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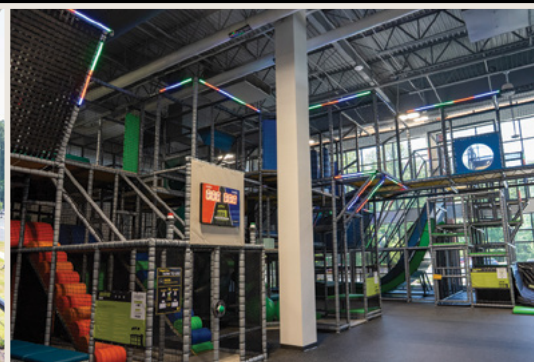
Never too late:
Stories of inspiring
senior athletes

THE FUTURE OF PICKLEBALL

CREATING A YOUTH DEVELOPMENT PIPELINE

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EDITOR'S PLAY•BY•PLAY

Keep on moving

About a month ago, I was lying on a physio table with acupuncture needles in my shoulder when I remembered a meme a friend had shared on Facebook: "I'm actually in my 50s. My mind thinks I'm 25, my body thinks I'm 80, and my playlist thinks it's the 90s."

My musical taste runs a little deeper on either side of that decade, but I certainly related to the rest of the sentiment. It's easy to say that age is just a number, but when age-related aches, pains, or injuries prevent you from participating in a sport or activity you love, it's hard not to feel older than you are.

While I'm nowhere near as fit as I'd like to be, I do try to stay active, partly so I can keep up with my kids and partly to stave off some of the natural effects of aging. I was on that table trying to regain the full range of motion in my shoulder, which has been causing me some grief lately. As my physiotherapist ran a low-voltage current through the needles—an attempt to reset my nervous system, I think—I found myself wondering, as the Talking Heads sang in their song *Once in a Lifetime*, "Well, how did I get here?"

Shoulder bursitis is the short answer. Not being active enough is the longer one.

I'm a big believer in the phrase "use it or lose it" when it comes to physical health. That's why I'm so impressed by the athletes contributor Keith Loria profiled in his article on the National Senior Games (see "Amazing stories" on page six). Held every two years since 1987, the games are a biennial, Olympic-style multisport event that promotes the benefits of competitive sports, physical fitness, and active aging for adults over 50. Whether or not you're a member of the over-50 club, I suspect you'll find their stories inspiring.

Speaking of inspiration, I came away energized after talking to four veteran charity golf tournament organizers for my article, "Driving results," on page 24. It was fascinating to hear the backstories behind their events, gather practical planning tips and strategies, and learn about the impact their fundraising efforts have in their communities.

Whether it's senior athletes proving that age doesn't have to define what's possible, charity tournament organizers using golf to support important causes, or the collective effort to create a youth development pipeline in pickleball, the stories in this issue share a common thread: the power of sports to improve lives ■



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LINEUP

Volume 24 • Number 7 • July 2026

On The Cover:

University of North Carolina's Faith Ilgner playing in a mixed doubles match against Liberty at the 2026 College Pickleball Tour Nationals in Peachtree Corners, Georgia.

Courtesy DUPR

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Successful charity golf tournaments create memorable experiences while raising money for important causes

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Powerlifting is one of more than 25 sports that athletes can compete in at the National Senior Games.

AMAZING STORIES

How the National Senior Games uses athlete profiles to inspire others and increase participation

BY KEITH LORIA

The athletes competing in the National Senior Games are often remarkable long before they ever step onto a track, court, or field. For instance, some are recovering from devastating injuries while others are discovering sports later in life after careers, family obligations or health setbacks delayed any chances for athletic feats. Still, many are simply looking for community, purpose, and a reason to stay active.

Together, their stories have become one of the most powerful tools used by the National Senior Games Association to inspire participation and challenge assumptions about aging.

Hosted every two years, the National Senior Games brings together thousands of athletes ages 50 and older to compete in more than 25 sports, making it one of the largest multisport events in the world for older adults. While the competition itself remains the centerpiece, storytelling has become an increasingly important part of the organization's communications strategy.

Through its long-running "Athlete of the Month" series and expanding digital and video storytelling efforts, the National Senior Games Association highlights competitors whose experiences go far beyond medals and podium finishes. The stories often focus on resilience, recovery, reinvention, and lifelong curiosity, themes the organization believes can motivate others to become active no matter their age.

"Storytelling is really core to our communications strategy," says Mary Johns, director of communications for the National Senior Games Association. "The athletes are what make the National Senior Games community so special, and they absolutely deserve to be celebrated."



Willie Spruill, in baseball cap, on the run at the 2025 National Senior Games in Des Moines, Iowa.

The hope is that those who see and read these stories see themselves in the athletes featured. "There is no better way to encourage people to get active than hearing the stories of people who are living proof of how sports and movement can transform lives," Johns says.

The profiles are intentionally diverse. Some feature elite competitors breaking records in their 80s and 90s, while others spotlight athletes who discovered sports after retirement or overcame serious personal challenges. The common thread is showing that active aging can look different for everyone.

"We can talk all day about the facts and statistics around healthy aging," Johns says. "But reading a story about someone who overcame depression through running or someone who discovered sports later in life, that's what people connect with emotionally."

The athlete stories also help combat stereotypes surrounding aging. "These stories are counter-narratives to the

ageism we unfortunately see in society," Johns says. "They show that life doesn't just dry up as you get older."

Social media engagement, athlete nominations, and participant feedback all suggest the storytelling initiative is resonating. Johns notes athletes frequently tell the organization they were inspired to try a sport or enter the Games after reading about someone else's experience. The stories also reinforce one of the organization's biggest messages: it is never too late to begin. Here are four competitors whose backgrounds are wildly different but whose experiences reflect the same spirit of perseverance and lifelong growth.

Willie Spruill

At one point, Willie Spruill could barely walk. The 67-year-old North Carolina athlete spent years dealing with chronic pain caused by injuries sustained during his Army service as a paratrooper. His health struggles eventually became

Courtesy National Senior Games/Britt Huckabay

National Senior Games/Britt Huckabay



Ann Hegstrom, in USA flag socks, took home the gold medal in her division of the 1,500-meter power walk event at the 2022 National Senior Games.

Courtesy Ohio Senior Olympics



Leurene Hildenbrand, on right, has participated in more than 17 sports.

overwhelming. He dealt with debilitating physical pain, migraines, depression, and reduced mobility. By 2017, he needed a cane to walk and says he had reached an emotional breaking point.

Sports had always been central to Spruill's identity. Growing up, he played baseball and football before joining the Army because he couldn't afford college tuition. Later, while serving in the military, he unexpectedly discovered track and field after an injury ended his baseball career.

"I fell in love with it," Spruill says of running. Years later, after his health deteriorated, he says he felt lost physically and emotionally.

Everything changed during a visit to a medical facility at Fort Bragg when he spotted information about the North Carolina Senior Games. Curious, he decided to start walking on a track again. Within weeks, he was running.

"It was so exciting that I was able to run again," Spruill says. He entered the Senior Games shortly afterward and won all three of his events. The experience reignited not only his competitive drive, but also his sense of purpose.

Today, Spruill competes in masters track and field events nearly every weekend, traveling across the country

and internationally to race. More important than the medals, however, has been the sense of belonging he found through the Senior Games community.

“We learn from each other, and it becomes a new family,” Spruill says. “Being active and in sports and track and field has really blessed me.”

Leurene Hildenbrand

Most athletes eventually settle into the sports they know best, but Leurene Hildenbrand prefers to keep learning. The Hall of Fame Senior Olympian and retired research scientist grew up fascinated by machinery, engineering, and problem-solving while helping her father repair equipment on the family farm. That curiosity eventually led her into scientific research during a time when very few women worked in those fields.

“When I was hired in the research department of Goodyear in the ’50s, there were 500 scientists employed,



NSG athlete stories help combat stereotypes surrounding aging.

Courtesy National Senior Games/John Beale

2026

SUNDAY

C, C2, D, D2

MONDAY

D & 50+

TUESDAY

A/B & C2

WEDNESDAY

60+

MNWAHL FALL REGISTRATION

MINNESOTA WILD



ADULT HOCKEY LEAGUE



Courtesy Rajeev Trehan

A lifelong athlete, Rajeev Trehan has participated in nearly every National Senior Games since 2007.



and I was the fifth woman,” Hildenbrand says. “You had to be better than the men to be equal.”

Her competitive side eventually expanded into sports after she and her husband became involved in table tennis. Once she discovered the Senior Games movement, Hildenbrand quickly embraced the opportunity to try new events and challenge herself physically in retirement.

Today, she has participated in more than 17 sports. That includes cycling, a sport she took up later in life after spending two years researching bike technology and training nearly every day before winning a silver medal in competition.

“I have always loved learning new things, and I have always loved a challenge,” Hildenbrand says. She believes many older adults underestimate their own capabilities and hopes her story encourages others to explore new experiences. “If you never take the opportunity, you will never know what you can do,” she says. “You will never know how much enjoyment learning new experiences can be.” Hildenbrand notes the Senior Games have given her far more than the opportunity to compete. “It has provided me with unexpected enjoyment, good health, many wonderful learning experiences, and lasting friendships,” she says.

Ann Hegstrom

Ann Hegstrom does not measure success strictly through medals. The longtime Iowa runner says simply being able to continue moving is reward enough.

Hegstrom first discovered running in middle school track before stepping away from the sport for many years while building a career as a nurse and later working at the Iowa Braille School.

At age 45, she began casually participating in charity 5K races alongside her late husband Gary, who competed using a power wheelchair. After his passing, Hegstrom dedicated her physical activity to his memory and gradually became more competitive in her 50s.

She says part of that motivation came from wanting to show her students that people should not be afraid to try something new later in life.

Eventually, she discovered both the Iowa Senior Games and the National Senior Games.

“It’s the most inspirational thing you can possibly do,” Hegstrom says of attending her first National Senior Games.

Her story includes additional challenges. Shortly before her first National Senior Games appearance in 2019, Hegstrom was diagnosed with breast cancer but still chose to compete.

Today, she still walks between eight and 10 miles every day and continues participating in races and track events,

and not just for exercise. “There’s this whole social aspect of it that I enjoy,” Hegstrom says. She has also become known for colorful outfits and twin braids that fellow athletes remember years later. “If you can’t win, you have to look good,” she says.

Despite injuries and surgeries over the years, Hegstrom remains grateful for one thing above all else. “It’s the fact that I can still run,” she says.

Dr. Rajeev Trehan

Badminton has shaped Dr. Rajeev Trehan’s life for nearly six decades. The 70-year-old physician and lifelong athlete grew up in India playing racket sports every afternoon after school before eventually immigrating to the United States and building a distinguished career in internal medicine, neurology, and psychiatry.

Today, Trehan still plays badminton four times a week while also serving as a national classifier for para badminton and as a medical leader for USA Badminton. His involvement with the sport has included work at multiple Olympic Games as both an official and a physician.

Although badminton remains relatively niche in the United States, Trehan believes it may be one of the most physically and mentally demanding racket sports in the world.

“Badminton is the only racket sport that does not have a ball,” Trehan says. “The fastest object of any racket sport is the shuttlecock.” His medical background has only deepened his appreciation for the sport’s complexity.

“This is a whole body and mind kind of activity,” Trehan says. “I don’t know that there could be anything better.” Trehan began competing in the National Senior Games shortly after turning 50 and has participated in nearly every Games since 2007.

Even after decades in medicine and international badminton leadership, he says his love for the sport still comes back to the same simple joy he felt as a child. Says Trehan: “While I’m doing all of these things professionally and with organized badminton, I’m basically just a player who loves the sport.” ■

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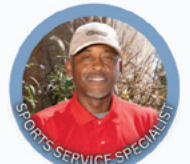
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FRESH FACILITIES

NEW MULTIUSE SPORTS COMPLEXES THAT ARE RAISING THE BAR FOR FLEXIBILITY, CAPACITY, AND ATHLETE EXPERIENCE

BY HELEN JACOB

As demand for youth, amateur, and multisport events continues to grow, communities are investing in facilities designed to host more sports, more participants, and more spectators. The newest generation of venues goes beyond fields and courts, incorporating athlete recovery, flexible event space, family amenities, and weather-resistant infrastructure. Whether planners are seeking tournament-ready diamonds, year-round indoor competition space, or multisport campuses that support large-scale events, these recently opened and renovated facilities offer new opportunities to elevate the participant experience while streamlining event operations.



SPOWLS HORIZON SPORTS PARK

Pinellas Park, Fla. Opened: March 1, 2026

Spowls Horizon Sports Park offers a family-friendly destination featuring six baseball and softball fields inspired by Florida's spring training venues. The complex also includes a multipurpose field for soccer, lacrosse, and flag football, as well as an outdoor ball hockey rink. A community playground provides space for children to stay active, while youth clinics offer structured training with small groups and personalized coaching. There's also an on-site Capelli Sport Pro Shop that supplies equipment and apparel. The facility regularly hosts community events and tournaments, drawing families and athletes from across the region.

Fast Facts:

- Six baseball/softball fields modeled after spring training parks
- Multipurpose field for soccer, lacrosse, and flag football
- Outdoor ball hockey rink
- Community playground for children
- On-site pro shop with sports gear and apparel
- Youth clinics (ages eight–12) with low coach-to-player ratios
- Ample parking, including accessible and team areas

Planner Perk: The Tiki Hut & Plaza offers space for people to gather in the park, including a Tiki bar, concessions, ample seating, and games.

