experience for athletes, coaches, and fans alike. This combination of competitive excellence and community benefit highlights the tournament's lasting impact.

CUE UP THE CELEBRATIONS



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Utah's Amusement Capital
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PEOPLE

Courtesy Jordan Tillotson

► **2**

Frank Geers: American Cornhole Organization

Frank Geers is a visionary event planner who helped transform cornhole from a backyard pastime into a globally recognized sport. As president and founder of the American Cornhole Organization in 2005, Geers built a professional platform that celebrates competition, community, and fan engagement. His leadership helped propel cornhole onto national stages, including coverage in *The Wall Street Journal*, and partnerships with NASCAR, the National Senior Games, the Carson Palmer Foundation, and NFL Thursday Night Football on Amazon Prime.

Geers' hallmark as an all-star planner is his ability to pair structure with spectacle. He spearheaded standardized rules and equipment, a professional ranking system, and a nationwide tour that now reaches players across Canada, Europe, and Asia. Events are designed to be inclusive, welcoming casual players and elite competitors alike while offering meaningful prize money and unforgettable experiences. Known as "The Cornhole Dude," Geers continues to innovate through Monster Cornhole, an entry-level program that builds skills, community, and lifelong fans.



Courtesy Frank Geers

All-Star Event Planner

Honors a planner whose leadership, creativity, and dedication have elevated the quality and success of amateur sporting events

► **1**

Jordan Tillotson: MADE Hoops

As senior director of operations at MADE Hoops, Jordan Tillotson exemplifies what it means to be an All-Star Event Planner, says nominator, Tessa Robinson, a communications specialist at Valley Forge Tourism & Convention Board. Over the past five years, Tillotson has grown the organization's presence in Montgomery County from a single tournament to three major annual events—each welcoming more than 150 teams and generating consistent growth in participation every year since 2022.

Tillotson's strategic vision, attention to detail, and commitment to creating a premier experience for athletes, coaches, and families have made these tournaments stand out. His events are known for their strong organization, competitive atmosphere, and the positive feedback they consistently receive from attendees, year after year.

Courtesy Debbie Crusco

► **3**

Debbie Crusco: PGC Basketball

Debbie Crusco sets the gold standard for event planning in youth and amateur sports, says nominator Val Royer, assistant director of Conference, Camp & Event Services at McDaniel College in Maryland. As a key planner for PGC Basketball, Crusco expertly manages every detail of both day and residential basketball camps across the United States and Canada, ensuring seamless execution and exceptional experiences for athletes, staff, and partners.

Crusco oversees site selection for camps held on college campuses, boarding schools, high schools, recreation centers, and private facilities. She negotiates pricing, executes contracts, and coordinates all logistical details required to deliver successful on-site programming. Her role also includes managing and supporting on-site staff, securing hotel accommodations, reviewing final invoices, and overseeing payment, providing end-to-end operational leadership.

A trusted partner to local convention and visitors' bureaus, Crusco leverages community relationships to secure facilities and housing efficiently. PGC Basketball's co-ed, educational camps serve players from fourth through 12th grade, and Crusco's meticulous planning ensures each event runs with professionalism, consistency, and care. Her ability to combine strategic oversight with hands-on execution makes her an all-star event planner and a cornerstone of PGC Basketball's continued success.

Rising Star in Sports Event Planning

Recognizes an emerging professional who demonstrates exceptional promise and fresh ideas in the sports events industry.

Courtesy Pernell Edwards



►1

Pernell Edwards: Explore St. Louis

Pernell Edwards is quickly emerging as a rising star in sports event planning, bringing a rights holder's perspective and a results-driven approach to his role as director of sports sales with Explore St. Louis. In the position, Edwards leads efforts to recruit and support sporting events and tournaments across St. Louis and surrounding counties, working closely with event owners, venues, hotels, and local partners to drive hotel room nights and economic impact.

Edwards entered the destination marketing side of the industry about a year and a half ago after previously serving as a rights holder, where he organized and hosted his own tournaments. That hands-on experience continues to shape his work, giving him insight into the challenges organizers face and allowing him to serve as a strategic connector between events and local resources.

His days are a blend of sales, relationship management, and coordination, from managing leads and proposals to building bid materials and organizing site visits. In 2025, Edwards helped secure three collegiate national championships for a previous destination, marking the first time the community hosted events of that caliber. Now leading sports sales for a major destination, Edwards views his role as both a milestone and a foundation for pursuing larger opportunities and elevating the profile of the markets he represents.

Courtesy Landyn Olson



►2

Landyn Olson: Snohomish County Sports Commission

Landyn Olson is a rising star, dedicated and passionate about making Snohomish County a premier sports destination. His willingness to create a friendship with the sports event organizer

rather than "just" learning about the tournament is "second nature" for him, says Snohomish County Sports Commission's executive director, Tammy Dunn. Landyn is consistently meeting with stakeholders, new event organizers, and community members to understand how the sports commission can be a better partner. He consistently works on finding new sports events that Snohomish County can host. The work he has done over the last 1.5 years is helping make Snohomish County a premier sports destination. He is also involved in the community as a wide receiver coach at his high school alma mater, Marysville Getchell High School.

Landyn's work has brought the following new events to Snohomish County: 2025 QuadballFest, 2025 Nitro Circus "Off the Rail", 2025 Ninja Paintball Tournaments, 2025 Tulalip March Madness Basketball Tournament, 2025 Quantum's Spooktacular V5 Robotics Competition, and 2026 Ignite the Northwest V5RC Signature Event.

Courtesy Visit Fargo-Moorhead



►3

Marissa Weidemann: Visit Fargo-Moorhead

Marissa Weidemann, the sports account manager at Visit Fargo-Moorhead is no doubt a rising star in the industry. Since joining the team in September 2023, Marissa has consistently demonstrated creativity, initiative, and leadership that are already making a big regional impact, says nominator, Stephonie Broughton, director of

sports with Visit Fargo-Moorhead. Weidemann brings to the table her energy, precision, and collaboration. Whether managing the complex logistics of sports tournaments, coordinating with venues, partners, and local services, or ensuring the athlete and visitor experience is exceptional, she always delivers. She understands that every detail matters, from scheduling arrival times, securing accommodations, to setting up an unforgettable arrival for participants.

Her work shows not only event-by-event success but growing influence: she's become a trusted partner to planners and stakeholders, elevating Visit Fargo-Moorhead's reputation as a destination that gets it right. For someone still early in her career, Marissa's footprint is impressively large, and her potential is undeniable.

Weidemann is the kind of rising star that makes people notice—not just because she works hard, but because she brings warmth, professionalism, and a genuine passion for making sports events better for everyone.

PARTNERSHIPS

Courtesy City of Virginia Beach - VBCVB



Virginia Beach CVB

The Virginia Beach Convention & Visitors Bureau is known for delivering more than just events—it creates experiences. Through a hands-on, highly collaborative approach, the bureau

1

Compete College Station

College Station offers championship-level experiences for sporting events, anchored by its role as home to Texas A&M University and its top-tier athletic facilities. The city provides a wide range of hotels and event venues, along with convenient access from major markets across Texas. Event organizers benefit from walkable districts, a diverse dining scene, and a strong volunteer culture that supports competitions of all sizes. The community's enthusiasm for sports and its reputation for hospitality help set College Station apart as a host destination.

The team at Compete College Station provides complimentary planning support and works closely with event organizers at every stage of the process. From facilitating group hotel rates and coordinating hospitality arrangements and welcome gifts to assisting with volunteer coordination, the team goes the extra mile to ensure a seamless planning experience.

In addition, Compete College Station has awarded select rights holders thousands of dollars through our Hotel Occupancy Tax (HOT) incentive program. This funding provides valuable supplemental resources that help enhance tournament operations and overall event success. With a welcoming spirit often described as "Howdy hospitality," College Station continues to attract planners looking to host, compete, and celebrate at a high level.



Courtesy Visit Compete College Station

All-Star Destination Partner

Celebrates a destination marketing organization, sports commission, or CVB that has gone above and beyond to support event planners and deliver memorable participant experiences.

partners closely with sporting event planners from the earliest stages of planning through the final moments on-site, ensuring every detail is thoughtfully supported. Its Sports Tourism team serves as a trusted local resource, assisting with venue coordination, hotel and accommodation needs, city services, and overall logistics, allowing planners to focus on delivering exceptional competition.

Venues such as the Virginia Beach Sports Center and the Hampton Roads Soccer Complex are paired with one of the East Coast's most iconic coastal settings. From the vibrant oceanfront and boardwalk to nearby arts districts, dining, and attractions, the destination offers an energy that elevates the experience for athletes, families, and fans.

To enhance that experience even further, the bureau activates on-site Visitor Center stations at select events, providing a welcoming touchpoint for visitors. These stations offer local insights, maps, event support, and access to digital savings passes, encouraging exploration and creating meaningful connections to the destination.

Beyond event operations, the bureau supports organizers with strategic public relations and media outreach, helping shine a spotlight on the athletes, competitions, and community. Together, these efforts leave participants with lasting memories—and every reason to return.



Courtesy William Frankhouse

Snohomish County Sports Commission

Dedicated to service, the Snohomish County Sports Commission acts as a true partner from concept to completion, offering hands-on assistance with event logistics, funding opportunities, volunteer recruitment, hotel accommodations, marketing, and connections to key local resources. Its collaborative approach helps planners streamline operations while elevating the overall quality of each event.

Snohomish County's portfolio of top-notch venues allows the commission to host a wide range of sports, including baseball, basketball, disc golf, esports, football, soccer, softball, Ultimate Frisbee, artistic swimming, and triathlons. The region's proven track record includes hosting premier events such as the Fed Cup by BNP Paribas Qualifier, WWA Wakeboard National Championship, USA Archery Field Nationals, United States Australian Football League Western Regionals, and Skate America. Through personalized support and exceptional facilities, the Snohomish County Sports Commission ensures events that leave lasting impressions on athletes, fans, and organizers.

Best Long-term Partnership between Planner & Destination

Acknowledges a successful, sustained collaboration between an event planner and a destination that continues to produce exceptional results year after year.

Courtesy City of Virginia Beach-VBCVB



1 National High School Coaches Association & City of Virginia Beach

The partnership between the National High School Coaches Association (NHSCA) and the City of Virginia Beach earned the

Best Long-Term Partnership between Planner & Destination award for more than a decade of shared vision, growth, and impact. Since 2010, Virginia Beach has hosted NHSCA championship events, developing one of the nation's largest annual gatherings in high school wrestling.

In 2025, the collaboration was strengthened with a new five-year agreement, ensuring the NHSCA High School Nationals and National Duals remain in Virginia Beach through 2030. The partnership has expanded the athlete and fan experience by creating a connected two-venue campus between the Virginia Beach Sports Center and the Convention Center, featuring 79 mats for High School Nationals and 85 mats for National Duals, solidifying the city as a leading stage for wrestling.

The impact extends well beyond competition, welcoming roughly 30,000 attendees annually and generating significant economic activity for hotels, restaurants, and local businesses. By fostering athlete development and showcasing future NCAA champions and Olympians, the NHSCA–Virginia Beach collaboration serves as a model for how destinations and planners can evolve together, adapt to growing needs, and set a standard for long-term sports tourism partnerships.

Courtesy MADE Hoops



2 MADE Hoops and Valley Forge, Pa.

The partnership between MADE Hoops and Valley Forge has spanned five years and elevated basketball in the region.

What began as a single tournament has grown into three major annual events, each drawing more than 150 teams, showcasing the sustained success of this partnership.

Since expanding in 2022, registration and participation have continued to rise, reflecting both the strong reputation of MADE Hoops events and the seamless coordination between the organizers and Valley Forge staff. Jordan Tillotson, senior director of operations at MADE Hoops, and his team consistently praise Montgomery County as the "Mecca for basketball," citing its accessibility, premier facilities, and positive experiences for athletes, coaches, and families.

This long-standing collaboration has strengthened the region's sports tourism footprint while enhancing the overall participant experience. Through shared vision, meticulous planning, and a commitment to excellence, MADE Hoops and Valley Forge have built a model partnership that continues to grow, ensuring premier basketball events that attract repeat participants and highlight the area as a top destination for youth sports.

Courtesy Champion Cheer Central



3 Champion Cheer Central and Erie, Pa.

Champion Cheer Central and the City of Erie have had nearly a decade of successful collaboration, transforming the region into a premier cheer and dance destination. Since 2014, Champion Cheer Central has hosted multiple major events in Erie, including the Winter Beach Bash Cheer and Dance Championships, Lights! Camera! Action! Cheer and Dance Extravaganza, and the Lake Erie National Cheer and Dance Championships.

Over the past five years, the partnership has fostered consistent growth, culminating in 2025 when registration for the Lake Erie National Cheer and Dance Championships sold out for the first time—marking the largest event ever held in Erie by Champion Cheer Central. Collectively, these events have attracted over 37,000 participants, more than 64,000 spectators, and generated an estimated \$17 million in economic impact for the region.

Through shared planning, strategic promotion, and a commitment to high-quality experiences for athletes, families, and spectators, Champion Cheer Central and Erie have built a model long-term partnership. Their collaboration continues to elevate the local sports tourism landscape, showcasing the city as a premier destination for national-level cheer and dance competitions.

Best Community Engagement by a Sports Event

Recognizes a sporting event that makes a meaningful impact beyond the field by actively engaging local communities through outreach, volunteerism, charitable partnerships, or youth involvement.



► **1**

USA Ultimate Beach Championships

The USA Ultimate Beach Championships earned the Best Community Engagement by a Sports Event title for its ongoing commitment to youth development, inclusivity,

and local outreach. Hosted in Virginia Beach for the eighth consecutive year this past May, the event goes beyond competition to create meaningful connections with the community. Central to this effort is the annual Learn to Play Clinic, where children ages five to 15, many from diverse backgrounds, are introduced to ultimate frisbee by some of the nation's top athletes.

During championship week, USA Ultimate volunteers extend their impact by visiting local middle schools, teaching students about the sport, promoting healthy lifestyles, and providing an accessible avenue for youth engagement. Led by David Raflo and a dedicated team, the organization distributes complimentary discs and offers free clinics, ensuring that its influence continues long after the tournament concludes.

These sustained efforts have helped grow youth ultimate participation across Virginia Beach while fostering inclusivity and mentorship. By prioritizing outreach, education, and community connection alongside athletic excellence, the USA Ultimate Beach Championships set a high standard for sports events dedicated to meaningful, lasting community engagement.

► **2**

Valley Forge 2025 Revolutionary 5-Mile Run

Hosted within Valley Forge National Historical Park, the Valley Forge 2025 Revolutionary 5-Mile Run is a unique five-mile course—the only one in the country entirely inside a national park—that attracts runners and walkers from across the U.S., with more than 1,200 participants from 19 states joining this year's hybrid event. Since its inception in 2006, the Revolutionary Run has raised nearly \$700,000 to fund park infrastructure improvements, educational programming, and visitor amenities, including recently installed water bottle filling stations in high-traffic areas.

The Valley Forge Tourism & Convention Board plays a vital role in the event's success, coordinating sponsors, directing logistics, and supporting volunteers to ensure a seamless experience. In 2024 alone, 43 sponsors helped raise a record \$80,000 to enhance the park ahead of America 250 in 2026.

Beyond fundraising, the event fosters community engagement by bringing together local businesses, organizations, and residents to celebrate health, fitness, and history. By combining competitive sport, civic pride, and historical preservation, the Valley Forge Revolutionary 5-Mile Run exemplifies how a sporting event can create a lasting impact on both the community and culture.



Dylan Eddinger/Courtesy Valley Forge



Courtesy U.S. Senior Pickleball

► **3**

U.S. Senior Pickleball

U.S. Senior Pickleball brings together players age 50 and above from across the United States, offering a competitive yet welcoming environment where athletes can showcase their skills, challenge themselves, and build lasting friendships both on and off the court.

What sets U.S. Senior Pickleball apart is its emphasis on community and connection. Beyond the high-level competition, the event fosters a supportive atmosphere for players, families, volunteers, and fans, promoting healthy living, teamwork, and intergenerational engagement. Senior athletes serve as role models, demonstrating that sport has no age limit and that dedication, strategy, and performance can continue to thrive at every stage of life.

By combining spirited competition with meaningful social interaction, U.S. Senior Pickleball creates an experience that extends beyond the court. The event highlights the vitality and resilience of senior athletes while strengthening the national pickleball community, making it a premier platform for both sport and connection.



Courtesy Patrick McDermott
With swimming, running and biking components, IRONMAN events have a large footprint on any community.

MOVING PARTS

Proven strategies to ensure flawless execution of multi-venue events

BY PAIGE TOWNLEY

No matter the sport, running a successful event in one venue is challenging enough. However, when the event spans multiple facilities, campuses, or communities, it's a whole new ballgame. Complexity multiplies quickly. From coordinating schedules and staffing to managing transportation, communication, and the attendee experience, multi-venue sporting events introduce a unique set of moving parts that can test—and stress—even the most seasoned planners. Yet with the right strategies in place, multi-venue events can run just as smoothly. We caught up with

two seasoned event professionals who know what it takes to keep a multi-venue event on pace. Here are their top five tips.

1. Put athletes first

IRONMAN events include swimming, biking and running courses—along with expo areas, Ironman Village, and a host of ancillary experiences—so the footprint in any host community is anything but small. For Keats McGonigal, senior vice president and managing director for the North America region, building the multi-venue schedule begins long before dates and times are locked in—it starts with

thoughtful consideration of the athlete's experience. "The biggest piece for us is looking at the athlete experience," he says. "How do we deliver the best athlete experience essentially from end to end?" That mindset shapes every scheduling decision, from how athletes arrive and where they stay to what race day feels like once they step into each venue. McGonigal explains that his team puts themselves in the athlete's shoes, asking what will make the experience user-friendly, memorable, and worth coming back for. From there, scheduling becomes an exercise in proactive planning. When entering a

► GAME Plan

Courtesy USA Volleyball



To minimize confusion and unnecessary movement during its events, USA Volleyball tries to keep divisions in the same venue from beginning to end.

Courtesy Patrick McDermott



With volunteers and staff spread across miles of course and multiple venues, staffing at IRONMAN events is built on structure, clarity, and redundancy.

new market, those conversations often begin 18 months to two years out, giving organizers time to align with local communities and map out details well in advance. Just as importantly, McGonigal notes that finalizing schedules early allows athletes to plan their travel with confidence. "When we open registration, we try to have the schedule for the race out so that athletes can plan their travel accordingly," he adds.

For IRONMAN, that athlete-first philosophy doesn't stop once the big milestones are set—it extends into the

smallest details of how the schedule is built and experienced. With a sport that requires extensive equipment and multiple venues, McGonigal says the team closely examines where logistics might create unnecessary stress for participants and plans accordingly. For example, they incorporate equipment drop-off into the schedule the day before race day, allowing athletes to take care of logistics in advance rather than scrambling the morning of the event. "So, that way, they can wake up, focus on good nutrition, have a good

breakfast, and let that be their mental focus as opposed to, 'How do I get my bike to the venue?'" McGonigal explains.

For USA Volleyball, thoughtful scheduling across multiple venues is just as much about families and logistics as it is about competition. With events in cities where multiple gym spaces are being used, clarity and consistency are critical, notes COO Steve Bishop. From his perspective, one of the most important scheduling strategies is keeping divisions anchored to a single venue whenever possible. "If you're going to have multiple venues, keep your divisions in the same venue from beginning to end," he explains, pointing out that families often book hotels and ground transportation based on where their athletes are playing. That approach minimizes confusion and unnecessary movement during the event. At the same time, flexibility is built into the schedule for championship moments. Bishop adds that while early rounds may stay put, teams advancing to finals can shift to a primary venue with a true championship court and space for awards, while others transition to secondary sites where those elements aren't needed.

2. Streamline transportation

When schedules are built with intention—as Bishop already noted, for example, by keeping teams at the same venue all day—transportation becomes far less of a moving target, minimizing venue-to-venue travel during competition hours. “If you’re going to have teams travel from venue A to venue B at any point during competition day, you have to factor all that in,” he says, noting how even short transfers can ripple into delays. That’s why, whenever possible, USA Volleyball eliminates the need for mid-day movement of teams. “You don’t have to try to wait for Team B to make the trip while Team A is standing on the court for an excessive amount of time waiting,” Bishop adds.

For IRONMAN events, participants must be moved between venues. In some host communities, that means transporting athletes from a transition area to the swim start, a process that demands precision and redundancy. “Make a plan on how many people you’re going to need to move and then work through how many buses you’re going to use,” Keats explains. To eliminate guesswork, his team has every bus drive the exact route in real-world conditions ahead of time to understand true travel times and turnaround. From there, they build in contingency time for the unexpected—whether it’s slower boarding, forgotten gear, or mechanical issues. “One of the pieces we’ve developed over the years is essentially overplanning on buses and having a few more than you need,” he says, noting that even the best plans can be disrupted by a breakdown or delay.

3. Use the best tech

Technology plays a critical role in keeping IRONMAN operations—and the athlete experience—on track. One priority for the organization has been making operational information more accessible and transparent, thereby enhancing engagement for everyone involved. “We have an app where friends, family, and spectators can get updates when athletes cross specific checkpoints on the race course,” McGonigal explains. “So not only do

we know, but friends and family of the athletes can get updates when they cross specific checkpoints on the race course.”

Behind the scenes, redundancy is just as important. On race weekends, IRONMAN operates across multiple communication platforms, including Microsoft Teams and WhatsApp, ensuring the event can continue seamlessly if one system goes down. That layered approach allows staff to stay connected, respond quickly to issues and keep the focus where it belongs—on delivering a safe, well-coordinated experience for athletes across every venue.

4. Connect the right people

With volunteers and staff spread across miles of course and multiple venues, staffing at IRONMAN events is built on structure, clarity, and redundancy. To manage that scale, the organization relies on a tiered staffing model that pairs experienced staff members with designated volunteer captains. “We’ve taken our volunteer needs and broken them down into manageable pieces,” McGonigal says, explaining that each functional area—such as an aid station on the run course—is overseen by a volunteer captain who works directly with a trained staff lead. That layered approach not only keeps operations organized but also builds in safeguards. “It enables us to have multiple layers of redundancy,” he notes, reducing the risk of a single point of failure on race day. Just as critical is starting the process early and communicating often. Volunteers receive detailed instructions well in advance, including parking locations, maps, and step-by-step directions to their assigned areas, allowing them to self-navigate and arrive prepared.

At USA Volleyball, staffing for multi-venue events also requires a layered approach, with clear roles and decision-making authority built into each site. “You can have multiple competition directors, one at each site overseeing, but generally only one tournament director,” Bishop explains. “At a multi-venue event, you’d have site directors, and they may have instructions that anything up to this level you make

the call, above that level give us a call and we will weigh in.” This structure ensures that each location can operate independently while still maintaining consistency and support from the overarching leadership team.

5. Expect the unexpected

Contingency planning is a cornerstone of IRONMAN’s operations, ensuring that both athletes and staff can handle the unexpected without missing a beat. “We work very extensively with our local venues and our partners, and that includes city, county, and state officials, traffic management, public works, medical staff, and EMS,” McGonigal explains. “All of those teams come together for regular meetings leading up to the events.” Part of those preparations include developing detailed contingency plans for various scenarios. Race protocols are strict on the safety side, and built-in buffers allow, for example, a delayed start if weather rolls in—plans that are communicated in advance so that on race day, everyone knows exactly what to do. “On race day, it’s just go and execute plans,” he notes, reiterating the goal of minimizing surprises and keeping the focus on delivering a seamless athlete experience.

Another critical piece of contingency planning, McGonigal emphasizes, is making sure the right people are in the room—those who will actually be on the ground when the event is happening. “I’ve seen situations where one county sheriff will be coming to planning meetings, but they aren’t necessarily working race weekend,” he explains. The key is identifying who will be available to pick up the phone or make decisions during the event and ensuring a direct connection to them. “This applies across all partners, from law enforcement to venue staff,” he adds. “Having access to the people who will actually be operating the event—and the decision makers for that venue or city—can make all the difference when issues arise on race day.” And while you can’t predict every potential obstacle or pitfall, having all the right people and plans in play will put you in a good position to be ready for anything that comes your way. ■

THE PADEL PHENOMENON

This exciting racquet sport, fresh to the U.S. scene, is rapidly capturing the hearts of players and planners alike

BY KEITH LORIA



Popular in Europe and Latin America for decades, padel is now finding its footing in North America, with the Pro Padel League launching in 2022. There are now 10 teams representing cities in the United States, Canada, and Mexico. *

Once considered a niche import from Europe and Latin America, padel is now carving out a meaningful presence in the American sports-event ecosystem. Participation is increasing, infrastructure is expanding, and organizers are starting to view the sport not as a novelty, but as a legitimate event and a viable business opportunity.