More info: horizonsportspark.com



POP LLOYD STADIUM

Atlantic City, N.J. (Re)opened: April 29, 2025

Following a \$5.6 million transformation, Pop Lloyd Stadium has been reimagined as a modern multipurpose venue capable of hosting a wide range of youth, scholastic, and community sporting events. The historic Atlantic City facility now features an all-weather synthetic turf field designed to accommodate baseball, softball, T-ball, soccer, lacrosse, field hockey, and flag football, giving event organizers flexibility to host multiple sports throughout the year. Upgrades include new dugouts, renovated locker rooms, enhanced spectator amenities, and improved accessibility. The venue also features modern event infrastructure, including LED lighting, a digital scoreboard, and an upgraded sound system, making it well-suited for tournaments, league play, and community events. With durable playing surfaces, streamlined operations, and the ability to quickly transition between sports, Pop Lloyd Stadium provides planners with a versatile venue capable of supporting everything from local championships to regional competitions.

Fast Facts:

- \$5.6 million renovation completed in 2025
- Multipurpose synthetic turf field
- Configurations for baseball, softball, T-ball, soccer, lacrosse, field hockey, and flag football
- New dugouts and renovated locker rooms
- ADA-compliant spectator access
- New bleachers with improved sightlines
- LED sports lighting for evening events
- Digital scoreboard and upgraded sound system
- Modernized restrooms and security features

Planner Perk: The flexible turf layout and upgraded event infrastructure allow organizers to host multiple sports and back-to-back competitions with minimal turnaround time between events.

More info: visitatlanticcity.com/listing/pop-lloyd-stadium/4863/

Courtesy Philadelphia Union



WSFS BANK SPORTSPLEX

Chester, Pa. Opened: July 17, 2025

Developed through a partnership between the Philadelphia Union and WSFS Bank, WSFS Bank Sportsplex brings a professional-caliber training and event environment to a 32-acre campus along the Delaware River. Positioned next to Subaru Park, the facility was designed to support both player development and large-scale amateur competition, giving event planners a versatile venue that blends elite infrastructure with community access. The complex includes a mix of outdoor grass and turf fields alongside a climate-controlled indoor fieldhouse that enables year-round programming. Inside, athletes and teams have access to performance training space, recovery services, locker rooms, and flexible event areas suited for meetings, clinics, and team functions. The venue also incorporates sport science and innovation through its Striker Lab, which uses technology to analyze and improve player technique. With its combination of indoor and outdoor venues and integrated athlete services, the Sportsplex is built to support continuous play, training, and tournament operations in all conditions.

Fast Facts:

- 32-acre multisport campus
- Six outdoor fields (grass and turf mix)
- Additional small-sided outdoor field
- Indoor climate-controlled turf field
- Multisport courts for basketball, volleyball, and futsal
- Performance and training center with strength and speed development space
- Six locker rooms and athlete support areas
- On-site recovery and physical therapy services
- Event and meeting space for programming and gatherings
- Striker Lab performance analysis technology

Planner Perk: Year-round reliability is the key advantage here—between the indoor fieldhouse and integrated performance, recovery, and event spaces, planners can run tournaments, training blocks, and ancillary programming without interruption from weather or scheduling gaps.

More info: wsfsbanksportsplex.com

CHILDREN'S HEALTH STARCENTER MULTISPORT

Northlake, Texas Opened: March 31, 2026

The Children's Health StarCenter Multisport Northlake expands the Dallas Stars' growing network of community sports facilities with a 225,000-square-foot venue designed to accommodate a wide range of athletic events. Opened in 2026 through a public-private partnership between the Dallas Stars and the Town of Northlake, the complex combines ice and court sports under one roof, creating a flexible setting for tournaments, leagues, and special events. Year-round programming includes hockey, basketball, volleyball, pickleball, and public skating, helping attract athletes and families from across the Dallas-Fort Worth region. The facility's versatile design allows organizers to host multiple competitions simultaneously, while dedicated team spaces support training, club operations, and event logistics. Its location in one of North Texas' fastest-growing communities further enhances its appeal as a regional sports tourism destination.

Fast Facts:

- 225,000 square feet of indoor event space
- Capacity for eight basketball courts or 16 volleyball courts
- Two NHL-regulation ice sheets available for tournaments and showcases
- Ability to host court and ice sports simultaneously under one roof
- More than 25,000 square feet of dedicated team and club space
- On-site food and beverage options, including concessions, coffee and smoothies
- Located within the Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex, one of the nation's largest youth sports market.

Planner Perk: The facility's mix of ice, court, and pickleball venues allows organizers to host multisport tournaments, championships, and festivals at a single site, reducing transportation logistics while creating a centralized experience for athletes and spectators.

More info: starcentermultisport.com



Courtesy Dallas Stars

Courtesy Buena Vista Sports Complex



BUENA VISTA SPORTS COMPLEX

Laredo, Texas Opened: January 28, 2026

Buena Vista Sports Complex positions Laredo as an emerging destination for youth and amateur sports tourism in South Texas. The nearly 200-acre facility opened in early 2026 and was designed to accommodate large-scale tournaments and multi-field events. Phase I includes 10 artificial-turf baseball and softball fields, two multipurpose fields, and tournament-ready infrastructure that supports simultaneous competition across multiple sports. The complex was developed as a \$45 million investment in recreation and economic development, with city leaders targeting regional and statewide events. Its extensive field inventory and all-turf design provide planners with scheduling flexibility and reliable playability, while the venue's location near the rapidly growing Cuatro Vientos corridor offers easy access for teams and spectators. Future expansion plans will further increase the complex's event-hosting capacity.

Fast Facts:

- Nearly 200-acre sports campus
- Home to the Juan Jose "J.J." Gomez Championship Field
- Professional-grade field lighting for evening competition
- Designed to host regional and statewide tournaments
- Located in South Laredo near the Cuatro Vientos corridor
- Phase II plans include additional baseball and multipurpose fields
- Future amenities include an amphitheater and expanded public gathering spaces

Planner Perk: With 10 turf diamonds and two multipurpose fields in a single location, event organizers can host large tournaments with minimal weather-related disruptions while maximizing scheduling efficiency across multiple age divisions and sports.

More info: cityoflaredo.com/departments/buena-vista-sports-complex

PENINSULA METROPOLITAN PARK DISTRICT RECREATION CENTER

Gig Harbor, Wash. Opened: July 1, 2025

The PenMet Parks Recreation Center expands the sports and recreation landscape on Washington's Gig Harbor Peninsula with a modern indoor venue designed for year-round activity. Anchoring a 17-acre recreation campus, the facility features three multiuse courts, a synthetic turf fieldhouse, and an elevated indoor walking and jogging track overlooking the courts below. The center supports a wide range of sports, including basketball, volleyball, pickleball, soccer, flag football, lacrosse, and cheer, while also accommodating fitness programs, camps, and community events. Flexible indoor spaces allow organizers to host everything from youth competitions to wellness programs, making the venue a versatile option for sports planners seeking adaptable event space. Outdoor amenities and trail connections further enhance the campus experience for participants and spectators alike.

Fast Facts:

- Part of a 17-acre recreation campus
- Elevated indoor track with two uninterrupted lanes
- Dedicated fitness and multipurpose programming room
- Outdoor event lawn for sports and community gatherings
- Pacific Northwest-themed miniature golf course
- Direct access to the Cushman Trail and regional trail network

Planner Perk: Harborstone Field, the campus's spacious outdoor event lawn, provides additional flexible space for opening ceremonies, festival-style activations, team gatherings, and overflow event programming.

More info: penmetparks.org/penmet-parks-recreation-center/



Courtesy Peninsula Metropolitan Park District

Courtesy 315 Sports Complex



BRADLEY 315 SPORTS PARK

Bradley, Ill. Opened: May 2, 2025

Built on 127 acres, Bradley 315 Sports Park is one of the Midwest's newest destinations for youth baseball and softball tournaments. The \$47 million complex features 16 fully turfed diamonds spread across 1.2 million square feet of synthetic playing surface, allowing for consistent play and reduced weather disruptions. Beyond competition, the venue was designed to create a destination experience for athletes and families, with on-site dining, concessions, recreational amenities, and gathering spaces. Event organizers can take advantage of batting cages, athletic training and medical services, camps and clinics, and a variety of entertainment options that keep participants engaged between games. The park also includes fishing ponds, a playground, bocce ball and foosball courts, and lawn games, with additional water attractions and community programming planned. Bradley 315 is positioned to attract regional and national tournaments while offering a family-friendly atmosphere that encourages longer stays and repeat visits.

Fast Facts:

- 127-acre sports and recreation complex
- 16 fully turfed baseball and softball diamonds
- 1.2 million square feet of synthetic turf
- Full-service restaurant and sports bar
- Two concession stands and on-site coffee shop
- Athletic training and medical facility
- Batting cages for team warmups and training
- Fishing ponds, playground, and lawn games
- Camps, clinics, and athletic development program

Planner Perk: The combination of on-site dining, recreational amenities and family attractions helps keep athletes and spectators engaged throughout multi-day tournaments, creating a true stay-and-play experience.

More info: 315sportspark.com

GREENBERG INDOOR SPORTS COMPLEX

Penn State University Park Opened: August 25, 2025

The Greenberg Indoor Sports Complex serves as a new centralized hub for Penn State Athletics, supporting student-athletes across all 31 varsity sports. Designed to enhance performance beyond competition, the facility combines sports nutrition, recovery, and academic support under one roof. The upper-level Performance Dining Center features a commercial kitchen producing athlete-specific meals, along with team meeting rooms, study spaces, a sports lounge, and communal gathering areas. On the lower level, a comprehensive wellness and recovery suite offers advanced therapies and treatment spaces to support athlete health and performance. Combined with the Morgan Academic Center, the complex creates a holistic environment that integrates training, recovery, education, and team development, making it a valuable model for collegiate sports programs and high-performance events.

Fast Facts:

- Supports student-athletes across 31 varsity sports
- State-of-the-art Performance Dining Center with full-service commercial kitchen
- Morgan Academic Center offering advising, tutoring, and study space
- Small team meeting rooms and communal gathering areas
- Sports lounge and dedicated quiet study spaces
- Centralized campus hub for dining, wellness, recovery, and academics

Planner Perk: The Wellness and Recovery Center features premium recovery amenities, including a hydrotherapy pool, hyperbaric chamber, red light therapy beds, dry float beds, saunas, and zero-gravity chairs, providing elite-level recovery resources for athletes participating in training camps, showcases, and championship events.

More info: gopsusports.com/news/2025/08/25/penn-state-athletics-debuts-greenberg-indoor-sports-complex ■



Courtesy Penn State Athletics/Mark Sellers

Janesville, Wis: A Midwest Hub for Indoor, Ice, and Alternative Sports

Janesville, Wisconsin blends athletic versatility, modern facilities, and community-centered design in a way few Midwest destinations can match. At the center of this momentum is the new **Woodman's Center**, a state-of-the-art venue built for today's sports landscape. Whether hosting a regional tournament, high-energy invitational, or multi-day championship, Janesville offers a polished, professional environment with hospitality teams remember.

A Venue Built for Modern Sports

Designed for flexibility and spectator experience, the Woodman's Center spans roughly 140,000 square feet and supports nearly every type of indoor sport. Multiple configurable competition areas, professional-grade amenities, and seamless access to lodging, dining, and entertainment make it a trusted host site for organizations across the Midwest and beyond.

Courts, Mats, and Multisport Flexibility

The Robert & Delores Kennedy Convention Center accommodates basketball, volleyball, pickleball, cheer, wrestling, and other sports with adaptable courts and clean sightlines. High ceilings and efficient traffic flow keep athletes focused and spectators comfortable. The Multipurpose Arena features seasonally adjustable flooring, transitioning from ice to dry-floor or turf sports to support year-round programming.

Events Cool as Ice

Ice athletes benefit from the Mercyhealth Ice Arena and the Multipurpose Arena, two premier ice sheets ideal for hockey, figure skating, synchronized skating, and more. Reliable ice quality, efficient scheduling, accessible locker rooms, team meeting areas, and cold-sport-specific infrastructure make the venue suitable for both recreational events and elite-level tournaments. Skaters also enjoy bright, consistent lighting, excellent acoustics, and temperature-stabilized seating that keeps families comfortable during long competition days.



Designed for Athletes — and Their Fans

Comfort and accessibility are central to the Woodman's Center experience. Guests enjoy wide concourses, indoor seating with modern amenities, on-site concessions, gathering spaces, and abundant free parking for buses and teams. ADA-accessible layouts and clear wayfinding ensure smooth movement throughout the facility.

Located five minutes from Interstate 39/90 and directly connected to Uptown Janesville, the venue offers immediate access to retail, dining, and family activities. Additional restaurants, shops, and amenities are within walking distance, and hotels sit one to five miles away — ideal for tournament blocks and multi-day stays.

Beyond the Woodman's Center

Janesville also shines in warm-weather sports. The city's natural assets include the Rock River, which supports state, national, and international water-skiing tournaments, as well as dragon boat racing, kayaking, and other water-based events. The extensive trail system includes more than 30 miles of paved, interconnected trails that serve cyclists, runners, and roller athletes, while nearby off-road routes attract trail runners, mountain bikers and adventure riders.

A City That Makes Hosting Easy

With nearly 1,000 hotel rooms, family-friendly dining, and walkable recreation options, Janesville is built for tournament-style travel. Organizers return because the city delivers dependable facilities and a visitor experience that feels both polished and personal. **The Janesville Area Convention & Visitors Bureau** supports bid preparation, marketing, partnerships, and logistics to ensure smooth, successful events.