So, what is padel? Pronounced with the accent on the first syllable, padel is a rapidly growing racquet sport that combines elements of tennis and squash. It is played on a smaller, enclosed court surrounded by glass and mesh walls, which keep the ball in play and fosters long, dynamic rallies. Usually played in doubles, padel uses a sturdy, perforated paddle and a depressurized tennis ball.

The game features underhand serves and emphasizes strategy, shot placement and teamwork over sheer power. Players can use the glass back walls to bounce the ball back, similar to squash, making the game lively and engaging.

“The amount of clubs has exploded in the U.S. in the past couple of years,” says Scott Colebourne, executive director of the United States Padel Association.

According to *The State of Padel in the U.S. Report 2025*, produced by Paddle Growth Analytics, the sport is gaining measurable traction in the U.S. In fact, the report finds that there are 112,872 active padel players nationwide and 688 padel courts at 180 facilities across 31 states, illustrating that participation is expanding beyond traditional coastal hubs.

The study also shows a diverse participation base, with nearly 40,000 core players who play 12 or more times per year, and more than 150 USPA-sanctioned tournaments held in 2025, signaling rising competitive engagement. While padel remains far smaller than tennis or pickleball, its growth curve has been steep enough to draw interest from facility developers, league operators and destinations looking to diversify their event offerings.

Past and present

Padel was invented in 1968 in Acapulco, Mexico, before spreading rapidly through Spain, Argentina, and other parts of Europe and Latin America. In Spain, it has grown into one of the country's most popular participation sports, supported by thousands of courts and a deeply embedded club culture.

The United States, by contrast, is still early in its adoption cycle, and that timing may be its greatest advantage. "Unlike Spain or Argentina, where the market is mature and saturated, the U.S. is in an early-phase growth curve," Colebourne says. "That creates both opportunity and challenge. We have a chance to build infrastructure, standards, and competition pathways correctly from the start."

According to the USPA, court construction has accelerated sharply in recent years, driven by increased investor interest and demand from players who were introduced to the sport during the COVID-era fitness boom. Unlike some pandemic-driven trends, padel's momentum has not slowed.

"We're seeing growth across every measurable indicator," Colebourne says. "Membership continues to grow month over month, and tournament participation has increased significantly, with many events filling quickly and expanding draws."

Insiders suggest that one reason the sport is growing so quickly is its accessibility for all ages.



Courtesy United States Padel Association

The Pro Padel League, which fields 10 professional franchise teams across major markets in the United States (Arkansas, Miami, Houston, Las Vegas, Los Angeles, New York, and San Diego) as well as in Canada and Mexico, has established a platform that inspires participation and serves as aspiration for the best prospects to reach their full potential.

"The PPL will continue to play a significant role in furthering the growth of padel by hosting world-class competitions, engaging fans with unique content and experiences and supporting grassroots participation," says Brian Flinn, COO of the league. "For 2026, we plan to increase the number of events hosted in team markets. We will work closely with our teams, sports commissions, tourism boards and venues to deliver world-class experiences for players, fans and partners."

Additionally, the PPL is planning a series of fan engagement events, including open play, clinics, pro-ams and exhibition matches, alongside pop culture events in unique locations. "These events will offer more access to the PPL, our teams and our players, and will enable us to produce a wide range of content, from live programming to influencer integrations and social media, reaching audiences around the world," Finn said.

Why padel is clicking

Much of padel's appeal lies in how it differs from other racquet sports. Played exclusively as doubles on an enclosed court, the game incorporates glass walls that keep rallies alive and introduce a strategic, three-dimensional element.

"Padel is played in three dimensions," Colebourne says. "The ball can bounce off the glass walls and stay in play, which makes it very different from tennis or pickleball." The sport's learning curve is also relatively forgiving. New players can rally quickly, and maintaining competitive balance across skill levels is easier.

"The ability level between players doesn't have to be super close for it to be a great game," Colebourne says. "Someone who has been playing a long time can play with someone newer and still have a lot of fun." That accessibility, combined with the sport's inherently social nature, has helped fuel participation, particularly among adult players.

Jaco Blanco, a former number-one-ranked player on the USPA circuit and a top 20 world-ranked player, now serves as a coach for the U.S. national team and believes the U.S. is at the beginning of a very exciting padel journey.

Courtesy Pro Padel league



Like in squash, players can hit the ball off the back wall in padel.

Courtesy United States Padel Association



Usually played in doubles, padel uses a sturdy, perforated paddle and a depressurized tennis ball.

“Having been involved in padel for over 30 years, I’ve seen the sport grow from a very niche activity into a global phenomenon,” he says. “Over the last three years living in the U.S., and now serving as a national team selector, it’s been especially interesting to witness how quickly padel is resonating here.”

He believes padel is gaining popularity in the U.S. for several key reasons, among them its extreme accessibility, which allows people to enjoy it from

their very first session, regardless of age or background. This aspect fits perfectly with the American mindset of fun, social, and inclusive sports.

“Second, the U.S. already has a strong culture of racquet sports like tennis and pickleball, so padel feels familiar yet fresh and offers something new, more dynamic and more social,” Blanco says. “Additionally, the growth of high-quality clubs, international exposure and professional events is helping legitimize

the sport and attract both players and investors. Once people try padel, they usually get hooked—the learning curve is fast, the rallies are long, and the social component is very strong.”

From niche hobby to organized competition

As padel participation has grown, so has the need for a structured approach. What began as loosely organized club play is increasingly supported by national rankings, sanctioned tournaments and league-based competition.

At the amateur level, the National Padel League has emerged as a key connector between clubs, players and the broader padel ecosystem. “The National Padel League was born in 2021, when the industry wasn’t nearly as evolved as it is today,” says Luis Fernando Ramirez Aristeguieta, CEO of the league. “The mission now is to solidify the ecosystem of padel in the United States and connect the community.”

Operating in partnership with the USPA, the NPL runs a team-based league structure that mirrors successful models in tennis and other sports. Teams compete at the city level before



According to the International Padel Federation, as of 2025, the sport is played in more than 140 countries worldwide, with approximately 30 million amateur players.

advancing to regional and national competitions. The response has exceeded expectations. “We were projecting around 800 players, and we doubled that,” Ramirez Aristeguieta says. “We’re at about 1,700 players right now, across 36 cities and more than 50 clubs.”

For organizers, league play offers a different value proposition than standalone tournaments as it’s rooted in retention and repeat engagement. “When players feel part of a team, they stick longer,” Ramirez Aristeguieta says. “They train more, they spend more time at the club, and they invest emotionally in the sport.”

Tournament tips

As more clubs and destinations experiment with padel events, organizers are discovering that success depends on mastering fundamentals rather than overcomplicating formats. “Players expect consistent standards for rules, officiating and scheduling,” Colebourne says. “Clear communication before and during the event is essential.”

Facilities with three or four courts tend to handle tournament flow most efficiently, though two-court venues can still host

successful entry-level competitions. “Adequate staffing, particularly for officiating and scoring, is one of the most critical factors,” Colebourne says. “That’s one of the biggest things we’ve learned.”

Beyond logistics, padel tournaments thrive when organizers lean into the sport’s social culture. Many successful events incorporate pop-up villages with vendors, music and post-match gatherings that encourage players to stay on site.

“Padel players are incredibly social, both online and offline,” Colebourne says. “They love when a tournament feels like more than just matches.”

Tournament gift bags, professional photography and sponsor activations have also become common tools for enhancing the player experience while creating revenue opportunities for organizers.

Padel partnerships

For sports commissions and CVBs, padel remains an emerging asset, but one with growing appeal. While events are generally smaller than traditional tournaments, they attract a highly engaged adult demographic that travels, spends, and returns.

The USPA works with destinations by providing tournament sanctioning, connecting organizers with endorsed court builders and assisting with event formats and sponsorship opportunities.

“A city is padel-ready when it has adequate court availability, a committed host club, and support from the destination or sports commission,” Colebourne says.

Most padel events today are still driven by clubs, but Colebourne encourages organizers to involve tourism partners early. “If clubs have good relationships with their cities or tourism boards, they should start those conversations now,” he says.

While participation remains the primary growth driver in the U.S., professional competition helps legitimize the sport and raise awareness among new audiences. “Some players prefer individual tournaments, others prefer team competition,” Colebourne says. “Both formats are important for the sport’s growth.” Professional events have also introduced new venue concepts, international talent and broadcast experimentation, developments that filter down to the amateur and grassroots levels.

The road ahead

Despite its momentum, padel’s biggest challenge in the U.S. remains infrastructure. Courts are expensive to build, zoning approvals can be slow, and projects often take years to complete. “Demand to play padel is really high,” Colebourne says. “But courts are still relatively inaccessible in many markets.” That reality shapes how events are planned. Flexible scheduling, efficient use of court time, and collaboration between clubs and leagues have become essential tools for organizers.

“We had to adapt,” Ramirez Aristeguieta says. “Flex scheduling at the city level allows participation even when infrastructure is still catching up.” Looking ahead, padel’s leaders see youth development, expanded infrastructure, and broader media exposure as critical to sustaining growth. “Long term, our biggest goal is becoming an Olympic sport in 2032,” Colebourne says. “This is still early days, but the foundation is being built.” Time will tell if padel grows to the point where it becomes a real challenger to tennis, pickleball, and squash as the true king of the court. ■



Fight club

The first rule is to talk about how to run a safe and successful event

MMA events require a strong focus on safety and integrity.

BY BOB SEXTON

Mixed martial arts (MMA) continues to grow in popularity across the U.S., attracting new athletes, fans, and communities to the sport. For event planners, that growth brings opportunity, but also responsibility. MMA events require careful coordination, specialized oversight, and a strong focus on safety and integrity. Unlike many amateur sports, MMA operates within a complex framework of regulations, insurance requirements, and safety protocols that vary by state. Organizers who underestimate that complexity can put athletes—and events—at risk.

To learn what it takes to host a safe and successful MMA event, we reached out to two representatives from the United States Fight League (USFL), a nonprofit sanctioning body overseeing youth and adult MMA competition. They say success starts with understanding what makes MMA

different and planning accordingly, which is where these five practical tips come into play.

1. Start with sanctioning

Before securing a venue or building a bout card, planners should first understand the regulatory landscape. MMA is governed at the state level, and requirements can vary significantly by location.

“Each state is going to have different regulations,” says Joe Stevenson, president of the California-based United States Fight League (USFL). “Whenever you’re going to throw an event, you want to always look at your athletic commission that is in charge.”

Even with a national organization involved, events must still comply with state rules. “Although we are the governing body in the United States, we still have to fall under the state regulation as well,” adds Mike Sydara, a USFL administrator and official.

Stevenson emphasizes that sanctioning protects everyone involved. “Once

you throw an event—selling tickets, profiting—everything needs to be above board,” he says. “That’s how you demonstrate a fair and safe sport.”

2. Build safety into the event plan

Safety planning goes far beyond the competition area itself. According to USFL officials, MMA events require detailed medical and emergency preparations long before doors open.

“We have a doctor ringside. We have an ambulance,” Stevenson says. “These are California Athletic Commission rules and regulations.”

The USFL also enforces an extensive set of rules and safeguards for the actual fight, which are especially stringent for youth fighters. For example, there are no head strikes allowed in youth matches to prevent either fighter from sustaining a concussion.

On event day, organizers conduct walkthroughs to confirm access and flow. “We do a safety walk to ensure

uninterrupted access to the cage, to the ambulance, and to each locker room in case of an emergency,” Sydara says.

Access control is also critical. “Only a certified official or cleared officials can be in there during the bout,” he explains. Locker rooms are similarly restricted to vetted personnel.

“These are all things planners need to think about,” Stevenson adds, noting that safety planning must be intentional, visible, and consistent throughout the event.

3. Know your insurance responsibilities

Insurance is another area where planners often underestimate what’s required. According to Stevenson, MMA events typically require more than one form of coverage.

“There are two separate insurances,” he said. “One is for the athletes, and the other is the actual event and venue outside of the competition.”

Venue insurance covers spectators and facility liability, while competitor insurance covers athletes and officials. “Your venue needs accidental insurance for anything that may happen to the crowd that’s watching,” Stevenson says.

For youth events, coverage becomes even more critical. “When you have an event with youth, you want to make sure you have insurance to cover the youth,” he says. Understanding these distinctions early helps planners avoid last-minute issues and ensures that venues, athletes, and organizers are properly protected.

4. Select venues carefully

MMA events can be hosted in a variety of spaces, but not every venue is automatically suitable. USFL officials said planners should evaluate facilities with safety, access, and layout in mind.

“You can use your regular gym if it’s big enough and has everything that’s proper and appropriate,” Stevenson says. “You can also use high school gymnasiums. There are multiple websites you can go on, especially since they’re government buildings, to rent them when they’re not being used.”

Regardless of location, venues must support emergency access and safe competition areas. “We walk around the



Successful MMA events depend heavily on experienced officials and properly vetted volunteers.



United States Fight League president Joe Stevenson and a young competitor.

cage to make sure there’s no exposed metal or danger,” Stevenson says.

Environmental factors also matter, especially for outdoor competitions. “We’ve seen events where the canvas was extremely hot and dangerous,” he says. Whether using a cage, a ring, or an open-mat format, planners must ensure the space meets safety and sanctioning standards before the first bout begins.

5. Staff events with trained, vetted personnel

Successful MMA events depend heavily on experienced officials and properly vetted volunteers. According to USFL leaders, staffing is never improvised. “No adults can be in locker rooms unless they’ve been cleared and background

checked,” Sydara says. “That includes coaches and even parents.”

Officials typically begin by gaining experience through shadowing. “Most people start as volunteers and shadow experienced officials,” Sydara explains. “You have to learn the ropes and get your reps.”

Stevenson says integrity is central to the whole process, particularly in how a match is officiated and scored. “If the integrity is questioned, we can go back on film, review it, and demonstrate exactly how scoring was applied,” he says. By relying on trained, credentialed personnel, planners help ensure fairness, safety, and credibility targets are met, which is essential to any MMA event’s long-term success. ■

SPOTLIGHT ON: TEXAS

Sports are woven into the fabric of daily life of Texas, making the state a natural fit for sporting events of every size and scope. Home to some of the nation's largest and most advanced stadiums, multi-field complexes, and indoor facilities, the Lone Star state is built to handle high-volume tournaments and championship-level competition with ease. "Beyond world-class venues and year-round play, visitors enjoy vibrant tourism, renowned dining, rich cultural attractions and entertainment options that make every sports trip a full experience for athletes, fans and organizers alike," says Travel Texas director Tim Fennell. ■

Dallas is a hotbed for sports. ►



Courtesy Visit Dallas

TEXAS

ABILENE

Abilene offers a diverse range of sporting venues, from baseball and softball to tennis and track and field.

Hotel rooms: 4,100

Major facilities:

- Dodge Jones Youth Sports Center is a 55,000-square-foot facility with four regulation basketball courts, four youth basketball courts and eight regulation volleyball courts
- Shotwell Stadium hosts football, soccer, and football
- Lake Kirby Park has four softball fields

Convention center: Abilene Convention Center houses a 20,000-square-foot exhibit hall.

Contact: Abilene CVB, abilenevisitors.com.

Major facilities:

- Courtside has eight basketball courts and 12 volleyball courts
- Netplex is a 62,000-square-foot facility offering seven volleyball courts, five futsal courts, three basketball courts, and 10 pickleball courts
- Rick Klein Sports Complex has six lighted baseball fields
- Amarillo National Tennis Center has 11 lighted outdoor tennis courts, three indoor tennis courts, two lighted padel courts and nine outdoor pickleball courts

Civic center: Amarillo Civic Center Complex comprises 340,000 total square feet and offers a variety of multipurpose areas.

Contact: Amarillo CVB, visitamarillo.com.

AMARILLO

Located along the iconic Route 66 at the crossroads of America, Amarillo is perfectly positioned to host a sporting event. With more than 7,500 hotel rooms and the Rick Husband Amarillo International Airport, Amarillo has the accessibility, and affordability to accommodate any group.

Hotel rooms: 7,500

Hotel tax rate: 15 percent

ARLINGTON

Arlington is home to world-class facilities like AT&T Stadium and Globe Life Field. The city is also home to the #1 esports stadium in North America, Esports Stadium Arlington + EXPO Center.

Hotel rooms: 8,500

Hotel tax rate: 15 percent plus two percent public improvement district assessment fee



MUST SEE:

The Heard Natural Science Museum & Wildlife Sanctuary

The Heard Natural Science Museum & Wildlife Sanctuary is a must-see attraction in McKinney. Offering a peaceful escape into nature across its expansive 289-acre preserve, it features miles of scenic trails winding through diverse habitats, including bird blinds, butterfly gardens, and outdoor exhibits that showcase wildlife from around the world. ■

Courtesy Visit McKinney

El Paso MADe FOR Sports!

Bring your next tournament to El Paso, where championship-ready venues, 300 days of sunshine, and unbeatable hospitality create the ultimate sports destination. From flexible facilities to rich culture and authentic cuisine, El Paso makes every event unforgettable on and off the court.

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Connect with our Sports Sales Manager:
Omar Ramirez | 915.238.6419
oramirez@destinationelpaso.com



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a City of Makers!



Major facilities:

- Home to the Dallas Cowboys NFL team, AT&T Stadium is a retractable dome stadium that seats 80,000 fans and hosts major events and concerts
- Globe Life Field is a 41,000-seat ballpark and is the home field of the Texas Rangers MLB team
- Choctaw Stadium is a 270-acre multipurpose complex
- College Park Center is a multipurpose venue with a capacity of 7,000
- Arlington Tennis Center boasts 26 lighted outdoor courts and 10 lighted pickleball courts
- Harold Patterson Sports Center has 24 multipurpose grass fields and six softball fields

Convention centers: Esports Stadium Arlington hosts esports, cheer and dance, gymnastics, and fencing. Opened in the entertainment district in 2024, the Arlington Convention Center and Loews Arlington Hotel have 266,000 square feet of indoor/outdoor meeting space.

Contact: Arlington CVB, arlington.org.

AUSTIN

Austin is a sports town, and it has the world-class facilities to prove it. Along with Austin's central location in the state and the country, and its accessible highways and airport, it's easy to see why so many sports event planners are bringing their events to Austin.

Hotel rooms: 50,000

Hotel tax rate: 17 percent

Major facilities:

- Moody Center is a 15,000-seat multipurpose facility
- Q2 Stadium houses one field and has a capacity of 20,500
- Home to the University of Texas at Austin Longhorns football team, Darrell K Royal – Texas Memorial Stadium has one championship football field and can seat more than 100,000 fans.

- Dell Diamond in Round Rock is the home stadium of the Round Rock Express, the Triple-A Minor League Baseball affiliate of the Texas Rangers. It has a capacity of 12,500
- H-E-B Center at Cedar Park has one court and a capacity of 7,200

Convention center: The Austin Convention Center is currently closed, and the new, bigger facility is scheduled to open in early 2029.

Contact: Visit Austin, visitaustin.org.

BIG SPRING

Big Spring is located in West Texas at the intersection of US-87 and I-20. The city is also located in an area where three ecological regions meet, resulting in varied topography.

Hotel rooms: 1,263

Major facilities:

- Roy Anderson Sports Complex features four softball fields, four baseball fields, one T-ball field, five soccer fields, and one football field
- Comanche Trail Lake is a top spot for fishing tournaments

Contact: Big Spring CVB, visitbigspring.com.

BRYAN

Bryan is perfectly positioned to serve all the major metro areas in Texas. The short distance allows teams from across the state, region, or nation to enjoy the award-winning amenities Bryan has to offer.

Hotel rooms: 1,600

Hotel tax rate: 15.75 percent

Major facilities:

- Legends Event Center offers a 65,000-square-foot hardwood floor with 16 volleyball courts, eight basketball courts, and up to 28 pickleball courts, along with an esports lounge, 2,500 square feet of artificial turf and four outdoor sand volleyball courts

- Travis Fields at Midtown Park include three turf fields

Contact: Destination Bryan Texas, destinationbryan.com.

CLEBURNE

Cleburne is a charming small town with a wide variety of venues for athletic competitions with proximity to the Dallas/Fort Worth area, affordability, and plenty of things to do after the event.

Hotel rooms: 700

Hotel tax rate: 13 percent

Major facilities:

- La Modena Field seats 3,500 spectators and has one synthetic turf field
- Cleburne Sports Complex includes seven baseball fields, four softball fields, 20 soccer fields, and two football fields
- Johnson County Sheriff's Posse Grounds has one outdoor arena

Convention center: Cleburne Conference Center offers 45,000 square feet of space and hosts cheerleading, gymnastics, wrestling, dance, and boxing.

Contact: Cleburne CVB, visitcleburne.com.

CONROE

Conroe's favorite attraction is our beautiful Lake Conroe. The city is a top bass fishing destination and hosts many competitions annually.

Hotel rooms: 2,300

Major facilities:

- Carl Barton Park has five Little League fields, four baseball fields, four softball fields, and nine soccer fields
- Scrap Yard Sports Complex has 16 all-turf fields for baseball and softball
- John Burge Park has an 18-hole disc golf course

Convention center: The Lone Star Convention Center hosts cheer and dance competitions.

Contact: Visit Conroe, visitconroe.com.

CORPUS CHRISTI

The mild winters and warm summers in Corpus Christi offer the ideal year-round temperature for outdoor sporting events. The high wind speeds make it one of the best cities in North America for unmatched wind surfing, kiteboarding and sailing. Corpus Christi has become a host to nationally recognized wind sport events, such as the J24 Sailing World Championships and the Youth Sailing World Championship, to name a few.

Hotel rooms: 10,000

Hotel tax rate: 15 percent plus two percent in hotels in city limits with 40-plus rooms

Major facilities:

- Cabaniss Athletic Complex offers an 8,000-seat multipurpose field, 1,000-seat soccer field, 3,000-seat baseball field, and 1,850-seat softball field

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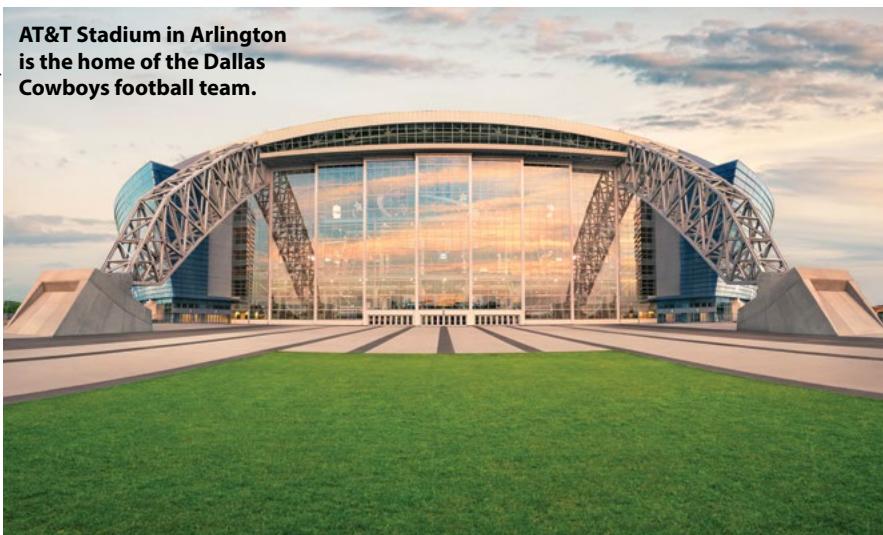


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LEARN WHY YOU'LL LOVE IT HERE. Like sports, hosting athletic tournaments takes practice, power and skill. But when you've successfully held as many events as we have, well, it's all in the reflexes. Learn more about our facilities, experts and city at CompeteCollegeStation.com today.

Compete COLLEGE STATION



AT&T Stadium in Arlington
is the home of the Dallas Cowboys football team.



The Harvest Moon Regatta
takes place annually along Texas' Gulf Coast.

of sunshine, El Paso is known for its warm temperatures and clear skies, the perfect weather combination for having fun outdoors.

Hotel rooms: 10,500

Hotel tax rate: 17.5 percent

Major facilities:

- Don Haskins Center is a 11,892-seat multipurpose venue
- El Paso County Sportspark offers 10 lighted baseball/softball fields
- Westside Sports complex includes 13 natural turf fields
- El Paso County Coliseum is a 5,250-seat multipurpose indoor arena
- Eastside Sports Complex has seven sod competition fields with one championship field

Convention center: El Paso Convention Center offers 133,100 total square feet of space, 80,000 of which is column-less.

Contact: Visit El Paso, visitelpaso.com/sports-planners.

FRISCO

Frisco went from a small town in North Texas to the home of some of the biggest sports organizations on the planet. The destination stands out as a place where world-class entertainment, sports and culture come together in one-of-a-kind family-friendly hub.