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Janesville Area Convention & Visitors Bureau

Tony Cipollone Director of Sports Sales & Development

Janesville stands out with effortless logistics, welcoming hospitality, and a layout that keeps teams close to hotels, dining, and recreation. From elite ice to outdoor adventure, the city offers a year-round sports and visitor experience that feels polished and personal.



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FROM ICE ARENAS TO MMA MATS – JANESVILLE IS READY TO PLAY

While pickleball is one of the fastest-growing sports in the U.S., until recently, it lacked a clear developmental pipeline for youth players.



BEYOND THE BOOM

Courtesy PPA

A movement is afoot to build a youth development pathway in pickleball

BY PAIGE TOWNLEY

Pickleball's rise has been nothing short of meteoric. From neighborhood parks and repurposed tennis courts to packed convention centers hosting national championships, the sport has exploded into one of the fastest-growing recreational activities in the country. Participation numbers continue climbing, professional tours are expanding, and destinations are increasingly embracing pickleball as both a tourism draw and event opportunity. But beneath the sport's rapid ascent lies a growing concern:

for all its momentum at the adult and amateur levels, pickleball is still missing many of the building blocks that traditionally sustain a sport long term.

Unlike basketball, soccer, or baseball—sports built on decades of youth leagues, school programs, and developmental systems—pickleball's rise happened in reverse. Professional tours and major events exploded before the sport established widespread junior pathways, scholastic programs, or academy systems designed to cultivate young talent. Now, organizations across the country are working to change that.

Building a future

As those within the sport search for ways to build a sustainable youth development system, organizations like the Southern Pickleball Association are beginning to create the structure pickleball has long lacked.

Founded in 2021 with a focus entirely on the amateur game, the Southern Pickleball Association (SPA) has watched the sport's demographics rapidly evolve in just a few short years. What was once widely perceived as a sport dominated by retirees is increasingly becoming a younger player's game—a shift SPA co-founder Mark Spackman says is impossible to ignore.

“The junior market is what is going to be growing the most right now,” Spackman says. “The average age of playing is down to 35 now. The 18- to 34-year-old age group is probably the biggest group now playing, which is a dramatic change over the last few years.”

The trend extends even further down the age ladder. Participation among players ages 13 to 17 has surged to nearly two million nationwide, according to Spackman, while collegiate club teams continue to pop up on campuses across the country. At the same time, state athletic associations are beginning to formally recognize the sport at the scholastic level. Kentucky recently approved pickleball as an official high school sport beginning in 2027, with several other states expected to vote on similar measures in the near future.

“Once there’s a high school team, there will be a middle school team,” he says. “That will continue to make that growth go younger.”

For Spackman, the challenge is less about interest and more about infrastructure. Unlike traditional sports that have spent decades building feeder systems through youth leagues, school programs, and academies, pickleball is still laying that foundation in real time. But momentum is building quickly. Indoor pickleball facilities are opening nationwide, many with dedicated junior programming, while organizations like SPA are working to create clearer developmental pathways for young players. “We’re starting Southern Juniors as a separate offshoot because we see the growth and need of players,” Spackman says. “We want to bring quality amateur pickleball events for kids six to 17 to be able to go and get started with pickleball, whether beginner, intermediate, or advanced. There’s a place to start and show there is a pathway.”

That pathway will eventually include SPA Junior State Championships, slated to launch in 2027 or 2028, and a pathway for juniors into the Southern Championships. The organization plans a soft launch of junior events later this year before fully rolling out the championship structure.



DUPR Collegiate has helped transform collegiate pickleball from a handful of club teams into a rapidly expanding national competition structure.

Creating a development system

The effort to build that pathway is also taking shape inside dedicated training academies focused specifically on junior athletes. In the Midwest, the Chicago Pickleball Academy is attempting to create the kind of structured developmental model that is long established in sports like tennis and soccer but is still relatively new in pickleball. When the academy launched in October 2025—the first junior pickleball academy of its kind in Illinois—founder and academy director David Selvaggi says the goal was to address a glaring market gap.

“The gap was structured, high-performance development for junior players—a real curriculum, not just supervised play,” Selvaggi says. “When we looked at the Chicago market, there was no environment treating junior pickleball with the rigor that junior tennis or club soccer has had for decades.”

The demand surfaced quickly. The Chicago Pickleball Academy opened with 18 juniors and four coaches. Less than a year later, the academy has expanded to more than 50 players supported by an 11-person coaching staff.

“That growth—both the players and the coaching bench it took to serve them—in a single suburban market in under a year tells you everything about where the demand curve is,” Selvaggi says.

According to Selvaggi, the most notable change is not simply the number of people playing pickleball, but the changing profile of who is entering the sport. Families are increasingly approaching pickleball with the same long-term mindset typically associated with more established youth sports.

“Three years ago, ‘pickleball player’ almost always meant a recreational adult,” Selvaggi says. “Now you have families enrolling kids the way they’d enroll them in junior tennis or club

Courtesy Freddy Requena



Players at the Chicago Pickleball Academy, which is attempting to create a structured developmental model similar to those long established in sports like tennis and soccer.

Courtesy Southern Pickleball Association



Pickleball is still very popular with an older demographic, but the average age of a typical player is now 35 years old.

soccer, with a multi-year development arc in mind.”

The academy is also seeing crossover athletes from sports such as soccer, tennis, and basketball transition into pickleball, while a growing number of younger players are discovering the sport on their own through social media and exposure to competitive events.

“The third bucket is newer and growing—kids finding pickleball on their own, pulled in by social media,

local exposure, or watching older juniors compete, without a parent driving it,” Selvaggi says.

He also believes pickleball’s accessibility is helping fuel that growth among younger demographics. “Because pickleball is easy to pick up and rewarding early, families are viewing it as an effective way to get kids off devices and into something active and social,” Selvaggi says.

At Chicago Pickleball Academy, the emphasis is on creating a clear

developmental progression rather than simply offering court access or recreational clinics.

“A community program gives you access—courts, open play, maybe a clinic,” Selvaggi says. “An academy gives you a development system.” Players move through structured training tracks designed to build skills methodically, from fundamentals through advanced competitive play. “We built a multi-phase progression that moves a player deliberately from the fundamentals to advanced competitive play,” Selvaggi says. “That’s the difference between somewhere to play and somewhere to get better on purpose.”

For Selvaggi, organized events and tournaments remain essential because they help establish the competitive ladder that pickleball still lacks compared to traditional sports. “Tournaments and organized events are the connective tissue that builds a pathway,” Selvaggi says. “They give developing players something concrete to train toward, they create visible role models for juniors, and they signal to serious athletes that there’s a future worth committing to.”

That philosophy is part of the academy’s partnership efforts with the Chicago Slice, the city’s Major League Pickleball franchise. “Connecting our



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juniors to a professional team in their own market—putting them around that level of play, that environment, that visibility—is the kind of bridge the sport needs more of,” Selvaggi says.

Growing the collegiate pipeline

While organizations like SPA and academies such as Chicago Pickleball Academy are focused on introducing younger athletes to the sport, the next stage of pickleball’s developmental ladder is rapidly taking shape on college campuses.

At the center of that growth is DUPR Collegiate, which has helped transform collegiate pickleball from a handful of club teams into a rapidly expanding national competition structure complete with qualification pathways, national championships, and prize money.

“The first college pickleball national championship was November 2022,” says DUPR Collegiate director Jacob Smith. “We had 16 schools there, and 150 players came to compete. That was the kickoff event.” Just four years later, the scale looks dramatically different.

“Our most recent one, a month ago, we had 64 different schools and 720 different players come out and compete,” Smith says. “It has absolutely taken off.” The organization recently completed its fifth collegiate national championship in April 2026, won by Florida Atlantic University, and is already preparing for its sixth competitive season. Along the way, DUPR Collegiate has steadily expanded the infrastructure surrounding the sport. “We started with one national championship,” Smith says. “We kept that every year but built out more pathway events that feed into it.”

That structure now includes eight Super Regionals annually—four in the fall and four in the spring—each awarding bids into the national championship. In addition, community organizers, facilities, and universities themselves are now hosting regional qualifying events that funnel teams into the broader collegiate system.

Today, Smith estimates there are roughly 150 competitive collegiate pickleball clubs nationwide, and the pathway is already producing tangible results. According



to Smith, several collegiate players have gone on to be drafted into Major League Pickleball, further reinforcing the idea that a legitimate pipeline between college and the professional ranks is beginning to form.

Formalizing the path forward

Even at the professional level, organizations are increasingly focused on building clearer developmental pathways for younger players entering the sport. The Professional Pickleball Association continues to focus its efforts beyond professional competition through junior tours, amateur divisions, and developmental events designed to keep players engaged as they progress through the sport.

“Junior PPA goes alongside every one of our events,” says Chris Patrick, deputy commissioner of the Carvana PPA Tour. “All of our PPA events have an amateur component. That’s how we started and how we continue to support the pickleball community as a whole.”

According to Patrick, the organization’s fastest growth is now coming from younger players, particularly those under 35, reinforcing the importance of building long-term infrastructure around youth and amateur participation.

“Our largest growth area in terms of registered users on PickleballTournaments.com is people under 35—by far—and has been for the last two years,” Patrick says. “It’s definitely trending a lot younger.”

As pickleball continues maturing, Patrick says the focus has shifted toward creating more intentional pathways connecting junior, amateur, and professional play.

“The other half of how it’s developing is an intentional look at what else we can do to formalize and communicate what these pathways are,” he says. “There are now clear intentions, and we’re communicating them more. We’re trying to meet players where they are and provide opportunities for everyone to participate.” ■

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DRIVING RESULTS

How successful charity tournaments create memorable experiences while raising money for important causes

BY BOB SEXTON

There's a reason charity golf tournaments remain one of the most popular fundraising events in the country.

According to the latest report by the National Golf Foundation, they generated \$4.6 billion in charitable giving in 2022, an 18 percent increase from 2016. Their appeal is simple: people enjoy playing golf, sponsors like supporting good causes, and organizers have a proven format that works.

But successful tournaments don't happen by accident. Like any event, there are strategies you can use to make organizing one more efficient and effective. Follow this advice from charity tournament veterans, and you'll be hitting the green instead of getting stuck in a sand trap.

Start planning early

No surprise here, but as with most events, the earlier you start planning, the better. That applies to everything from securing a course to lining up sponsors.

Many, if not most, golf courses have events scheduled nearly every weekend during the season, so the sooner you reach out, the better your chances of securing your preferred date.

Charity golf tournaments are popular and highly effective ways to raise funds and awareness.

Once you've selected a venue, find out whether it has a tournament director or similar staff member dedicated to events. That person can become one of your most valuable resources during both the planning process and tournament day.

"Nine times out of 10, a golf course is not giving you any type of nonprofit discount because it's too expensive to run a golf course for them to do that," says Angela Merkle, development manager for the northern region of the American Cancer Society, who has organized the Drive Out Cancer Alaska Golf Classic in Anchorage since 2022.

"You're paying to have your tournament there, whether you're a nonprofit organization or business," she says. "So, utilize the tournament director to your advantage. Sit down with them and say, 'This is what we want to do. These are our goals. How can we do this?' Because that's what they do, they put on tournaments."

Pick the right format

Because charity tournaments often attract participants with varying skill levels, a scramble format and shotgun start are usually the safest choices. A scramble keeps play moving and is particularly welcoming to occasional golfers because teams always play from their best shot.

A shotgun start, meanwhile, allows all groups to begin simultaneously from different holes around the course. Besides speeding up play, it ensures everyone finishes at roughly the same time, making it easier to transition into awards ceremonies, meals, and post-round activities.

Another way to improve the player experience is to simplify purchases. Many tournaments offer add-ons such as mulligans, 50/50 raffles, and contest entries. Rather than requiring players to buy each item separately, Merkle recommends bundling them together.

"Instead of having all of your activations separately, like your mulligans, your string game, all your fun things, we still had those available to purchase individually, but we created something called the whole package



The ball drop at the Aces Fore Austin tournament is one of its most popular and successful fundraising initiatives, organizers say.

Courtesy Aces Fore Austin



Give sponsors the chance to support something tangible and visible, like the golf carts.

Courtesy Katie Hammond Photography, Notist and LimeLight Expressions

that had a lot of the things in it for a discounted rate and almost every single team purchased that whole package because it was just easier for the team captain to come do the check-in, purchase that for the team and move on," she says. The approach not only streamlines registration but also helps increase fundraising revenue.

Get in front of sponsors early

Early planning is equally important when it comes to sponsorships. Roderick Head, president of the Southaven

Leadership Foundation, which runs an annual tournament that funds scholarships for youth in DeSoto County, Mississippi, says organizers need to understand how corporate budgeting cycles work.

Different companies operate on different fiscal years, so timing matters. "Keep that in mind and get information to them prior to the start of the fourth quarter or during the fourth quarter, so you can actually be in the conversation as opposed to getting into the year itself and being told, 'Well, our budget is already tapped.'"

Make it easy for sponsors to participate

Once you've secured a date and venue, the next challenge is covering costs and maximizing fundraising potential.

Because the primary goal of a charity tournament is to raise as much money as possible for the cause, sponsorship revenue is critical. To make participation as easy as possible

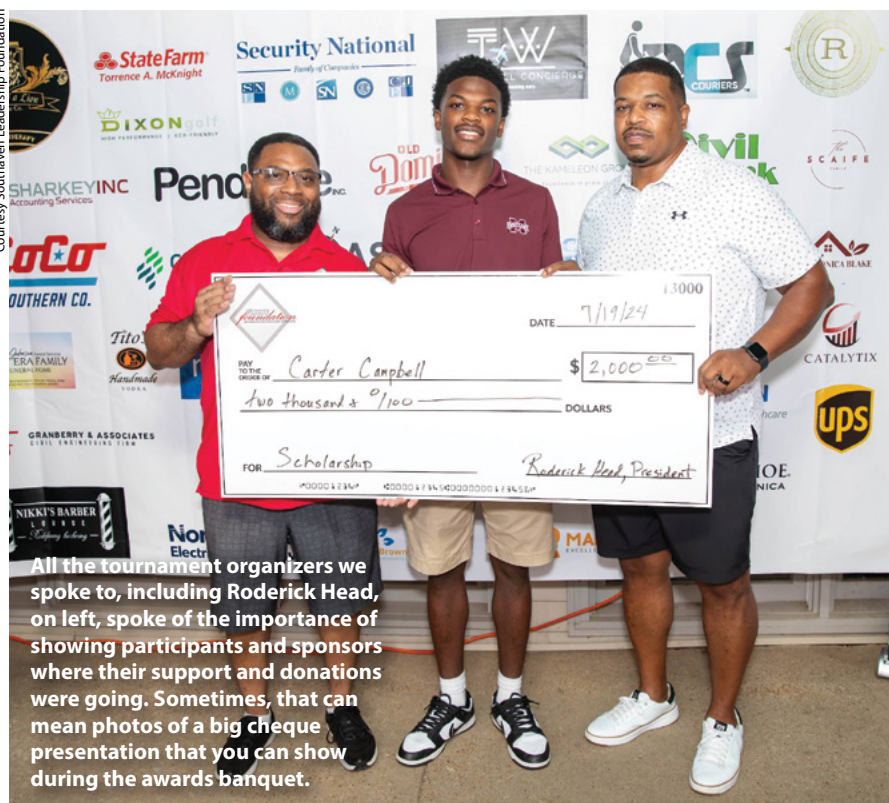
for sponsors, follow the KISS principle: Keep It Simple, Stupid.

For longtime sports event planner Anthony Terling, that starts with a well-designed sponsorship deck. Now sports development director with Auburn-Opelika Tourism, Terling also serves as president of the Austin 1st Foundation, which runs the annual Aces Fore Austin tournament. The

event raises money for rare disease research in memory of his son, Austin, who passed away in 2022 from UBA5 Mutation.

"I always believe less is more, quality over quantity," Terling says. "I don't believe in having 10 different levels of sponsorships and then having benefits underneath because it just gets too much for sponsors."

Courtesy Southaven Leadership Foundation



All the tournament organizers we spoke to, including Roderick Head, on left, spoke of the importance of showing participants and sponsors where their support and donations were going. Sometimes, that can mean photos of a big cheque presentation that you can show during the awards banquet.

Courtesy Katie Hammond Photography, Notist and LimeLight Expressions



Creative prize holes, like a human slot machine, increase donations and make the event memorable for participants.

SHINING EXAMPLES

Looking for inspiration for your next fundraising event? These four tournaments have built successful models around compelling causes, memorable experiences, and strong community support.

Aces Fore Austin

Hosted by the Austin 1st Foundation, this Alabama tournament honors Austin Terling and raises awareness and research dollars for rare diseases. Proceeds support organizations including the University of Alabama at Birmingham's Undiagnosed Disease Program, Children's Hospital of Alabama, and other rare disease research initiatives. Learn more: austin1stfoundation.org

Drive Out Cancer Alaska Golf Classic

Organized by the American Cancer Society, this Alaska-based event raises funds for cancer research, advocacy, patient support, and local programs serving cancer patients and families across the state. In 2026, organizers introduced a unique Midnight Sun format with an evening shotgun start. Learn more: alaska.acsgolf.org

Sam Osborn Memorial Golf Tournament

This two-day Omaha event celebrates the life of Sam Osborn while raising money for causes important to him, including muscular dystrophy-related programs and pediatric health initiatives. Since launching in 2022, it has generated significant support for charitable organizations throughout the region. Learn more: samsgreatstory.com

Southaven Leadership Foundation Scholarship Golf Tournament

Held annually in Mississippi, this tournament funds scholarships for participants in the Southaven Leadership Foundation's mentoring program, helping create educational opportunities and leadership development experiences for youth throughout DeSoto County. Learn more: southavenleadershipfoundation.org

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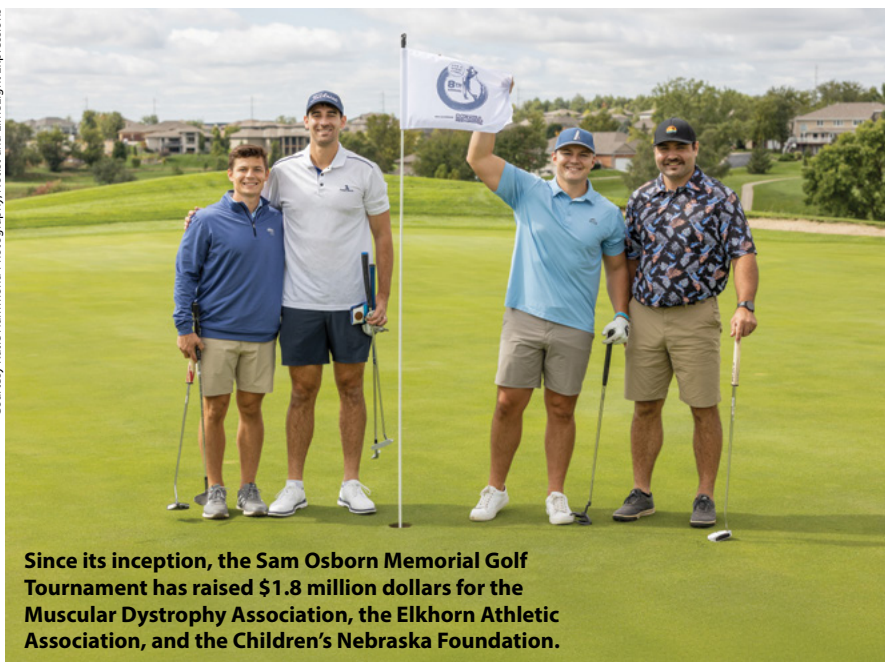


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Courtesy Katie Hammond Photography, Notist and LimeLight Expressions



Since its inception, the Sam Osborn Memorial Golf Tournament has raised \$1.8 million dollars for the Muscular Dystrophy Association, the Elkhorn Athletic Association, and the Children's Nebraska Foundation.

Merkle agrees. Rather than relying on traditional gold, silver, or bronze sponsorship levels, she ties sponsorship opportunities directly to visible event elements.

"Instead of doing the platinum, gold, or having fun names, sponsorships sell better when they're connected to something that is going to give them the visibility," she says.

"We have the golf cart sponsorship, where your logo is going to be on every single golf cart. We have a check-in and registration sponsorship where you're prominently displayed right there, where everyone's signing in. There's the banquet sponsor where you have all of these tables that you can put your logo on." In her experience, sponsors respond better when the benefit is clearly spelled out from the start.

Take advantage of tech

Technology isn't just about registration. It can also help organizers track performance, identify fundraising trends, and improve future events.

While spreadsheets and general project management tools can work, there are numerous golf tournament-specific platforms on the market, including Charity Golf Today, Golf Genius, and Kismet Golf.

"When we switched over to Charity

Golf Today, it has actually coincided with the tournament's growth," Head says. "We can pretty much manage the tournament through that." Such platforms simplify registration, payments, and financial tracking while reducing administrative headaches.

The American Cancer Society uses its own internal systems, but Merkle stresses the importance of maintaining a reliable system of record regardless of the technology involved. "You need something to stay organized because year after year, you're going to want to keep track of things like, how much did my silent auction make? How much did we make on mulligans? Was this the right cost? Do we need to change that for next year? So, having a system of record is really important and keeping track of the funds coming in and where those funds are coming from."

Make it memorable

At the end of the day, people may be supporting a worthy cause, but they're also paying for a day on the golf course. Creating a memorable experience is one of the best ways to maximize participation and keep players coming back year after year.

The Sam Osborn Memorial Golf Tournament in Omaha, Nebraska, raises money for muscular dystrophy research

in honor of Sam Osborn, who passed away from the disease in 2022 at age 17. The two-day tournament sells out every year, says lead planner Kimmylea Konsel-Taylor, because organizers continually look for ways to improve the experience.

Alongside traditional contests such as longest drive, closest-to-the-pin, and hole-in-one challenges, the event features unique activations, including a dunk tank, a human slot machine, and a wheel that determines which type of tool players must use to putt. Not only do these activities generate additional fundraising opportunities, but they also help create a fun and memorable atmosphere.

The setting itself can become part of the draw. The Aces Fore Austin tournament is held at Grand National–Robert Trent Jones Golf Trail, one of the country's top-rated public golf facilities, Terling says. Meanwhile, the Drive Out Cancer Alaska Golf Classic introduced a unique twist this year when organizers moved the event to Settler's Bay Golf Course west of Wasilla and rebranded it as the Drive Out Cancer Midnight Sun Golf Classic.

"It's a shotgun start at 8 p.m.," Merkle said prior to the June event. "Golfers will golf over the midnight sun, and the tournament wraps up around 1 a.m., so we're pretty excited for it."

Don't skimp on hospitality

Terling believes participants should feel like they're receiving a premium experience in return for their support. "When you come, it's going to be a first-class experience," he says. Rather than offering basic box lunches, the tournament provides a buffet breakfast, a sit-down lunch, quality player gifts, and attractive raffle and silent auction items. Yes, participants are there to support a good cause, Terling says, but thoughtful touches help create an event people want to attend again. In the end, successful charity golf tournaments come down to a fairly simple formula: make it easy for players to participate, easy for sponsors to support the event, and memorable enough that everyone wants to come back. Do that, and the fundraising will take care of itself. ■

SPOTLIGHT ON: NORTH DAKOTA

North Dakota offers an experience that blends wide-open landscapes with a refreshingly authentic Midwest atmosphere. With quality facilities spread across its cities and towns, paired with endless natural space ideal for outdoor competition, the state easily accommodates everything from youth tournaments and collegiate athletics to endurance events and recreational competitions. Its accessible venues, low congestion, and welcoming host communities make planning and participation straightforward, while the surrounding scenery adds a distinctive sense of place that sets events apart. ■

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NORTH DAKOTA



MUST SEE:

Bismarck-Mandan Art Trail

Bismarck-Mandan's Art Trail offers an interactive way to experience the region's local culture, turning the entire destination into a walkable, digital art tour. With a downloadable pass that allows visitors to check in at more than 80 participating locations, the experience offers an opportunity for exploration through murals, sculptures, galleries, and public art installations throughout the community. Along the way, participants can even earn prizes for checking in, adding a fun, gamified layer to the journey. ■

BISMARCK

In Bismarck, athletes and planners can have the best of both worlds: metropolitan amenities along with wide-open spaces and a friendly hometown atmosphere.

Hotel rooms: 3,500

Hotel tax rate: 11 percent or 11.5 percent, depending on location

Major facilities:

- BSC Aquatic & Wellness Center houses an eight-lane, 50-meter pool and dive well
- Mandan Aquatic Center houses an eight-lane, 50-meter pool and dive well
- MDU Resources Community Bowl is a 6,000-seat venue that includes a field for football and soccer, natural grass fields, a nine-lane track, and more
- VFW Sports Center recently underwent an expansion and renovation and now features three sheets of ice
- Capital Ice Complex features two sheets of ice

Convention center: Bismarck Event Center offers 200,000 square feet of space and hosts a variety of sports, including wrestling, curling, cheerleading, and rodeos.

Contact: Bismarck-Mandan CVB, noboundariesnd.com.

FARGO

Fargo offers the ideal combination of first-class sports facilities, affordability, easy accessibility, and authentic hospitality. Located on the border of North Dakota and Minnesota, the metro is within 3.5 hours driving from major markets like Minneapolis-St. Paul, Winnipeg, and Sioux Falls while also served by Hector International Airport with direct flights to major hubs like Chicago, Atlanta, Dallas, and more.

Hotel rooms: 5,960

Hotel tax rate: ranges from 13.75 percent to 14 percent

Major facilities:

- Fargo Parks Sports Center is a new multipurpose indoor venue with an indoor NCAA soccer field, two sheets of ice, six pickleball courts, and eight hardwood courts
- FARGODOME is a multipurpose venue with an 80,000-square-foot arena floor
- Hulbert Aquatic Center houses a 10-lane pool
- North Softball Complex boasts 18 fields
- Scheels Arena is a multipurpose venue, with two hockey rinks

Contact: Fargo-Moorhead Athletic Commission, fargomoorhead.org.

GRAND FORKS

Grand Forks is one of the largest cities in the state, situated in eastern North Dakota. Besides its great facilities, what really sets Grand Forks apart from other communities is the quality of the complimentary services the city offers to event organizers.

Hotel rooms: 2,226

Hotel tax rate: 10 percent

Major facilities:

- Albrecht Field is a new softball field that features more than 500 seats
- Ralph Engelstad Arena is a 40,000-square-foot arena that hosts hockey and other ice events and basketball
- Alerus Center is a 100,000-square-foot multipurpose venue
- Betty Engelstad Sioux Center is a multipurpose venue with four basketball and volleyball courts
- ICON Sports Center features two USA Hockey-sanctioned rinks and seating for 500 per rink
- The Frederick "Fritz" D. Pollard Jr. Athletic Center includes a 100-yard artificial turf field and a 300-meter eight-lane track
- Coming soon: Altru Sports Complex will be a 215,000-square-foot facility with a 50-meter indoor competition pool, 25-yard instructional pool, full-size soccer and football turf, and eight pickleball courts

Contact: Visit Greater Grand Forks, VisitGrandForks.com.