Hotel rooms: 4,635

Hotel tax rate: 13 percent

Major facilities:

- The Star is a 510,000-square-foot indoor facility
- Toyota Stadium is a football/soccer stadium with a capacity of 20,500
- Comerica Center is a 6,000-seat multipurpose venue with two ice rinks
- Riders Field is an award-winning ballpark with a capacity of 10,216

Contact: Visit Frisco, visitfrisco.com.

GALVESTON ISLAND

With 32 miles of Gulf shoreline, easy access to calm bay waters, resort-style convention space, and plenty of flat, flexible playing fields, Galveston is the perfect host for sporting events in every season. Beyond the venues, competitors and families are drawn to the island's vacation energy—anchored by standout family attractions and a walkable collection of historic and cultural sites just minutes from event locations.

Hotel rooms: 5,200

Hotel tax rate: 15 percent

Major facilities:

- East Beach Park features 30 beach volleyball courts
- Sandhill Crane Soccer Complex houses up to 16 grass fields depending on size
- Crockett Park Baseball Complex offers three fields
- City of Galveston Ball Fields has seven fields

- McGee Beach has nine courts for sports like volleyball, soccer, and rugby
- Bill Witt Park has 12 regulation fields and four baseball fields
- The new Corpus Christi Sports Complex includes two turf multipurpose fields and six flexible multi-sport natural grass fields

Convention center: Hilliard Center features a 10,500-seat arena, 2,526-seat auditorium, and 138,000-plus-square feet of divisible space.

Contact: Visit Corpus Christi, visitcorpuschristi.com.

DALLAS

Dallas is a hotbed for sports with eight professional sports teams. From youth volleyball tournaments to the FIFA World Cup, the city can host it all with its 90-plus area sports venues.

Hotel rooms: 36,000; 10,000 downtown

Hotel tax rate: 15 percent

Major facilities:

- American Airlines Center is a 20,000-seat multipurpose venue
- Cotton Bowl Stadium is an iconic venue that hosts football and soccer
- Moneygram Soccer Park includes 19 soccer fields
- Fair Park Coliseum is a multipurpose indoor venue with 8,513 seats
- Globe Life Field is a multipurpose venue with a capacity of 40,300

Convention center: The Kay Bailey Hutchison Convention Center boasts over one million square feet of exhibit space, a 9,816-seat arena and the largest column-free space in the country. The versatile venue hosts volleyball, gymnastics, cheerleading, fencing, weightlifting and more.

Contact: Dallas Sports Commission, dallassports.org.

EL PASO

El Paso welcomes all to enjoy year-round sports and excitement in the sunny southwest. With 300-plus days



**CORPUS CHRISTI
SPORTS COMMISSION**

WHERE *Texas* COMES TO PLAY



Corpus Christi stands apart from inland Texas markets with one unbeatable advantage: the coast. Here, competition unfolds alongside Gulf breezes, wide-open beaches, and outdoor venues designed to elevate every event. Our sports-ready infrastructure, experienced event support, and relaxed coastal atmosphere deliver seamless tournaments and unforgettable experiences between games. For planners looking to offer more than fields and facilities, Corpus Christi is where sport meets the shoreline.



**SCAN TO HOST YOUR
NEXT SPORTS EVENT**

Convention center: Galveston Island Convention Center features 140,000 square feet of space and hosts a wide variety of indoor sporting events.
Contact: Visit Galveston, visitgalveston.com.

GRAPEVINE

Grapevine is centrally located in North Texas between Dallas and Fort Worth, making it easy for sports participants and fans driving in from other markets. Within 10 minutes of Grapevine hotels, Dallas/Fort Worth International Airport offers convenient access, with direct flights from most cities.

Hotel rooms: 6,000

Hotel tax rate: 13 percent

Major facilities:

- Oak Grove Baseball Complex has nine baseball fields
- Oak Grove Softball Complex offers four softball fields
- Oak Grove Soccer Complex has four soccer fields
- Fieldhouse Grapevine is a multipurpose indoor facility with 12 courts

Convention center: Gaylord Texan Resort and Convention Center hosts a wide variety of sports events, including youth and amateur volleyball, cheer and dance competitions, and gymnastics and fencing events.

Contact: Grapevine CVB, GrapevineTexasUSA.com.

HOUSTON

Houston is recognized by professional and collegiate sporting organizations as a town that knows how to put on big events well and has a fanbase that supports all types of sports.

Hotel tax rate: 85,000

Major facilities:

- NRG Stadium is a 72,220-seat football stadium
- Previously known as Minute Maid Park, Daikin Park is a 41,015-seat ballpark that serves as the home of the Houston Astros.
- Shell Energy Stadium is a 22,000-seat multipurpose venue
- Toyota Center is an 18,023-seat multipurpose venue

Convention center: George R. Brown Convention Center offers 1.85 million square feet of space.

Contact: Houston Sports Authority, houstonsports.org.

IRVING

From pro to amateur, Irving has hosted hundreds of national and regional events for more than 20 unique sports. And with its central location between Dallas and Fort Worth, it's easy to enjoy the best sports and entertainment of all three cities.

Hotel rooms: 14,000

Hotel tax rate: 15 percent

Major facilities:

- Trinity View Park has nine youth baseball fields, six

soccer fields, four adult softball fields, and four football fields

- Levy Event Plaza is a six-acre site
- Irving Soccer Complex consists of 13 youth soccer fields

Convention center: Irving Convention Center at Las Colinas hosts numerous sports, including judo, wrestling, roller derby, and gymnastics with its 50,000 square feet of column-free space in its exhibit hall.

Contact: Visit Irving, irvingtexas.com.

KERRVILLE

Kerrville's historic downtown, local shops, and handcrafted eats give visitors plenty to enjoy—but what really sets it apart as a sporting event destination is the mix of Hill Country beauty and top-notch facilities.

Hotel rooms: 1,200

Hotel tax rate: 13 percent

Major facilities:

- Kerrville Sports Complex includes four Little League baseball fields, two adult baseball fields, five softball fields, and 20 acres of field space for soccer
- Kerrville Tennis Complex offers 14 lighted courts

Contact: Kerrville CVB, kerrvilletexascvb.com.

LAREDO

Laredo's warm, year-round climate makes it an exceptional destination for sporting events of all kinds. With long, sunny days and mild winters, athletes and spectators alike can enjoy outdoor activities without seasonal limitations.

Hotel rooms: 4,280

Hotel tax rate: 14 percent

Major facilities:

- Laredo Tennis Complex at TAMIU offers 18 courts
- Slated to open in early 2026, Buena Vista Sports Complex includes 10 baseball/softball fields and two soccer/flag football fields
- Border City Sportsplex has four basketball/volleyball courts
- Max Mandel Municipal Golf Course is a par-72, 18-hole course

Contact: Laredo CVB, visitlaredo.com.

LEWISVILLE

Lewisville is in the Dallas/Fort Worth area in the heart of North Texas. The city is home to some of the finest outdoor and indoor sports facilities in the area, which are just minutes from the city's hotels and restaurants.

Hotel rooms: 2,048

Major facilities:

- Westside Aquatic Center has a 75-meter competition pool and two diving boards
- Lewisville Railroad Park includes a seven-field soccer complex, three man-made lakes, skate park, two-field football complex, and three-field baseball complex

• Lewisville Lake Park houses eight soccer fields, eight baseball fields, two adult soccer fields, golf course, and disc golf course

Convention center: The Lewisville Convention Center offers 17,000 square feet of space and is connected to the Hilton Garden Inn. The ballroom is 9,120 square feet.

Contact: Lewisville CVB, visitlewisville.com.

LONGVIEW

Longview is located in East Texas. The city is within a three-hour drive of all of North Texas, southern Oklahoma, western Arkansas, and northern Louisiana.

Hotel rooms: 2,400

Major facility:

Lear Park has six baseball fields, 10 softball fields, 15 soccer fields, and a Miracle League field

Convention center: Maude Cobb Convention Center offers 27,000 square feet of indoor space with 25-foot ceilings.

Contact: Longview CVB, visitlongviewtexas.com.

LUBBOCK

Lubbock is centrally located in the United States and is surrounded by five major highways, making traveling to the city convenient. Lubbock also boasts the Lubbock Preston Smith International Airport.

Hotel rooms: 6,946

Major facilities:

- Berl Huffman Athletic Complex features over 50 fields and four baseball/softball diamonds
- Lubbock Memorial Civic Center includes a 40,000-square-foot, column-free exhibit hall

Contact: Lubbock Economic Development Alliance, marketlubbock.org.

MANSFIELD

For being a relatively small area, Mansfield can host any sporting event. As home of the Mansfield Starcenter, with its two full-size ice rinks, the city has the ability to host every major team sport.

Hotel rooms: 702

Hotel tax rate: 13 percent

Major facilities:

- Fieldhouse USA is a 100,000-square-foot indoor complex
- The Fields at Station 63 offer eight turf fields for baseball and softball
- Vernon Newsom Stadium is an 11,134-seat football stadium
- Michael L. Skinner Sports Complex has nine lighted baseball fields and eight soccer fields
- Children's Health StarCenter is a 78,000-square-foot facility housing two NHL-sized sheets of ice

Contact: Mansfield CVB, mansfieldsgotgame.com.



Where Champions Compete and Big Events Thrive in the Heart of Texas



With a bold vision to position Arlington, Texas as a premier sports tourism destination, the Arlington Sports Commission recruits and supports high-impact, headline-making sporting events that drive economic growth and showcase the city on a national and international stage. Centrally located in 15 minutes from DFW International Airport, Arlington offers unmatched accessibility to world-class venues, and a proven track record of hosting events at every level — from youth and amateur competitions to collegiate championships and professional sports.

Home to iconic facilities with world class features like AT&T Stadium, Globe Life Field, Choctaw Stadium, and College Park Center, Arlington provides flexible venues capable of hosting everything from multi-day tournaments to global sporting showcases. Beyond the competition, teams and fans enjoy a walkable entertainment district, diverse dining, family-friendly attractions, shopping and a welcoming community known for delivering seamless event experiences. In Arlington, sports don't just happen, champions are crowned.



GET TO KNOW:

Parker Eidson
Sports Account Director
817-704-7596
parker@arlington.org
arlingtonsportscommission.org

Arlington is one of the few U.S. cities to host Super Bowls, World Series games, NCAA Championships, international events, and esports competitions, all within a single entertainment district.

HOT TOPICS

Top Sports Spots

Arlington is home to one of the most concentrated collections of premier sports venues in the country. AT&T Stadium, home of the Dallas Cowboys, anchors the Entertainment District and hosts everything from NFL games to global sporting events and concerts. Nearby, Globe Life Field delivers a climate-controlled home for the Texas Rangers, while Choctaw Stadium continues its legacy hosting football, soccer, and specialty sporting events. The Entertainment District is also home to Esports Stadium Arlington, the largest dedicated esports facility in North America.

Just minutes away, College Park Center offers a versatile indoor venue for basketball, volleyball, wrestling, gymnastics, and international competitions, including WNBA games, WWE Live, and Volleyball Nations League Finals. Together, these facilities create an unmatched ecosystem for tournaments, championships, and fan experiences — making Arlington a true heavyweight in the sports tourism arena.



Hot Restaurants or Bars

Arlington's dining scene delivers bold flavors and crowd-pleasing favorites that make it easy for teams, fans, and event organizers to refuel between games. Hurtado Barbecue, a Texas Monthly favorite, brings together Central Texas BBQ and Mexican flavors with nationally acclaimed brisket and tacos. Smoke 'N Ash BBQ offers a unique fusion of Ethiopian and Texas barbecue, creating dining experience unlike anywhere else in the state. For Mediterranean cuisine, Prince Lebanese Grill has been a local institution for decades, serving classic dishes and warm hospitality. Rounding out the lineup, J. Gilligan's Bar & Grill is a must-visit Arlington

staple known for its Irish Nachos and lively, welcoming atmosphere. From casual bites to chef-driven concepts, Arlington's restaurants and bars offer something for every appetite.

Courtesy Visit McKinney



Courtesy Jonathan Thomas



MCKINNEY

McKinney stands out as a sporting-event destination thanks to its wide variety of high-quality facilities, its compact and easily navigable layout, and its strong city support for sports tourism. In May 2026, it will also serve as the host city for the 2026 S.P.O.R.T.S.-The Invitational conference, which brings together hand-picked destination partners and premier rights holders within the sports tourism industry.