MINOT

Located in central North Dakota, Minot offers the convenience of a regional sports hub with the charm of a community known for hospitality, family-friendly attractions, and year-round events. With venues for hockey, baseball, softball, basketball, soccer, wrestling, and more, the Magic City makes it easy for teams, families, and fans to turn a tournament trip into a memorable visit.

Hotel rooms: 2,500

Hotel tax rate: 10.5 percent

Major facilities:

- Maysa Arena offers three ice rinks
- Minot State University Dome is a multipurpose indoor venue with seating for up to 10,000 and an eight-lane indoor track
- Minot Municipal Auditorium is a 13,200 square-foot multipurpose indoor facility
- Corbet Field is a 950-seat ballpark
- All Seasons Arena is a 25,000-plus-square-foot arena at the North Dakota State Fairgrounds, used for any type of event

Convention center: The North Dakota State Fair Center houses 250,000 square feet of space and hosts sports such as hockey, curling, wrestling, and equestrian.

Contact: Visit Minot, visitminot.org.



The ICON Sports Center in Grand Forks features two USA Hockey-sanctioned rinks.

Courtesy Visit Greater Grand Forks



Minot State University Dome is a multipurpose indoor venue with seating for up to 10,000.

Courtesy Visit Minot

WATFORD CITY

Watford City is centrally located near premier western North Dakota attractions, including Theodore Roosevelt National Park and Fort Union National Historic Site. For sports, the city offers two large indoor facilities and several fields.

Hotel rooms: 800

Hotel tax rate: 9.5 percent

Major facilities:

- Rough Rider Center is a multifaceted facility offering two sheets of ice, a field house, an arena, an aquatic center, along with space for

gymnastics and outdoor turf baseball and football field in partnership with Watford City High School

- McKenzie County Ag Expo facility includes 212 acres of land with a 112,000 square foot building
- McKenzie County Athletic Park has five softball diamonds and two soccer/football fields
- American Legion Baseball Field offers a multiuse baseball field
- Koeser Field features a Cal-Ripken baseball field/ girls fastpitch softball field

Contact: Visit Watford City, visitwatfordcity.com. ■

SPOTLIGHT ON: IOWA

With a strong sports culture, centrally located cities, and a reputation for hosting well-run events, Iowa is a welcoming destination for sports. From youth tournaments and amateur championships to large-scale collegiate competitions, Iowa combines Midwest hospitality with the infrastructure and experience needed to deliver successful, memorable events year-round. "Iowa offers versatility – large arenas, historic stadiums and emerging multisport complexes are located all across the state," says Amy Zeigler, state tourism manager for Travel Iowa. "The biggest standout is that Iowa offers these venues without the congestion or cost barriers found in other markets. Event planners talk about how Iowa's affordability and accessibility help them create an experience, not just a competition." ■

Prospect Meadows in Cedar Rapids is an eight-field baseball complex. ▶



Courtesy Cedar Rapids Tourism



MUST SEE:

The World's Largest Concrete Gnome

Roadside attractions come with a sense of personality in Ames, and few are more memorable than Elwood, the World's Largest Concrete Gnome. Standing proudly outside Reiman Gardens, this larger-than-life landmark has become a must-see photo stop, adding a playful twist to any trip through this college town. ■

Andy Moore, Director of Marketing with Discover Ames.

IOWA

AMES

Home to Iowa State University, Ames is easy to get to and offers access to high-quality venues, experienced event support, and community excitement.

Hotel rooms: 2,200

Hotel tax rate: 12 percent

Major facilities:

- Hunziker Youth Sports Complex boasts 24 soccer fields, five baseball fields, and four softball fields
- Iowa State University Rec Services includes 31 fields, 20 basketball courts, 31 volleyball courts, two pools, six ball fields, and 300 square feet of indoor turf
- Iowa State Athletics offers the 14,267-seat Hilton Coliseum, 61,500-seat Jack Trice Stadium, and the Cyclone Sports Complex, which hosts soccer, softball, and track and field

Contact: Discover Ames, discoverames.com.

CEDAR RAPIDS

Cedar Rapids is a welcoming and convenient Midwest destination. It is within a five-hour drive of six major

cities and features a world-class airport with 17 non-stop flights.

Hotel rooms: 3,350

Major facilities:

- Alliant Energy PowerHouse Arena and Convention Center houses a 37,550-square-foot arena floor and is connected to the 267-room DoubleTree by Hilton Hotel
- ImOn Ice Arena includes two sheets of ice, including the NHL ice sheet, with seating for 3,500
- Tuma Soccer & Sports Complex features 32 soccer fields of various sizes, and two football fields
- Veterans Memorial Baseball Stadium is a 5,300-seat minor league baseball park
- Prospect Meadows is an eight-field baseball complex
- Triple Play Park has six baseball/softball fields

Convention center: Alliant Energy PowerHouse Convention Center has a flexible exhibit hall and hosts a variety of sports, including gymnastics, cornhole, volleyball, and wrestling.

Contact: Cedar Rapids Tourism, tourismcedarrapids.com.



COUNCIL BLUFFS

Council Bluffs is home to a wide variety of sports facilities and fields to host any type of competition.

Hotel rooms: 2,674

Major facilities:

- Council Bluffs Recreation Complex includes 10 soccer fields, seven softball fields, four football fields, and three baseball fields
- Iowa West Field House is a 100,000-square-foot-plus indoor sports facility with 12 regulation volleyball courts or eight high school basketball courts
- Iowa West Sports Plex is a 75,000-square-foot indoor facility
- Mid-America Center combines an arena and convention center with more than 64,000 square feet of flexible space

Contact: Unleash Council Bluffs, unleashcb.com.

DES MOINES

Greater Des Moines offers a winning combination of accessibility, affordability, and experience. Located in the heart of the Midwest, it's an easy drive for regional teams and fans, while offering affordable hotels, venues, dining, and entertainment compared to larger markets.

Hotel rooms: 13,000

Hotel tax rate: 12 percent

Major facilities:

- Hy-Vee Multiplex is a 50-acre synthetic turf multisport complex with six pods, 12 soccer fields, and 18 baseball/softball fields
- Downtown Wellmark YMCA houses a 50-meter indoor Olympic-sized pool
- MidAmerican Energy Company RecPlex offers two indoor ice arenas, a fieldhouse with three full-size basketball courts or six full-size volleyball courts, three full-size pickleball courts, full-size soccer field, three full-size outdoor turf soccer fields, and a 3,500-square-foot esports room

- Waukee Natatorium offers an Olympic-sized pool
- Gregg Young Sports Campus has 10 acres of multisport turf, four soccer fields, eight baseball/softball fields, and 41,000 square feet of multipurpose courts, along with 11,000 total square feet of indoor field turf

Convention center: The Iowa Events Center is comprised of three connected facilities: Casey's Center, EMC Expo Center, and Community Choice Convention Center.

Contact: Des Moines CVB, catchdesmoines.com.

DUBUQUE

Nestled along the limestone bluffs of the mighty Mississippi River, Dubuque pairs championship-caliber venues with unforgettable visitor experiences. Sports organizers have their choice of numerous top-quality venues while keeping athletes and families close to hotels, dining, and entertainment.

Hotel rooms: 1,890

Hotel tax rate: 12 percent

Major facilities:

- Dubuque Soccer Complex features seven full-length fields
- Dubuque Sports Complex includes four youth baseball diamonds
- ImOn Ice Arena is a 66,000-square-foot facility with a single sheet of ice
- Dubuque Girls Independent League Softball Complex has five youth softball diamonds
- Sundown Mountain Resort features 21 scenic trails on 85 acres

Convention center: Grand River Center features 86,000 square feet of indoor space.

Contact: Travel Dubuque, traveldubuque.com.

IOWA CITY

The Iowa City area is a great place to host sporting events as it offers world-class venues, loyal, and passionate fan

base, and great accessibility. With hotels, restaurants, and entertainment all within walking distance of our venues, the area offers convenience for athletes and fans.

Hotel rooms: 3,700

Hotel tax rate: 12 percent

Major facilities:

- Xstream Arena is a 5,100-seat multipurpose venue
- GreenState Family Fieldhouse offers five basketball courts
- Hawkeye Tennis and Recreation Complex features 12 outdoor courts and eight indoor courts
- Campus Recreation and Wellness Center includes a 50-meter Olympic-sized pool and diving well
- The Palestra has four courts for basketball, volleyball, and pickleball

Convention center: Hyatt Regency Hotel and Conference Center offers more than 80,000 square feet of indoor and outdoor space and hosts basketball, wrestling, and dance.

Contact: Iowa City/Coralville Area CVB, thinkiowacity.com.

SIOUX CITY

Sioux City delivers a strong mix of top tier sports venues, ample lodging, family friendly attractions, and Midwest hospitality, making it a reliable host for events of all sizes. As home to the NAIA Women's Basketball and Women's Volleyball National Championships, along with multiple youth national qualifiers, the city has a proven record of running high level competitions.

Hotel rooms: 2,500

Hotel tax rate: 13.65 percent

Major facilities:

- Tyson Events Center is a flexible indoor multipurpose venue with a capacity of up to 10,000 and boasts a 17,000-square-foot arena floor
- The Siouxland Sports Academy features five courts,
- Seaboard Triumph Foods Expo Center boasts a 55,277-square-foot turf area and 80,000 square feet of arena space
- IBP Ice Center is an indoor ice rink
- MercyOne Field at Lewis and Clark Park is a baseball stadium with a capacity of 3,800

Convention center: The Sioux City Convention Center offers 56,000 square feet of space, 28,600 of which is contiguous, and hosts sports like boxing, dance, mixed martial arts, volleyball, wrestling, and cheer.

Contact: Sioux City Sports Commission, exploresiouxland.com/sioux-city-sports-commission. ■

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SPOTLIGHT ON: ARKANSAS

Arkansas offers a winning combination of quality sports facilities, scenic beauty, and welcoming communities that make it an ideal destination for athletic events of all kinds. From mountain trails and lakeside venues to expansive parks and modern indoor complexes, the state provides a diverse backdrop suited for everything from championship tournaments to outdoor endurance competitions. Event organizers also benefit from the Natural State's central location, affordable travel experience, and strong local support, while athletes and families can enjoy hiking, fishing, dining, and entertainment long after the competition ends. ■

The Bank OZK Arena in Hot Springs is home to the Spa City Classic pickleball tournament. ►



Courtesy Destination Rogers

ARKANSAS



MUST SEE:

Hot Springs Baseball Trail

The Hot Springs Baseball Trail offers a one-of-a-kind sports history experience that brings the early days of America's pastime to life right in the heart of the city. Tracing the origins of spring training and the era when legends like Babe Ruth, Jackie Robinson, and Honus Wagner once trained and played here, the trail connects historic ballfields, bathhouses, hotels, and downtown streets into a walkable journey through baseball's roots. For visitors, it's chance to step directly into the story of the game, where every marker and landmark adds another layer to how Hot Springs helped shape baseball history. ■

Courtesy Visit Hot Springs

BENTONVILLE

Bentonville is an Ozark Mountain city that combines world-class sports facilities with vibrant arts, culture, and outdoor adventure. Its state-of-the-art venues include the 6,000-seat Tiger Stadium, Olympic-sized aquatic center, and multiple sports complexes featuring synthetic turf fields, hardwood courts, and championship softball diamonds.

Hotel rooms: 2,711

Hotel tax rate: 13.5 percent

Major facilities:

- Bentonville Tiger Stadium is a 6,000-seat college-style stadium
- Premier Championship Softball Field has a capacity of 500
- Tiger Arena has an indoor arena and two auxiliary gyms
- Phillips Park has 10 lighted baseball fields, two lighted soccer/football fields, and two softball/T-ball fields
- Osage Park has eight pickleball courts
- Memorial Park includes 12 lighted tennis courts, five lighted baseball fields, six lighted softball fields, four T-ball fields, seven lighted soccer fields,

two multipurpose fields, two basketball courts, and four lighted sand volleyball courts

Contact: Visit Bentonville, visitbentonville.com.

CONWAY

Conway is a college town at heart. The city is home to three colleges, so there's always something going on.

Hotel rooms: 1,600

Major facilities:

- Conway Station Park has nine lighted turf baseball fields
- City of Colleges Park includes five lighted turf softball fields
- Conway Tennis Center features eight lighted outdoor courts
- Centennial Soccer Complex boasts 10 fields
- Don Owen Sports Complex consists of three basketball courts, three lighted baseball fields, and six volleyball courts
- The Conway Community Center features 133,000 square feet of indoor space, which includes an eight-lane competition pool, eight volleyball courts, and 12 pickleball courts

Contact: Visit Conway, visitconway.org.

www.sportseventsmediagroup.com

Courtesy Will Newton, AR Department of Parks



The Big Dam Bridge 100 is an annual cycling event in central Arkansas.

FAYETTEVILLE

Nestled in the heart of the Ozarks and bordered by the scenic Boston Mountains, Fayetteville offers the perfect blend of outdoor adventure, collegiate energy, and championship-ready sports facilities. With a mild four-season climate and a vibrant, walkable downtown, the city provides an ideal backdrop for tournaments, training events, and athletic travel year-round.