Hotel rooms: 1,800

Hotel tax rate: 13 percent

Major facilities:

- McKinney ISD Stadium is a 12,000-seat stadium with a Community Center that seats 400
- The Courts Tennis & Pickleball Complex houses a 3,500-square-foot clubhouse, 22 outdoor lighted

courts, five indoor tennis/pickleball hybrid courts, four outdoor lighted pickleball courts, and four indoor pickleball courts

- The 65-acre McKinney Soccer Complex at Craig Ranch offers 12 lighted soccer fields

Contact: McKinney CVB, visitmckinney.com.

MESQUITE

With access to four major highways, Mesquite—a suburb of Dallas—is an ideal location for groups coming in. The city offers a variety of sports complexes.

Hotel rooms: 1,800

Hotel tax rate: 13 percent

Major facilities:

- Mesquite Arena is a 7,000-seat multipurpose arena

- Memorial High School Football Stadium has a seating capacity of 19,400

- E.H. Hanby Football Stadium is a 12,000-seat venue

- Eastfield Soccer Complex includes 18 fields

- Mesquite Girls Softball Complex has four lighted fields

Convention center: Mesquite Convention Center hosts sports such as martial arts, dance, and cornhole.

Contact: Mesquite CVB, cityofmesquite.com.

MIDLAND

Conveniently situated along Interstate 20, Midland stands equidistant between El Paso and Dallas. The city's state-of-the-art facilities will give athletes, coaches, and spectators a first-class experience.

Hotel rooms: 5,821

Hotel tax rate: 14 percent

Major facilities:

- Astound Broadband Stadium at Scharbauer Sports Complex includes one baseball field, one football/soccer field, and four multipurpose auxiliary fields
- COM Mabee Aquatics Center houses a 50-meter Olympic pool

- Bush Tennis Center boasts 19 full-size lighted courts

Convention center: Barbara & George H.W. Bush Convention Center hosts volleyball, boxing, and cheer and dance.

Contact: Visit Midland, visitmidland.com.

ODESSA

Odessa is a strong sporting event destination because it combines a national sports identity, proven venues, and easy logistics.

Hotel rooms: 4,718

Hotel tax rate: 15 percent

Major facilities:

- Ector County Coliseum accommodates football and hockey
- James Segrest Stadium offers a field for football and soccer
- The Basin Sports Complex includes 11 baseball/softball fields, eight adult soccer fields, 20 youth soccer fields, two T-ball fields, one basketball court, and one sand volleyball court
- Ratliff Stadium is a 24,000-seat football facility with two football/soccer fields, three softball fields, and track and field
- Odessa Sports Complex is expected to open in early 2026 and offer a 140,000-square-foot indoor facility, 10 multipurpose outdoor fields, and 12 baseball/softball fields

Convention center: Odessa Marriott Hotel & Conference Center can host cheerleading, volleyball, and basketball.

Contact: Odessa CVB, odessacvb.com.

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OAK VIEW GROUP

PEARLAND

Pearland, positioned south of Houston in the Gulf Coast region of Texas, is a perfect location for sporting tournaments with affordable hotels, restaurant options, shopping, and accessibility to area attractions.

Hotel rooms: 1,064

Hotel tax rate: 13 percent

Major facilities:

- Sports Complex at Shadow Creek Ranch features four lighted softball fields, four lighted baseball fields, two rugby fields, one cricket field, two multipurpose fields, and one Miracle League field
- Hickory Slough Sportsplex features six sports fields for soccer/lacrosse/field hockey
- Centennial Park includes six lighted softball fields, four lighted tennis courts, and a nine-hole disc golf course
- Pearland Recreation Center & Natatorium is a 63,000-square-foot facility with a competition pool

Contact: Pearland CVB, visitpearland.com.

PLANO

Plano offers parks and facilities that were strategically planned and built to accommodate both league play and large and small elite tournaments.



Plano regularly hosts lacrosse tournaments.

GIVE YOUR NEXT TOURNAMENT a Little Lagniappe



Beaumont is a winning choice for your next sports event! Imagine having a little something extra to celebrate your team's win. That's the lagniappe that Beaumont has to offer. We have a thriving, diverse culinary scene with everything from Cajun to Asian as well as standout venues to give your event real flavor. With 3,700 guest rooms and 200,000 square feet of versatile event space, Beaumont makes planning your sports event easy and delicious. Let us help you plan a flavorful victory!

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Courtesy Go Round Rock

Round Rock Sports Center hosts a wide variety of events, including Spikeball competitions.

Hotel rooms: 7,555

Hotel tax rate: 13 percent

Major facilities:

- Archgate Park has seven fast pitch softball fields and 11 soccer fields
- Carpenter Park includes 11 full-size soccer/lacrosse/football fields, four synthetic turf fields, two other soccer fields, and two baseball fields
- Cheyenne Park consists of six soccer fields and three softball fields
- Children's Health StarCenter includes two full-sized ice rinks
- Enfield Park has 10 baseball fields of various sizes

Convention center: Plano Event Center offers more than 86,400 square feet of flexible space and accommodates a variety of sports, from cheerleading and dance to martial arts and boxing.

Contact: Visit Plano, visitplano.com.

RICHARDSON

Richardson is within minutes of all of the amenities of the Dallas/Fort Worth area. Breckinridge Athletic Complex and Huffhines Athletic Complex are just two of the city's top-notch venues.

Hotel rooms: 2,400

Major facilities:

- Breckinridge Athletic Complex has four baseball fields and two multiuse complexes for sports like soccer, football, ultimate, and lacrosse
- Huffhines Athletic Complex includes four softball fields and two auxiliary fields, allowing for soccer,

flag football, or other field sports

- Huffhines Tennis Center boasts 10 courts
- Lookout Athletic Fields consists of four fields for soccer, football, lacrosse, or ultimate Frisbee

Contact: Richardson CVB, richardsontexas.org.

ROUND ROCK

Nestled within a three-hour drive of major Texas cities, Round Rock stands out as a top sporting event destination. It features premier facilities, including the Round Rock Sports Center and the Round Rock Multipurpose Complex, that offer year-round capabilities for both indoor and outdoor events.

Hotel rooms: 4,975

Hotel tax rate: 15 percent

Major facilities:

- Old Settlers Park includes 645 acres and an 18-hole disc golf course, seven soccer fields, a 12-court tennis complex, sand volleyball courts, and cross-country courses
- The Round Rock Multipurpose Complex includes four natural grass multipurpose fields, one natural grass championship field, four synthetic turf multipurpose fields, and one synthetic turf championship field
- Round Rock Sports Center boasts 118,750 square feet of indoor space
- Dell Diamond is a multipurpose indoor complex

Convention center: Kalahari Resorts & Conventions features a 200,000-square foot convention center and nearly 1,000 guest rooms.

Contact: Round Rock CVB, goroundrock.com.

SAN ANTONIO

San Antonio stands out as an exceptional destination for sporting events due to its unique blend of top-notch facilities, vibrant culture, and world-class attractions. Its venues are conveniently located near a wide array of hotels, providing an unmatched experience for fans, players, and event organizers alike.

Hotel rooms: 48,000

Hotel tax rate: 16.75 percent plus 1.25 percent TPID assessment fee at participating hotels

Major facilities:

- Boeing Center at Tech Port is an esports facility that offers 130,000 square feet of space and has a seating capacity of 3,000
- Frost Bank Center is a multipurpose venue that seats 18,581
- Alamodome is a 72,000-seat multipurpose venue
- Northside ISD Swim Center houses two 50-meter pools
- Toyota Field is an 8,296-seat soccer stadium
- South Texas Area Regional Soccer Complex is a 13-field soccer venue
- McFarlin Tennis Center includes 22 hard courts

Convention center: Located in the heart of downtown, the Henry B. González Convention Center offers 1.6 million square feet of space and hosts a variety of sporting events annually, including gymnastics, cheer and dance, volleyball, and basketball.

Contact: San Antonio Sports Commission, sanantoniosports.org.

SAN MARCOS

San Marcos is a great place for sports lovers and athletes of all backgrounds and activities, from quadball and water polo to kayaking, pickleball, and pretty much everything in between. Centrally located between Austin and San Antonio, San Marcos is a convenient location for hosting.

Hotel rooms: 2,414

Major facilities:

- Five-Mile Dam Soccer Complex has 10 fields
- Gary Softball complex includes eight lighted fields for youth and adult fast and slow pitch softball
- Ramon Lucio Baseball Park features four lighted youth baseball fields
- Rio Vista Tennis Complex consists of six lighted outdoor courts

Convention center: San Marcos Conference Center offers 78,800 square feet of flexible space and is attached to the 283-room Embassy Suites by Hilton.

Contact: San Marcos CVB, visitsanmarcos.com.

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Your next event can shine in a place where playoff games, national tournaments, and world-class athletes compete.

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SEGUIN

Seguin is centrally located in Texas, just a three-hour drive from major Texas cities.

Hotel rooms: 700

Major facilities:

- The Fields at Huber Ranch has five softball fields
- Tiger Volleyball Complex has four indoor volleyball courts and eight outdoor sand volleyball/soccer courts
- Smokey Joe Williams Field is a 750-seat baseball complex

Contact: Seguin CVB, visitseguin.com.

SHENANDOAH

Shenandoah is a great sports destination thanks to its location between three exits of I-45 and variety of facilities.

Hotel rooms: 1,402

Hotel tax rate: 13 percent

Major facilities:

- Woodforest Bank Stadium is a 10,000-seat artificial turf stadium for football and soccer
- The Conroe ISD Natatorium is a seven-lane 65-meter pool
- Scrap Yard Sports hosts baseball, softball, and lacrosse, among other sports on its 10 multiuse, all-turf fields

Contact: Shenandoah CVB, visitshenandoahtx.com.

TYLER

Tyler is centrally located between Dallas and Shreveport, Louisiana. The city offers a range of facilities to accommodate most any type of event.

Hotel rooms: 3,200

Major facilities:

- Christus Trinity Mother Francis Rose Stadium hosts football, soccer, and track and field
- Joanne Murphy Medlock Tennis Center includes eight lighted tennis courts
- Faulkner Park hosts baseball, softball, and tennis
- Cascades Tennis Center includes eight lighted outdoor courts and two indoor courts
- Pat Hartley Fields includes one turf field and one grass field for soccer and football
- Lindsey Park features 15 soccer fields

Contact: SportTyler, sporttyler.com.

VICTORIA

Victoria is an easy two-hour drive from Houston, San Antonio, Austin, and Corpus Christi. With favorable weather year-round and plenty of amenities, the family-friendly destination is an easy choice for hosting.

Hotel rooms: 1,800

Major facilities:

- The Victoria Youth Sports Complex features seven baseball fields and five softball fields
- Riverside Stadium is a 1,500-seat baseball facility
- Riverside Soccer Complex includes 13 soccer fields

The Waxahachie Sports Complex has hosted the DFW Youth World Baseball Classic.



- Memorial Stadium is a 10,729-seat football stadium

Contact: Explore Victoria, victoriatx.gov.

WACO

Waco is centrally located within the state of Texas, ideal for drawing attendance from the mega-cities of Dallas, Fort Worth, Houston, Austin, and San Antonio.

Hotel rooms: 5,000

Major facilities:

- Extraco Events Center offers seating for 6,000 and an 80,000-square-foot multipurpose hall
- Riverbend Park hosts baseball and softball
- Brazos River is ideal for swimming, rowing, and other watersports
- Baylor University offers facilities for football and basketball

Convention center: The Waco Convention Center hosts boxing, archery, powerlifting, and other indoor sports.

Contact: Waco CVB, destinationwaco.org.

WAXAHACHIE

Waxahachie is conveniently located on the south side of the Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex at the intersection of I-35E & Highway 287 at the "Crossroads of Texas." Being centrally located, Waxahachie is an easy destination for teams from all around the state of Texas to travel to.

Hotel rooms: 538

Hotel tax rate: 13 percent

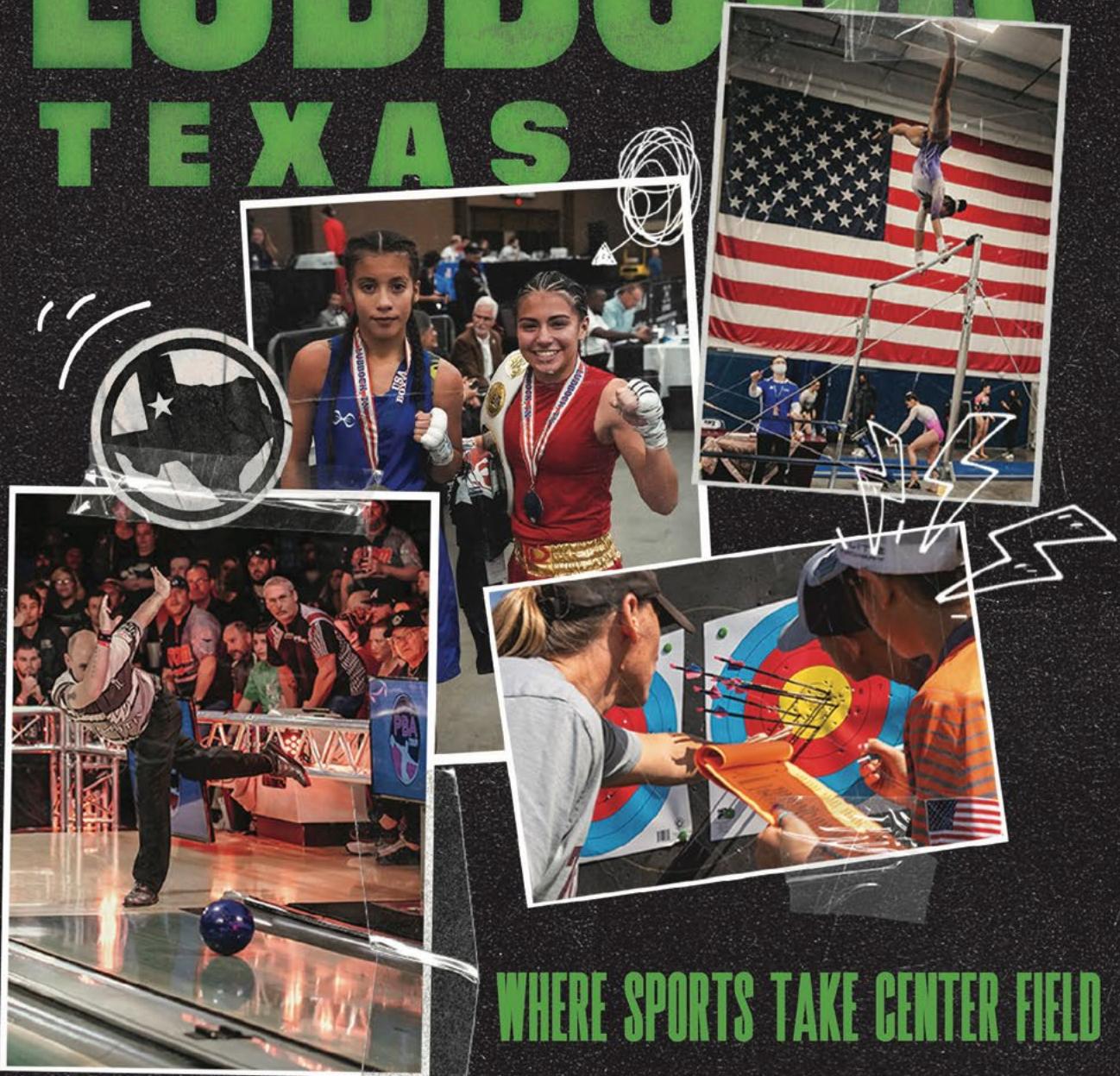
Major facility:

- Waxahachie Sports Complex is a 100-acre venue with fields for baseball, softball, football, flag football, soccer, and sand volleyball

Civic center: The Waxahachie Civic Center is a 60,000-square-foot facility equipped to host sports such as cheer and dance, gymnastics, wrestling, martial arts, weightlifting, boxing, fencing, and wrestling.

Contact: Waxahachie CVB, waxahachiecvb.com. ■

LUBBOCK TEXAS



WHERE SPORTS TAKE CENTER FIELD

There's a reason they call us the Hub City. From premier facilities and expert hospitality to a city that breathes sports year-round, Lubbock is the place where athletes come to compete and sports planners come to win. Easily accessible and ready to host, Lubbock offers everything you need for a championship-caliber event.

LUBBOCK
SPORTS



SPOTLIGHT ON: NEVADA

Nevada has earned its spot on the short list of premier sports destinations in the U.S., offering a rare mix of natural terrain and purpose-built facilities. From desert valleys and mountain backdrops ideal for endurance and outdoor events to state-of-the-art arenas and convention centers capable of hosting large-scale competitions, the Silver State delivers versatility at every level. "Nevada truly stands out from many other states thanks to its amount of public land. This allows those hosting sports more freedom and creativity than other states," shares Tracie Barnhouse, chief communications officer at Travel Nevada. "Fans and hosts alike will find adrenaline pumping experiences from watching their favorite sporting event to a whole other scale with Nevada's open landscape, while simultaneously enjoying some responsible recreation of their own." ■

Flat track racing in Carson City.►



Courtesy Visit Carson City



MUST SEE:

Nevada State Railroad Museum

Learn all about the role railroads played in shaping the Silver State at the Nevada State Railroad Museum in Carson City. Home to historic steam engines, vintage rail cars, and carefully preserved railroad artifacts, the museum provides an immersive experience that blends history with hands-on exploration. Guests can walk through classic rail equipment, learn how the railroad connected Nevada's communities, and gain a deeper appreciation for the engineering behind early transportation. ■

Courtesy Visit Carson City

NEVADA

CARSON CITY

Carson City is surrounded by stunning natural beauty, making it the perfect destination for sports enthusiasts, whether they're in the area to attend—or play—in a sporting event. Outside of the event itself, visitors can enjoy local area adventures thanks to the Sierra Nevada Mountains and Lake Tahoe.

Hotel rooms: 1,400

Hotel tax rate: 11 percent

Major facilities:

- The Bob Crowell Multi-Purpose Athletic Center is a 41,000-square-foot indoor athletic facility with four high school basketball courts, two collegiate-sized basketball courts, two futsal courts, four volleyball courts, and 12 pickleball courts
- Pete Livermore Sports Complex includes four youth softball fields, 10 soccer fields, and a BMX track
- Mills Park is a 51-acre regional park with skate park and 14 pickleball courts

• John D. Winters Centennial Park Complex is a 59-acre sports facility with seven softball fields, one soccer field, and eight tennis courts

Contact: Visit Carson City, visitcarsoncity.com.

LAKE TAHOE

Lake Tahoe is North America's largest alpine lake. The area blends natural beauty with year-round adventure, offering stunning scenery, endless outdoor activities, and versatile venues for most sports.

Hotel rooms: 10,000 on the South Shore of Lake Tahoe, with more than 3,000 on the Nevada side

Hotel tax rate: 14 percent plus \$5 per room, per night tourism surcharge

Major facility:

- Tahoe Blue Event Center is a multipurpose venue with an NHL regulation-sized ice rink, NBA regulation-sized basketball court that can also be used as a volleyball court, and 27,000 square feet of open floor space

Contact: Visit Lake Tahoe, visitlaketahoe.com.



Play at the Top of Your Game on Lake Tahoe's South Shore



Championships are earned here. From NCAA tip-offs to pro ice, South Lake Tahoe pairs elite venues and smart logistics with an unforgettable alpine setting where athletes rise, fans rally, and events make history at 6,224 feet above sea level.



South Lake Tahoe isn't new to the spotlight. Its scorecard is filled with high-profile competition and peak-level performance.

The destination has hosted headline-making events, including NCAA women's basketball matchups, professional boxing cards, Xtreme International Ice Racing, national volleyball tournaments, and the first-ever Grand Slam of Curling event held in the United States. It's also home to professional hockey, with the Tahoe Knight Monsters calling the region home.

At the center of it all is the Tahoe Blue Event Center, a modern, multi-sport venue built for ice hockey, basketball, volleyball, cheer, gymnastics, and more. Surrounding the venue, teams and fans enjoy walkable access to hotels, dining, nightlife, and lakeside recovery time that keeps schedules efficient and experiences elevated.



HOT TOPICS: FAMILY FUN FOR YOUTH SPORTS

In South Lake Tahoe, youth sports weekends come with built-in adventure and no logistical headaches. Between games, families dive into lake life with paddleboarding, kayaking, boat rentals, and jet skis during warmer months, all set against Tahoe's signature blue. Winter events trade water time for powder days, snow play, and easy access to Heavenly Ski Resort, making cold-weather tournaments just as appealing. Beyond the activities, Tahoe makes tournament travel easier. Walkable hotels, free micro-transit, and clustered venues reduce time spent in cars and keep schedules running smoothly. Dining, entertainment, and indoor attractions give parents and siblings plenty to do between games, while athletes enjoy space to recharge outdoors. The result? Less downtime stress, more quality time, and tournaments that feel like a reward, not a grind. It's youth sports with breathing room, fresh air, and experiences families actually look forward to returning for.



GET TO KNOW:

Stuart Maas
Senior Director of Marketing & Business Development
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visitlaketahoe.com/sports

A lifelong sports enthusiast, Stuart spends his weekends on the mountains and the water, and is among the few who can claim a 'Tahoe Quadfecta' to have golfed, kayaked, biked, and skied all in a single spring day in Tahoe.

Courtesy Visit Reno/Tahoe



Courtesy Negative



LAS VEGAS

Las Vegas stands out as one of the world's most dynamic entertainment and hospitality destinations, with a year-round schedule of marquee sporting events that can't be found elsewhere.

Hotel rooms: 150,000

Major facilities:

- Allegiant Stadium is a 1.8-million-square-foot stadium with 65,000 seats
- T-Mobile Arena is a 20,000-seat multipurpose indoor venue
- Michelob ULTRA Arena is a 12,000-seat sports complex
- Las Vegas Ball Park has a capacity of 8,196

Convention center: The newly renovated Las Vegas Convention Center boasts 2.6 million square feet of dedicated exhibit space and is within a short distance of the city's 150,000 hotel rooms.

Contact: Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority, LVCVA.com.

MESQUITE

Mesquite is a resort destination nestled in the picturesque Virgin River Valley surrounded by distant mountain ranges and flat top mesas. Visitors can choose from several fabulous championship golf courses, explore nearby national and state parks, or lounge by a sparkling pool.

Hotel rooms: 1,647

Major facilities:

- Hunter Sports Park features three lighted softball fields
- Old Mill Pickleball Courts offers 14 courts
- Pioneer Park includes three lighted fields for baseball and softball
- Mesquite Sports & Events Complex has five soccer fields
- Mesquite Recreation Center offers a multipurpose natural grass field, two gyms, two racquetball courts and a pool.

Contact: Mesquite CVB, visitmesquite.com.

RENO

Situated between the Sierra Nevada mountains and desert landscapes, Reno Tahoe offers year-round opportunities for outdoor sports, from skiing and snowboarding in winter to biking and water sports in warmer months, along with top-tier facilities.

Hotel rooms: 15,834

Hotel tax rate: ranges from 13 to 13.5 percent, depending on district; hotel resort fees vary

Major facilities:

- Located in the city of Sparks, Golden Eagle Regional Park has six softball fields, four baseball fields, stadium-sized football/soccer field, four volleyball courts, two bocce ball Courts, two youth baseball/softball fields, and the largest single installation artificial turf project in North America at 1.4 million square feet
- Reno Events Center is a 7,000-seat multipurpose arena
- North Valleys Regional Park includes four soccer fields, two volleyball courts, basketball courts, and four baseball fields
- Rancho San Rafael Regional Park is a cross-country cycling and running venue, and home to the Great Reno Balloon Race
- Reno Sports Complex consists of four adult softball fields
- Reno Tennis Center houses 22 courts and 16 pickleball courts

Convention center: The Reno-Sparks Convention Center hosts a wide variety of sporting events, including volleyball, basketball, track, martial arts, wrestling, cheerleading, and more.

Contact: Reno-Sparks CVA, visitrenoatahao.com. ■

SPOTLIGHT ON: WEST VIRGINIA

What sets West Virginia apart is the experience it creates. Athletes and spectators are treated to a setting that feels both competitive and refreshing, with natural landscapes enhancing everything from tournaments to championships. Combined with easy drive-in and communities that embrace visiting teams and fans, West Virginia delivers a distinctive, high-value environment for sports events looking to stand out. "West Virginia's central location puts it within a day's drive of much of the country, which makes traveling here for tournaments and competitions incredibly convenient," says West Virginia tourism secretary Chelsea Ruby. "Across our scenic mountain towns, visitors find welcoming communities, wide-open spaces and standout outdoor recreation. Our whitewater, trail systems, ski areas and fall football traditions show just how much there is to explore here, giving sports travelers even more reasons to choose West Virginia for their events." ■

Shawnee Sports Complex in Charleston has six turf and 11 grass fields.►



Courtesy Charleston WV CVB

WEST VIRGINIA



MUST SEE:

Blenko Glass Company

Blenko Glass Company in Huntington is an experience rooted in more than 100 years of craftsmanship. As one of the nation's oldest continuously operating hand-blown glass factories, Blenko allows guests to watch artisans shape molten glass into colorful, one-of-a-kind pieces right on the factory floor. Beyond the live demonstrations, the site provides a deeper look at the region's artistic heritage and creative spirit, making it an engaging stop for visitors looking to explore something uniquely local. ■

Courtesy Blenko Glass Company

BARBOURSVILLE

Barboursville is located near Huntington in western West Virginia. The area houses a 16-field soccer complex and a five-diamond baseball complex.