Hotel rooms: 2,400

Hotel tax rate: 13.75 percent

Major facilities:

- Kessler Mountain Park is a 620-acre park that consists of eight baseball diamonds, six soccer fields, and more than 20 miles of soft surface trails
- Centennial Park at Millsap Mountain is a nationally recognized cycling venue and outdoor recreation hub with world-class cyclocross and mountain biking facilities
- The University of Arkansas offers a variety of facilities for sports, including baseball, softball, football, track and field, gymnastics, volleyball, basketball, soccer, and tennis

Contact: Experience Fayetteville, experiencefayetteville.com.



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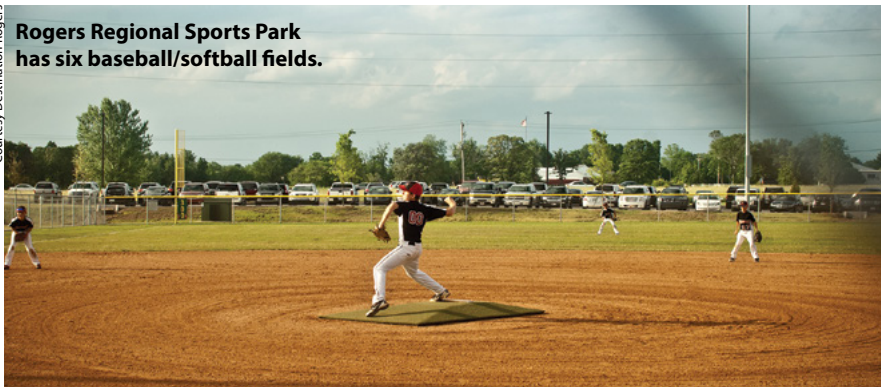
discoverfortsmith.com/sports
paige@discoverfortsmith.com

Courtesy Little Rock CVB



The Statehouse Convention Center in Little Rock regularly hosts volleyball tournaments.

Courtesy Destination Rogers



Rogers Regional Sports Park has six baseball/softball fields.

FORT SMITH

Fort Smith is a city that's easy to navigate and brimming with hospitality and southern charm. Its central location, rich amenities, and post-event attractions make it a memorable choice for sporting events of any size.

Hotel rooms: 2,500

Hotel tax rate: 14.5 percent

Major facility:

- Ben Geren Regional Park is home to the largest disc golf course in the region. It also has a golf course, six tennis courts, four sand volleyball courts, 10 softball fields, 12 soccer fields, biking and mountain biking trails, and a lake

Convention center: Fort Smith Convention Center offers versatile space for a variety of sporting events, from cornhole and volleyball to dance and cheer.

Contact: Fort Smith CVB, fortsmithsports.com.

HOT SPRINGS

Hot Springs is a unique destination, offering top-notch sports venues and family attractions, including a national park. The city is just three hours from Memphis, four hours from Dallas/Fort Worth, and four hours from Tulsa.

Hotel rooms: 3,235

Hotel tax rate: 14.5 percent

Major facilities:

- Majestic Park is a five-field complex for baseball/softball
- Kimery Park offers four softball fields and two soccer fields
- Northwoods Trails has more than 30 miles of cross-country and flow mountain bike trails on 2,000 acres just five minutes from downtown

Convention center: Hot Springs Convention Center and Bank OZK Arena feature 360,000 total square feet and hosts sports such as basketball, volleyball, archery, cheerleading, and pickleball.

Contact: Visit Hot Springs, hotsprings.org.

LITTLE ROCK

Little Rock is the state capital and sits in the heart of the state. It's a destination that can draw athletes from all over the South and Midwest.

Hotel rooms: 7,000

Hotel tax rate: 14.62 percent

Major facilities:

- Simmons Bank Arena is an 18,000-seat multipurpose venue
- Burns Park Sports Complex features 17 soccer fields, 27 tennis courts, two 18-hole golf courses, and nine baseball/softball fields
- Rebsamen Tennis Center houses 17 lighted tennis courts

- University of Arkansas Little Rock's Jack Stephens Center seats 5,600 and is a multipurpose facility
- War Memorial Stadium is a 54,000-seat multipurpose stadium

Convention center: The Statehouse Convention Center is approximately 220,000 square feet and is ideal for all sorts of indoor sports.

Contact: Little Rock CVB, littlerock.com.

NORTH LITTLE ROCK

With facilities for baseball, soccer, softball, tennis, pickleball, golf, disc golf and more, North Little Rock is built for tournaments of all sizes. At the center of it all is Burns Park, one of the largest municipal parks in the country.

Hotel rooms: 2,700

Hotel tax rate: 15 percent

Major facilities:

- Burns Park spans over 1,700 acres and features 17 soccer fields, two high-school and seven youth baseball fields, 12 pickleball courts, 27 tennis courts, and 1,200-plus miles of trails
- North Little Rock Riverfront Park is a 3.3-acre park with two multipurpose spaces and a 17-mile paved trail system ideal for cycling, running, and adventure races

Convention center: North Little Rock Event Center features 31,000 square feet of space.

Contact: North Little Rock CVB, northlittlerock.org.

ROGERS

Rogers is a family-friendly destination with a thriving sports community. Located in northwest Arkansas in the heart of the Ozarks, the city hosts a variety of youth, amateur, and professional sporting events, drawing awareness and interest to this ever-growing region.

Hotel rooms: 2,596

Hotel tax rate: 14.5 percent

Major facilities:

- Rogers Regional Sports Park features six baseball/softball fields
- Arkansas Athletes Outreach has four basketball courts, six volleyball courts, and two multipurpose fields
- Veterans Memorial Park includes two softball fields, two baseball fields, five grass, multipurpose fields, and one turf multipurpose field
- Beaver Lake is a year-round fishing spot 10 minutes from downtown Rogers

Convention center: Embassy Suites & Rogers Convention Center boast 400 hotel rooms and 125,000 square feet of event space.

Contact: Destination Rogers, destinationrogers.com. ■



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SPOTLIGHT ON: NORTH CAROLINA

From championship-caliber stadiums and collegiate facilities to expansive parks, trails, and multisport complexes, North Carolina offers the infrastructure needed to support everything from youth tournaments to elite competitions. Its diverse geography—spanning mountains, piedmont, and coast—adds even more versatility for planners, while its accessible travel hubs and well-connected cities make logistics seamless for teams and fans alike. Backed by enthusiastic local communities and a continued investment in sports development, the Tar Heel State delivers an experience that is as dependable as it is dynamic. ■

**The Jay M. Robinson
Turf Field in Concord. ►**



Courtesy Explore Cabarrus

NORTH CAROLINA



MUST SEE:

Sea Life Aquarium

SEA LIFE Aquarium inside Concord Mills brings the underwater world right into the heart of one of North Carolina's busiest entertainment destinations. Spanning 26,000 square feet and home to more than 5,000 sea creatures, the attraction is best known for its sweeping 180-degree ocean tunnel, where guests can walk beneath sharks, rays, and schools of tropical fish for a fully surrounding view of marine life in motion. Interactive touch pools and engaging educational talks and feedings add to the experience. ■

Courtesy Explore Cabarrus

ASHEVILLE

Asheville is a premiere sports event destination known for its unique combination of stunning natural beauty, vibrant arts and music, and award-winning restaurants and breweries—all set against the backdrop of the majestic Blue Ridge Mountains.

Hotel rooms: 9,803

Hotel tax rate: 13 percent

Major facilities:

- Harrah's Cherokee Center Asheville is a 7,500-seat multipurpose venue
- Bob Lewis Ballpark has seven fields for baseball and softball
- John B. Lewis Soccer Complex includes four artificial turf fields
- Kimmel Arena is a 3,200-seat multipurpose venue
- Home of the Asheville Tourists, the High-A affiliate of the Houston Astros, HomeTrust Park is a 4,000-seat minor league ballpark
- Buncombe County Sports Park includes eight multipurpose grass fields
- Aston Park Tennis Complex includes 12 lighted day courts

Contact: Explore Asheville, exploreasheville.com.

BURLINGTON

Burlington is situated in Alamance County in central North Carolina, making traveling convenient for teams around the state. The city is also within 30 to 45 minutes from major airports.

Hotel rooms: 1,900

Hotel tax rate: 12.75 percent

Major facilities:

- City Park has five athletic fields, 12 lighted tennis courts, and a year-round aquatics facility
- Burlington Pickleball Complex houses 17 professional-grade courts, including one championship court
- The 78-acre Springwood Park features fields for baseball, softball, and soccer, as well as an 18-hole championship-level disc golf course
- Mebane Soccer Complex consists of two full-size 11v11 soccer fields and two smaller fields
- Mebane Baseball/Softball Complex includes four baseball/softball fields and one football field
- Cedarock Park offers three disc golf courses

Contact: Alamance County Visitors Bureau, visitalamance.com.

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NORTH CAROLINA



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The 2026 ACC Fencing Championships took place at Duke University's Cameron Indoor Stadium in Durham.

CABARRUS COUNTY

Situated centrally in central North Carolina along Interstate 85, Cabarrus County is just 20 minutes northeast of Charlotte providing easy access to Charlotte Douglas International Airport, as well as Interstate 77 and 40.

Hotel rooms: 3,000

Hotel tax rate: 13 percent

Major facilities:

- Jay M. Robinson MONDO Track & Field Facility features a MONDO Super X 720 Track and Field surface
- Kemba Walker Sports Academy is a 47,000-square-foot multisport facility with four full-size basketball courts
- Atrium Health Ballpark is a 5,000-seat minor league ballpark
- The 150,000-square-foot Cabarrus Arena & Events Center has 2,300 fixed seats and can seat up to 5000, with additional seating added
- The 238-acre Frank Liske Park has an 18-hole disc golf course, a nine-acre lake, four lighted softball fields, an 11-field soccer complex, and six lighted tennis courts

Convention center: Concord Convention Center at Embassy Suites by Hilton offers 42,000 square feet of space and 308 guest rooms.

Contact: Explore Cabarrus County, explorecabarrus.com.

CHARLOTTE

Known as the Queen City, Charlotte is the 14th largest city in the country and one of the fastest growing. The

city is a magnet for major sporting events such as ACC Championships, NCAA basketball tournaments, college football bowl games, and PGA Championships.

Hotel rooms: 6,828 in uptown Charlotte; 31,127 countywide

Hotel tax rate: 15.25 percent

Major facilities:

- Spectrum Arena is a 19,077-seat multipurpose venue
- Matthews Sportsplex has nine synthetic turf fields, two grass fields, and a 5,000-seat grass stadium
- Mecklenburg Aquatic Center houses a 50-meter competition pool
- Bojangles Entertainment Complex offers an 8,600-seat coliseum
- Bank of America Stadium is a 75,037-seat football and soccer stadium

Convention Center: The Charlotte Convention Center features plenty of space for sports like fencing, boxing, wrestling, basketball, volleyball, cheer and dance, and esports.

Contact: Charlotte Regional Visitors Authority, crva.com.

CRYSTAL COAST

The Crystal Coast boasts more than 85 miles of scenic shoreline along the Southern Outer Banks, with a collection of beaches and towns. The area is home to an abundance of outdoor space and water access, providing a unique setting for a wide variety of outdoor sporting events.

Hotel rooms: 2,233

Hotel tax rate: 12.75 percent

Major facilities:

- Fort Benjamin Recreation Center has six tennis courts, two baseball fields, ball fields, six multipurpose fields, and a nine-hole disc golf course
- Western Park houses five tennis courts
- Swinson Park has five ball fields, one multipurpose field, and two tennis courts
- Crystal Coast Gymnastics Center offers 10,000 square feet of space
- Home of the Morehead City Marling, Big Rock Stadium is an 1,800-seat ballpark

Convention center: The Crystal Coast Civic Center sits on the banks of the Intra-Coastal Waterway and includes 12,000 square feet of flexible space.

Contact: Crystal Coast Tourism Authority, crystalcoastnc.org.

DUNN

Dunn is located in the heart of North Carolina, halfway between New York and Florida on I-95.

Hotel rooms: 587

Major facilities:

- Clarence Lee Tart Memorial Park has four softball fields, three multipurpose fields for football and soccer, an outdoor volleyball court, and a nine-hole disc golf course
- Tyler Park features three baseball fields, a Miracle Field, and tennis courts

Contact: Dunn Tourism, dunntourism.org.

DURHAM

Durham sits in a prime location just 10 miles from the Raleigh-Durham International Airport. Half of the U.S. population lives within a day's drive or an hour's flight from the city.

Hotel rooms: 8,000

Hotel tax rate: 13.5 percent

Major facilities:

- Durham County Memorial Stadium is an 8,500-seat multipurpose stadium for soccer, football, and lacrosse and also has an eight-lane track and javelin lane
- Cameron Indoor Stadium is a 9,000-seat arena for basketball, volleyball, fencing, and wrestling
- Brooks Field at Wallace Wade Stadium is a 40,000-seat football stadium
- McDougald-McLendon Arena is a 3,500-seat multipurpose arena
- Durham Bulls Athletic Park is a 10,000-seat ballpark

Convention centers: The 35,000-square-foot Durham Convention Center offers flexible space for

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Championship Facilities

Ivey M. Redmon Sports Complex: 189-acre complex containing multiple linear and diamond fields, a cross-country course, and the new Kernersville Recreation & Event Center with flexible indoor court spaces.

Truist Sports Park: 15 total fields (11 Bermuda grass, 4 artificial turf, 14 lighted)

JDL Fast Track: Indoor facility with a new 200-meter banked MondoTrack El track and 1,700 bleacher seats.

Truist Stadium: Home to minor league Dash baseball, it includes 5,500 stadium-style seats.

Winston-Salem Fairgrounds Arena and Event Center: 60,000 square feet of flexible space.