Hotel rooms: 409

Major facilities:

- Barboursville Park houses soccer fields, three baseball fields, tennis courts, basketball courts, volleyball courts and Little League baseball fields
- Barboursville Soccer Complex offers 15 fields, including three full-size lighted turf fields

Contact: Barboursville CVB, discoverbarboursville.com.

BRIDGEPORT

Bridgeport is situated in North Central West Virginia, along the I-79 corridor and less than an hour from Morgantown.

Hotel rooms: 1,150

Major facility:

- Bridge Sports Complex features Citynet Center, which houses two indoor pools, an indoor turf, pickleball courts, and basketball courts, as well as acres of baseball and soccer fields

Contact: Greater Bridgeport CVB, greater-bridgeport.com.

CHARLESTON

Charleston is within a day's drive of 70 percent of the U.S. population and is easily accessed by three interstates: I-64, I-77, and I-79. In addition to its convenient drive-to location, Charleston is served by Yeager Airport, the largest commercial airport in West Virginia.

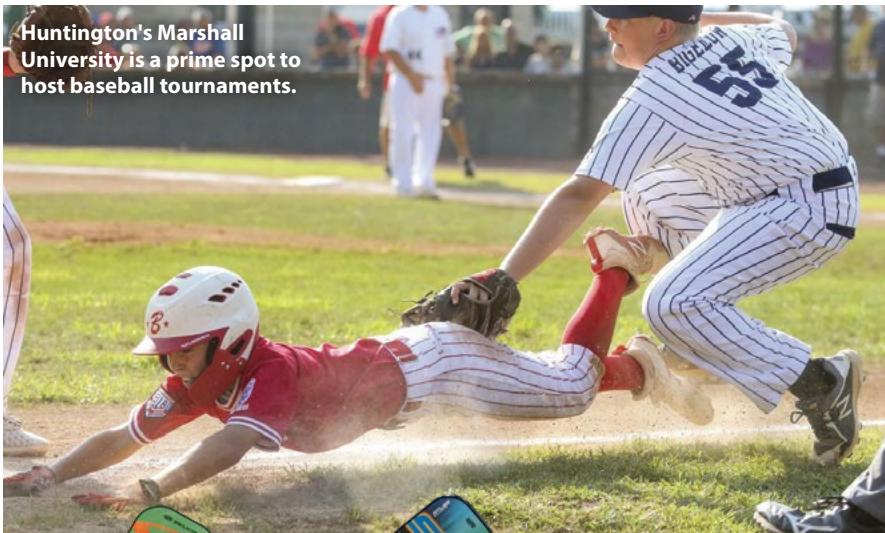
Hotel rooms: 2,000

Hotel tax rate: 12 percent

Major facilities:

- Shawnee Sports Complex features six turf and 11 grass rectangular fields for soccer, lacrosse, football, and rugby, as well as four turf baseball fields
- GoMart Ballpark is a minor league ballpark
- Little Creek Park has basketball and tennis courts plus an athletic complex with turf and natural baseball, softball, football, and soccer fields
- University of Charleston Stadium at Laidley Field is an 18,500-capacity venue with field and track

Convention center: The Charleston Coliseum & Convention Center seats 13,500 and regularly hosts



Courtesy Huntington Area CVB



sporting events, including volleyball, cheer, basketball, and gymnastics.

Contact: Charleston West Virginia CVB, charlestonwv.com.

HUNTINGTON

Conveniently located on I-64, Huntington is within six hours of over half the U.S. population. Airport access is also available from the Huntington Tri-State Airport—just 10 minutes from downtown.

Hotel rooms: 1,400

Hotel tax rate: 13 percent

Major facilities:

- Ritter Park Tennis Complex has nine outdoor courts and eight lighted pickleball courts
- The Huntington YMCA features seven outdoor multipurpose fields and four gyms
- Marshall University offers a multipurpose arena, field and track, soccer complex, tennis center, natatorium, and baseball field

- Ona Speedway houses a 7/16-mile oval track and is the only asphalt track in the state

Convention center: Marshall Health Network Arena & Convention Center is an 86,000-square-foot venue with seating for 8,000. It hosts sports including wrestling and volleyball.

Contact: Huntington Area CVB, visithuntingtonwv.org.

MORGANTOWN

Morgantown sits in the heart of north-central West Virginia, nestled within the seven-county tourism region known as Mountaineer Country. This lively university city blends small-town warmth with big-city energy, offering a distinctive culture, exhilarating outdoor adventures, and endless miles of rolling scenic beauty.

Hotel rooms: 2,800

Hotel tax rate: 13 percent

Major Facilities:

- Mylan Park features 16-plus different indoor and outdoor facilities comprising over 60 acres of athletic field space, six outdoor pickleball courts, and more than 180,000 square feet of indoor space, including a state-of-the-art aquatic center featuring a 50-meter Olympic pool and diving well
- Hope Gas Ice Pavilion at Mylan Park is a 48,000-square-foot ice rink facility
- The Kendrick Family Ballpark at the Monongalia County Baseball Complex is a 2,500-seat ballpark
- The Bridge Sports Complex includes nearly 160,000 square feet of space, which includes an indoor turf field, six multisport courts, a pool, and outdoor baseball fields

Convention centers: The newly renovated 23,000-square-foot Morgantown Event Center, combined with the attached 207-room hotel, offers a total of 73,449 square feet of event space. Hazel & J.W. Ruby Community Center is a 58,000-square-foot flexible space that can host wrestling, gymnastics, cheer, and dance. Attached to the community center is a new sports complex that offers five multipurpose courts for basketball, volleyball, pickleball, and futsal.

Contact: Visit Mountaineer Country, visitmountaineercountry.com.

SUMMERSVILLE

Summersville is centrally located within the state and offers a variety of dining and lodging options.

Hotel rooms: 500

Hotel tax rate: 13 percent

Major facility:

- Summersville Arena & Conference Center houses a 24,000-square-foot arena that can seat 2,400 fans in bleacher seats for wrestling, basketball, archery, and more

Contact: Summersville CVB, summersvillecvb.com. ■

SPOTLIGHT ON: WYOMING

Wyoming offers a sports destination unlike any other, where wide-open spaces and dramatic landscapes elevate the competitive experience. From rugged mountain ranges and high-plains terrain to expansive trails and open water, the Cowboy State is tailor-made for endurance, outdoor, and adventure-based events. "Wyoming is a premier sports destination for people of all ages and interests, but especially for those who enjoy the spirit of the American West," says Hailey Mach, public relations manager for Wyoming Office of Tourism. ■

The WYO Sports Ranch in Casper. ►



Courtesy Wyo Sports Ranch

WYOMING

CAMPBELL COUNTY

Located in the northern part of the state, Campbell County features great venues for sporting events, including Gillette's Cam-Plex Multi Event Facilities, Energy Capital Sports Complex and Bicentennial Park.

Hotel rooms: 2,200

Major facilities:

- Campbell County Recreation Center is a 189,000-square-foot venue with three basketball courts, a 200-meter indoor track, five tennis courts, and more
- Energy Capital Sports Complex features four baseball/softball fields



MUST SEE:

National Historic Trails Interpretive Center

Explore the stories that helped shape the American West at the National Historic Trails Interpretive Center in Casper. With free admission and hands-on exhibits, the center brings the nation's historic trails to life through interactive displays, immersive storytelling, and sweeping views of the surrounding landscape. ■

Courtesy Visit Casper

- Bicentennial Park boasts 10 natural turf soccer fields, six softball fields, two baseball fields, and eight tennis courts

Convention center: Cam-Plex Multi Event Center boasts more than 1000 acres of possibilities with 144,000 square feet of indoor event space and hosts everything from horse racing and indoor soccer to basketball and hockey.

Contact: Campbell County CVB, visitgillettewright.com.

CASPER

Casper is no stranger to state, regional and national sporting events. The city regularly hosts state championships and has hosted the College National Finals Rodeo each June for over 25 years.

Hotel rooms: 2,300

Hotel tax rate: 12 percent

Major facilities:

- WYO Sports Ranch is a 131,000-square-foot indoor sports complex housing 10 basketball courts, 20 volleyball courts, and a permanent indoor multiuse turf multipurpose facility
- Ford Wyoming Center is a 28,000-square-foot multipurpose facility
- Casper Mountain Biathlon Club is a 40-acre venue that hosts biathlons, cross-country skiing, running, and mountain biking events
- Central Wyoming Fair and Rodeo has a variety of options, including a grandstand and outdoor arena
- Casper Pickleball and Sports Complex has eight courts

Contact: Casper Sports Alliance, www.visitcasper.com.

CHEYENNE

From the Frontier Days Arena at Frontier Park to the Event Center at Archer, Cheyenne can offer multiple

venues for all types of sporting events.

Hotel rooms: 2,800

Hotel tax rate: 13 percent

Major facilities:

- Frontier Days Arena typically hosts rodeos
- Rodeo Arena at Archer hosts rodeos
- Event Center at Archer is a multiuse facility capable of hosting a variety of indoor sports
- Powers Field and Cheyenne Junior Baseball Complex host softball, Little League Baseball and Legion Baseball tournaments

Contact: Visit Cheyenne, cheyenne.org.

LARAMIE

There is no shortage of activity to be found in Laramie for sport and recreation enthusiasts. Being Wyoming's one and only college town, Laramie has cemented itself as a statewide destination for sporting events at every level.

Hotel rooms: 1,560

Major facilities:

- UW Tennis Complex consists of four indoor courts
- Jonah Field at War Memorial Stadium is a 30,000-seat football stadium
- Laramie Ice and Events Center is a 2,000-square-foot facility
- Madrid Soccer Field has a 700-seat soccer field and an adjacent 400-meter, eight-lane track
- Arena Auditorium features 200,000 square feet and has the largest indoor seating capacity in the state at 11,612.
- UniWyo Sports Complex is a 5,000-square-foot facility

Contact: Visit Laramie, visitlaramie.org. ■

Bigstock



Lighting the first torch at the start of the 2020 Olympic Torch Relay.

The Olympic flame

BY BOB SEXTON

While there is no shortage of symbols associated with the Olympic Games, likely none captures the spirit of peaceful competition more than the Olympic flame. Highlighting the ideals of “*Citius, Altius, Fortius*” (Faster, Higher, Stronger), the flame links the modern Games with the ancient Games. And as has been the case with all Winter Games since Innsbruck 1964 (and the Summer Games since Berlin 1936), the Olympic flame burning in Milan and Cortina this month was first lit in front of the ruins of the Temple of Hera in Olympia, Greece. That’s where the Olympic flame is ignited by focusing sunlight with a parabolic mirror. This traditional method is the only way the flame can be lit, as it preserves the purity of the sun’s rays. Once ignited, the flame is placed in an urn and transported to the ancient stadium in Athens, where the high priestess in charge of the ceremony passes it to the first runner in the Olympic Torch Relay. This process takes place several months before the Games

open to ensure the flame can be relayed to the host city in time.

The first ancient Olympic Games are believed to have been held in Olympia in 776 BC. A fire burned throughout the ancient Games, linked to the myth of Prometheus (famous for stealing fire from the gods to give to mortals). The ancient games were eventually banned by the Romans in 393 AD. However, when the Olympics were revived in France in 1896, fire wasn’t part of the ceremonies. It wasn’t until the 1928 Amsterdam Games that the flame returned, and the torch relay began at the 1936 Berlin Games. For the Milan-Cortina Games this month, the flame was originally lit on November 26 last year and subsequently traveled 63 days across Italy, passing through 60 cities and covering 12,000 kilometers across all 110 provinces of the country, before arriving at the opening ceremony on February 6. It was carried by 10,001 torchbearers, each playing an important role: announcing the Olympic Games and conveying a message of peace and friendship to the communities along its route. ■

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