Downtown Benton Convention Center: 150,000 square feet with two connected hotels.

Championship-level track and field, baseball, basketball, cycling, tennis, and volleyball complexes.

Championship Amenities

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Courtesy Fayetteville CVB



Fayetteville hosted the Ultimate Battle Grounds 26 at Sebra Stadium in September, 2025.

a variety of uses, and the Sheraton Imperial Convention Center offers 31,000 square feet.

Contact: Discover Durham, discoverdurham.com.

FAYETTEVILLE

Fayetteville offers excellent, professional sports facilities capable of hosting a wide range of athletic activities. The city is also conveniently located right off Highway 95.

Hotel rooms: 5,500

Hotel tax rate: 13 percent

Major facilities:

- Jordan Soccer Complex is an eight-field complex
- Freedom Courts Sportsplex is a 42,000-square-foot climate-controlled multisport facility
- Fort Liberty offers a variety of sports facilities, including athletic fields and the Cleland Ice & Inline Skating Rinks, the only ice rink within a 60-mile radius that provides year-round skating

Convention center: Crown Complex comprises four buildings, including the 11,000-seat Crown Coliseum, a 60,000-square-foot Expo Center, an 11,000-square-foot Arena, and a 2,400-seat theater.

Contact: Distinctly Fayetteville, distinctlyfayetteville.com.

GASTON COUNTY

Gaston County is about 15 miles west of Charlotte, North Carolina, and just a short drive from Charlotte-Douglas International Airport. It offers a unique outdoor experience, with the beautiful scenery of

Crowders Mountain to the west and the Catawba River to the east.

Hotel rooms: 1,956

Hotel tax rate: 13 percent

Major facilities:

- Caromont Health Park is a multipurpose artificial turf stadium that can accommodate baseball, softball, soccer, lacrosse, football, field hockey, and more
- Poston Park has four baseball/softball fields and four soccer fields
- Dallas Park includes three baseball/softball fields, and six tennis courts, two of which are painted for pickleball

Contact: Gaston County Tourism Development, gogastonnc.org.

GOLDSBORO

Nestled in the heart of eastern North Carolina between Raleigh and the coast, Goldsboro is a destination with a rich culture and heritage, which has deep military and agricultural roots.

Hotel rooms: 1,274

Major facility:

- Bryan Multi-Sports Complex houses a combo of eight natural and artificial fields over 63 acres

Convention center: The Maxwell Convention Center is a 26,000-square-foot indoor space for gymnastics, dance, cheer, esports, volleyball, and more.

Contact: Goldsboro Travel & Tourism, greatergoldsboro.com.

GREENSBORO

Greensboro is home to state-of-the-art facilities for various sports, including basketball, pickleball, swimming and diving, soccer, track and field, martial arts, tennis, golf, and more.

Hotel rooms: 10,755

Major facilities:

- Greensboro Complex includes the 22,000-seat First Horizon Coliseum, 120,000-square-foot Special Events Center, 2,300-seat Novant Health Fieldhouse, and the Greensboro Aquatic Center
- Bryan Park Truist Soccer Complex boasts 21 fields
- Marcus T. Johnson Track at Truist Stadium is a premier track and field facility
- Greensboro Sportsplex features eight basketball and volleyball courts, four indoor soccer fields, and an in-line roller hockey rink
- J. Spencer Love Tennis Center boasts 18 courts

Contact: Visit Greensboro, visitgreensboronc.com.

GREENVILLE

Greenville is mainly accessible from the east and west via I-587. About an hour and a half west of downtown Greenville is Raleigh-Durham International Airport, which offers countless domestic and international flights.

Hotel rooms: 2,100

Major facilities:

- East Carolina University offers multiple venues to accommodate baseball, cross country, disc golf, lacrosse, rugby, soccer, and more
- Stallings Stadium hosts baseball and softball
- H. Boyd Lee Park features three lighted softball fields and four beach volleyball courts

Convention Center: Greenville Convention Center features more than 91,000 square feet of flexible indoor and outdoor event space, including a 57,000-square-foot convention center with 28-foot-high ceilings. The venue has hosted sports such as martial arts, gymnastics, dance, cheer, and cornhole.

Contact: Visit Greenville, visitgreenvillenc.com.

HENDERSON COUNTY

Henderson and Henderson County are great sports destinations thanks to their access to mountains, road biking trails, kayaking opportunities, golf courses, and more.

Hotel rooms: 1,923

Major facilities:

- Edneyville Community Park offers two tennis courts and a basketball court
- Etowah Park has tennis courts, four lighted ball fields, a basketball court, and a soccer field

- Jackson Park features eight lighted tennis courts, nine lighted baseball/softball fields, two soccer fields, and two lighted basketball courts

Contact: Henderson County Tourism Development Authority, visithendersonvillenc.org.

HICKORY

Hickory boasts a growing sports venue scene with the addition of new turf fields and a new 35,000-square-foot indoor facility.

Hotel rooms: 1,300

Major facility:

- Henry Fork River Park offers nine fields, with two additional fields under construction

Convention center: The Hickory Metro Convention Center is currently under construction. When completed this year, it will offer approximately 136,000 square feet of space on one level.

Contact: Hickory Metro CVB, visithickorymetro.com.

HIGH POINT

Thanks to its central location in the state, High Point is easily accessible. The city boasts top-notch facilities and typically hosts a variety of sports, including baseball, softball, and soccer.

Hotel rooms: 927

Hotel tax rate: 13.5 percent

Major facilities:

- Truist Point Stadium is a 4,024-seat stadium that accommodates baseball, soccer, football, lacrosse, and more
- High Point Athletic Complex features eight multipurpose fields, one football stadium, one baseball field, and one track with field areas
- Johnson Street Sports Complex includes two T-ball fields, one baseball field, and three softball fields
- Deep River Recreation Center includes multiple baseball/softball fields, tennis courts, gym, and basketball courts
- Allen Jay Recreation Center houses three baseball fields, two softball fields, two basketball courts, and two lighted pickleball courts

Contact: Visit High Point, visithighpoint.com.

JACKSONVILLE

Jacksonville is located in Onslow County. The city offers convenient access to shopping, restaurants, and even the beach.

Hotel rooms: 2,900

Hotel tax rate: 13 percent

Major facilities:

- Jacksonville Commons has two youth ballfields, two adult ballfields, tennis courts, and soccer fields
- Kerr Street Park has one baseball/softball field,

and basketball and tennis courts

- Woodlands Park features six rectangular fields
- NEC has two adult ballfields

Contact: Jacksonville-Onslow Sports Commission, playjosc.com.

JOHNSTON COUNTY

Johnston County, N.C., offers a unique and appealing destination for sporting events. It combines excellent facilities with convenient accessibility. Strategically

located at the intersection of I-95 and I-40, the county provides easy access for participants and spectators traveling from various regions.

Hotel rooms: 2,692

Hotel tax rate: ranges from 9.75 percent to 11.75 percent, depending on the location

Major facilities:

- Smithfield Recreation and Aquatics Center has two gyms and a 50-meter pool
- Smithfield Community Park has four baseball fields, four

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Carolina Hurricanes Fan Fest

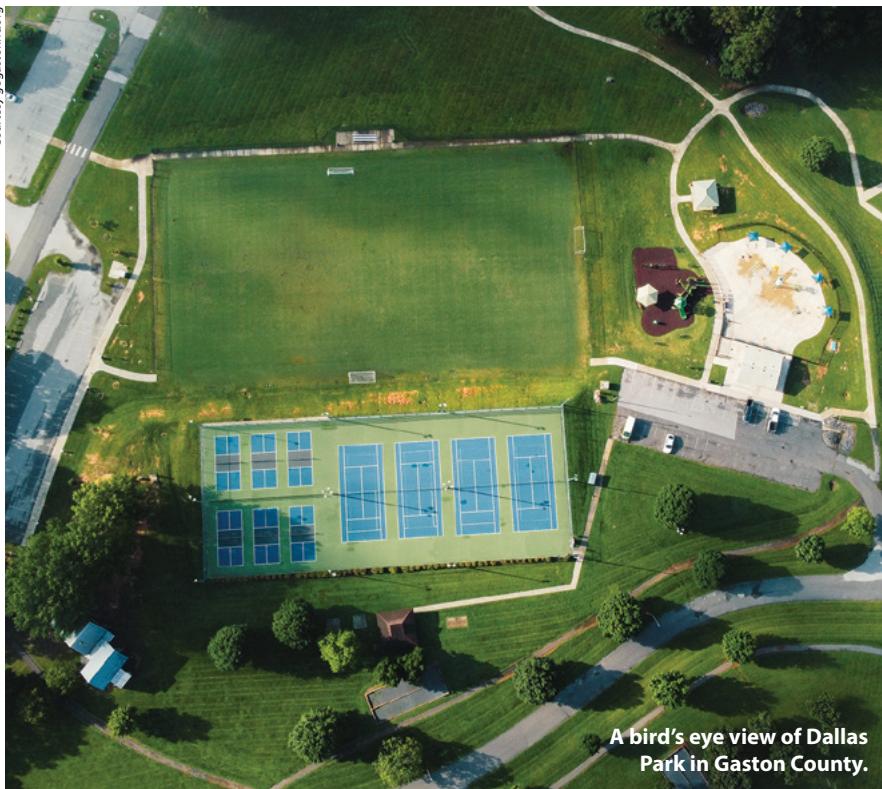


When Raleigh, N.C., serves as the backdrop for major events, the whole city gets involved. The Carolina Hurricanes Fan Fest, in tandem with the 2023 NHL Stadium Series, turned downtown Raleigh into a hockey hotspot, proving that sporting events can spark full-scale festival-style experiences. **Want that kind of energy behind your event? GRSA knows how to help you build it.**



raleighsports.org/ideas

Courtesy gogastomc.org



A bird's eye view of Dallas Park in Gaston County.

tennis courts, two basketball courts, two soccer fields, one football field, and a nine-hole disc golf course

- Clayton Community Park includes two baseball fields, one youth baseball field, two sand volleyball courts, and six tennis courts
- East Clayton Community Park has one baseball field, four multipurpose fields, one soccer field, and an 18-hole disc golf course
- Benson Lee Street Complex consists of one multipurpose field, two baseball fields, one outdoor basketball court, and one gym

Contact: Johnston County Visitors Bureau, johnstoncountync.org.

LAKE NORMAN

Lake Norman is home to many quality and versatile venues, including Lake Norman, the largest manmade lake in the Carolinas with 520 miles of shoreline.

Hotel rooms: 1,728

Hotel tax rate: 15.25 percent

Major facilities:

- Huntersville Family Fitness & Aquatics has a 50-meter pool and a 10-meter dive tower
- Davidson College's Baker Sports Complex has a 4,300-seat arena
- Richard Barry Park includes six soccer/multiuse fields
- Spartan Park has a synthetic turf field
- Bradford Park consists of five baseball/softball fields and three soccer/lacrosse fields

- Huntersville Athletic Park has four synthetic turf baseball fields

Contact: Visit Lake Norman, visitlakenorman.org.

MOUNT AIRY

Mount Airy is in the northwest part of North Carolina. The city is appealing as a tournament host because of its close proximity to facilities. Mount Airy has eight gyms within a two-mile radius and three more within five miles.

Hotels: approximately 13 properties

Major facilities:

- Graham Field is a lighted baseball facility
- Riverside Park has a lighted soccer field and a skate park
- Westwood Park includes two lighted baseball/softball fields, a nine-hole disc golf course, and mountain bike trails

Contact: Mount Airy Visitors Center, visitmayberry.com.

NASH COUNTY

Nash County and Rocky Mount sit at the intersection of I-95 and U.S. 64, two of the East Coast's most-traveled corridors, placing us within a two-hour drive of Raleigh, the Research Triangle, and the Virginia border. Rocky Mount is the second-largest hotel exit off I-95 in North Carolina, meaning traveling teams and families arrive to a full range of lodging, dining, shopping, and entertainment options just minutes from their venue.

Hotel rooms: 2,400

Hotel tax rate: 11.75 percent

Major facilities:

- The Rocky Mount Sports Complex is a 143-acre complex that boasts six youth playing fields, four softball/multipurpose fields, one championship baseball field, eight soccer fields, and a disc golf course
- Rocky Mount Event Center is a 165,000-square-foot multipurpose venue with 16 full-size volleyball courts
- Miracle Park at Coopers has two baseball fields, two softball fields, outdoor basketball courts, and soccer fields
- Glover Park includes four baseball/softball fields, two basketball courts, a football field, and a multiuse field

Contact: Nash County Travel and Tourism, explorenashcounty.com.

OUTER BANKS

The Outer Banks is a 200-mile stretch of barrier islands just off the coast of North Carolina. From iconic lighthouses to three national parks, wild horse safaris, group-friendly festivals, and miles of rolling sand dunes, there is plenty to do and see.

Hotel rooms: 3,100

Hotel tax rate: 12.75 percent

Major facilities:

- The area offers 10 soccer/lacrosse fields and six high school or middle school gyms

Contact: Outer Banks Visitors Bureau, Outerbanks.org.

PINEHURST

The Pinehurst, Southern Pines, Aberdeen Area is a globally recognized golf destination. Centrally located in the middle of the state, the destination is easily accessible from cities like Raleigh, Charlotte, Greensboro, and other locations within a four- to five-hour radius.

Hotel rooms: 2,300

Hotel tax rate: 10 percent

Major facilities:

- The Pickle Place has four indoor pickleball courts
- Morganton Road Sports Complex contains the Armory softball/baseball field, the Optimist baseball field, and four soccer fields
- The Moore County Sports Complex has four multipurpose sports fields, a gym, two high school basketball courts, four volleyball courts, and four pickleball courts
- National Athletic Village in Southern Pines offers 80 acres with grass fields, an indoor

multisport court, a 3D archery range, an airsoft field, a performance gym, and a Spartan-like obstacle course

Contact: Pinehurst-Southern Pines-Aberdeen Area CVB, homeofgolf.com.

RALEIGH

Raleigh is solidifying its status as a premier sports destination by continuously offering a unique mix of world-class venues, a passionate sports community, and a strong history of hosting elite sporting events.

Hotel rooms: 18,000

Hotel tax rate: 13 percent

Major facilities:

- Lenovo Center is a multipurpose indoor venue housing 700,000 square feet of space
- Cary Tennis Park boasts 32 tennis courts, including one stadium court, and four pickleball courts
- Reynolds Coliseum is a 5,500-seat multipurpose venue
- Triangle Aquatic Center, in Cary, houses a 50-meter, eight-lane competition pool
- USA Baseball National Training Complex includes four baseball fields

Truist Point Stadium in High Point is home of the High Point Rockers baseball team and Carolina Core Football Club.



Courtesy Visit High Point

Play in the Heart!

Randolph County, in the Heart of North Carolina, offers a variety of sporting venues for enthusiasts of all ages. From baseball diamonds to golf courses, there's something for everyone. Experience the new Cone Health ZooCity Sportsplex in Asheboro, a state-of-the-art sports complex that's a popular destination for youth and adult leagues, tournaments, special events, and more!



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Wilmington hosts an annual IRONMAN 70.3 North Carolina triathlon.

- WakeMed Soccer Park is a 150-acre park with a 10,000-seat stadium and seven additional soccer fields

Convention center: With 500,000 square feet of functional space, Raleigh Convention Center can host a variety of sports, including indoor volleyball, basketball, cheerleading, wrestling, martial arts, gymnastics, esports tournaments, and more.

Contact: Greater Raleigh Sports Alliance, visitraleigh.com/sports-event-planners.

TRIANGLE REGION

The Triangle Region is comprised of Wake, Durham, and Orange Counties. Thanks in part to its 10 colleges and universities, the Triangle features one of the finest collections of sports venues per capita in the world.

Hotel rooms: 26,500

Hotel tax rate: ranges depending on county

Major facilities:

- Kenan Stadium, Carter-Finley Stadium, Wallace Wade Stadium, and O'Kelly Riddick Stadium all host football
- Dean Smith Center, Lenovo Center, Cameron Indoor Stadium, Carmichael Arena, Dorton Arena, Reynolds Coliseum, and McLendon McDougald Gymnasium are all arenas
- Leroy T. Walker Complex, NetSports, and Triangle Sportsplex are multipurpose venues
- Koury Natatorium, Taishoff Aquatics Pavilion, Walker Complex Aquatics Center, and Pullen Aquatic Center host aquatics

Contact: Triangle Sports Commission, trianglesportscommission.com.

WILKESBORO

Wilkesboro, located in Wilkes County, is establishing itself as a premier, multi-faceted sporting event destination, blending its deep-rooted NASCAR heritage with a growing reputation for outdoor adventure sports. Located in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains, the area offers a mix of high-adrenaline racing, technical trail riding, and premier shooting sports.

Hotel rooms: 350

Hotel Tax Rate: 13 percent

Major Facilities:

- North Wilkesboro Speedway has a capacity 30,000
- The 203-acre Cub Creek Park. includes six baseball fields, three basketball courts, two tennis courts, and eight pickleball courts, and four mountain biking trails
- Lowe's Park at Rivers Edge includes three full-size soccer fields, five youth-sized soccer fields, five softball fields, and two baseball fields
- The 1,475-acre W. Kerr Scott Dam and Reservoir is great for fishing, watersports, and mountain biking
- Hidden Brook Sporting Club is 285-acre facility offering 14-station sporting clays, skeet, trap, 3D archery, and mountain biking trails
- Yadkin Valley Event Center has 5,000 square feet of space

Contact: Wilkesboro TDA, wilkesboronc.org.

WILMINGTON AND BEACHES

Nestled along the Cape Fear River, Wilmington, and its island beaches have hosted many diverse events filled

with good times and record-breaking participation. Its welcoming year-round weather, breathtaking beaches, and bustling riverfront are fan favorites.

Hotel rooms: 8,000

Hotel tax rate: 13 percent

Major facilities:

- Althea Gibson Tennis Complex features 24 lighted tennis courts
- nCino Sports Park has 11 full-size soccer fields
- Legion Sports Complex includes Jurgenson-Gabriel Field, Legion Back Field, Buck Hardee (Baseball) Field, Robert Shipp Pool, and four lighted tennis courts
- Olsen Park features five lighted baseball/softball fields, a volleyball court, and Miracle Field

Convention center: The Wilmington Convention Center has a 30,000-square-foot exhibit hall, a 12,000-square-foot ballroom, and more. The venue hosts sports such as cheerleading, dance, gymnastics, and weightlifting.

Contact: Wilmington and Beaches CVB, wilmingtonandbeaches.com.

WINSTON-SALEM

Winston-Salem delivers the rare combination of big-city amenities and boutique-scale charm, making it a place that feels dynamic, intimate, and uncomplicated.

Hotel rooms: 5,500

Hotel tax rate: 13 percent

Major facilities:

- Ivey M. Redmond Sports Complex is a 189-acre complex with five soccer fields, three lighted baseball/softball fields, two multipurpose fields, and a multi-distant cross-country course
- RISE Indoor Sports Complex features eight high-school regulation basketball courts, 12 regulation volleyball courts, and pickleball courts
- Truist Sports Park boasts 15 full-sized fields, including a 1,400-seat stadium field and four artificial turf fields
- JDL Fast Track is a 105,000-square-foot facility with a 200-meter oval track made of Mondotrack FTX surfaces
- Joe White Tennis Center features 20 lighted courts

Convention center: The Benton Convention Center offers 150,000 square feet of flexible space and hosts sports such as martial arts, fencing, cheer, and dance. The facility is conveniently adjacent to the Marriott Hotel Winston-Salem and Embassy Suites Hotel Winston-Salem.

Contact: Visit Winston-Salem, visitwinstonsalem.com. ■

SPOTLIGHT ON: NEW MEXICO

New Mexico is a homerun sports destination thanks to its year-round sunshine, dramatic landscapes, and wide-ranging terrain that naturally lend themselves to outdoor competition. From high-desert trails and rugged mountain backdrops to open plains and scenic urban venues, the Land of Enchantment provides a striking setting for everything from endurance races and cycling events to youth tournaments and multisport festivals. Add in accessible travel routes and a rich cultural backdrop that enhances every visit, and the state delivers a sports experience that is visually unforgettable and operationally dependable. "New Mexico's leisure experience is a unique offering that many folks traveling for sporting competitions won't find elsewhere," says Cody Johnson, Communications director for the New Mexico Tourism Department. ■

The 2024 USA Gymnastics Region 3 Championships were held at the Albuquerque Convention Center. ▶



Courtesy Core-Visual

NEW MEXICO



MUST SEE:

Gatewave

In Farmington, one of the most unique outdoor experiences to catch is Gatewave, the city's newest river feature on the Animas River. This professionally engineered river wave creates a continuous surfable feature where athletes can ride the current in a controlled but dynamic environment. ■

Courtesy Visit Farmington

ALBUQUERQUE

As the largest city in New Mexico, Albuquerque is rich in history and culture. From unique architecture to one-of-a-kind cuisine, the city offers an immersive experience for visitors of all ages. With more than 310 days of sunshine each year and a mild four-season climate, Albuquerque is the perfect location for both outdoor and indoor sporting events.

Hotel rooms: 17,000

Hotel tax rate: 15.625 percent

Major facilities:

- Jennifer Riordan Spark Kindness Regional Sports Complex features five collegiate-level baseball fields that can also accommodate softball
- Balloon Fiesta Park is an 86-acre multipurpose grass park
- New Mexico Soccer Tournament Complex features 22 grass fields
- Jerry Cline Tennis Complex has 18 courts
- Manzano Mesa Pickleball Facility houses 33 lighted courts

- Los Altos Softball Complex encompasses five lighted softball fields

Convention center: The 600,000-square-foot Albuquerque Convention Center is a versatile facility that can accommodate a variety of sports from archery to volleyball.

Contact: Visit Albuquerque, visitalbuquerque.org.

FARMINGTON

Farmington is a standout destination for sports and outdoor recreation, offering quality facilities for baseball, soccer, golf, aquatic events, wrestling, and more. With convenient amenities and plenty to experience outside of competition, Farmington offers a memorable setting for tournaments and sporting events.

Hotel rooms: 1,707

Hotel tax rate: 13.19 percent

Major facilities:

- Farmington Aquatic Center houses a 50-meter by 25-yard indoor pool

Courtesy Visit Farmington



New Mexico is a haven for mountain biking.

- Hadley Sports Complex boasts 11 baseball/softball fields
- Pan American Center is a 12,000-seat multipurpose arena
- Aggie Memorial Stadium is a 30,000-seat college football stadium
- Field of Dreams Complex has a football stadium, a softball four-plex and a baseball three-plex

Convention center: The Las Cruces Convention Center has hosted numerous events such as the US Combat Sports Grapplefest and Battle of the Badges Boxing event.

Contact: Visit Las Cruces, visittascruces.com.

RIO RANCHO

Rio Rancho's mild high desert climate allows for outdoor sports almost year-round with close to 300 days of sunshine each year.

Hotel rooms: 445

Major facilities:

- Rio Rancho Events Center is a 7,000-seat multipurpose facility
- Rio Rancho Sports Complex has seven softball fields that can also accommodate soccer and football
- Bernalillo Soccer Complex features 22 fields
- McDermott Athletic Center is a 60,000-square-foot arena for baseball, basketball, and hockey
- Rio Rancho Aquatic Center includes an eight-lane, 25-yard pool

Contact: Visit Rio Rancho, visitorio Rancho.org.

SANTA FE

Santa Fe is located at an elevation of 7,000 feet, which makes it an ideal high-elevation training ground for athletes. The city also ranks high for having the best air quality in the U.S.

Hotel rooms: 5,000

Hotel tax rate: 15.19 percent

Major facilities:

- Municipal Recreation Sports Complex has a BMX track with bleachers, five soccer fields, four baseball fields, and two rugby fields
- Genoveva Chavez Community Center houses an Olympic-sized pool, three volleyball courts, indoor track, and an ice rink
- Las Campanas has two Jack Nicklaus-designed golf courses
- Forked Lightning Racquet Club features a total of 27 courts, including 12 tennis courts, 12 pickleball courts, and three padel courts

Convention center: The 72,000-square-foot Santa Fe Community Convention Center boasts 40,000 square feet of indoor flexible meeting space.

Contact: Tourism Santa Fe, santafe.org. ■

Courtesy Tourism Santa Fe



HIPICO Santa Fe is a highly regarded equestrian facility.

- Ricketts Park is a 6,100-seat baseball/softball stadium
- Home to the Connie Mack World Series, Worley Field is a recently upgraded baseball facility
- Farmington Sports Complex includes a lighted baseball/softball complex, eight tennis courts, and 16 pickleball courts
- Justis Park Complex is a four-field complex
- Memorial Coliseum is a 67,000-square-foot building with a 29,000-square-foot arena

Contact: Farmington CVB, farmingtonnm.org.

LAS CRUCES

Las Cruces is nestled in the Mesilla Valley between the Organ Mountains and the Rio Grande. With a mild climate, 320 days of sunshine each year, and average annual rainfall of just over 10 inches, Las Cruces is the ideal destination for year-round recreation and competition.

Hotel rooms: 3,000

Hotel tax rate: 13.39 percent plus \$2.50 per room, per night

Major facilities:

- High Noon Soccer Complex consists of 12 soccer fields

SPOTLIGHT ON: NEW HAMPSHIRE

With its mix of mountain terrain, lakeside recreation, and well-equipped athletic facilities, New Hampshire offers an ideal setting for sports events across every season. The Granite State has built a strong reputation for outdoor competition, from skiing and snowboarding in the winter to trail running, cycling, paddlesports, and field sports during the warmer months. Its location in the heart of New England also makes travel convenient for teams and spectators throughout the Northeast, while charming downtowns, scenic venues, and year-round recreational opportunities give visitors plenty to experience beyond the competition itself. ■

Manchester is home to the annual Shamrock Shuffle and Lil' Leprechaun Run. ►



Courtesy Jeffrey Hastings/Frame of Mind Photography

NEW HAMPSHIRE

CONCORD

Located just 90 minutes north of Boston, Concord is less than one hour from ocean beaches, stunning lakes, and the mighty White Mountains. Concord features state-of-the-art theater and music, unique restaurants, and tax-free shopping, and the city limits contain pristine forests and riverside beaches.

Hotel rooms: 1,000

Hotel tax rate: nine percent

Major facilities:

- New Hampshire Motor Speedway seats 100,000 for NASCAR races
- Memorial Field and Douglas N. Everett Arena accommodate baseball, football, and hockey

Contact: Greater Concord Chamber of Commerce, concordnhchamber.com.

LAKES REGION

The Lakes Region is in central New Hampshire, about two hours from Boston and about one hour from the Manchester-Boston Regional airport. The area is known for its scenic beauty, clean lakes, and beaches.

Hotels: Approximately 40 properties

Hotel tax rate: 8.5 percent

Major facilities:

- Plymouth State University offers ice arenas,

basketball courts, fields, indoor pools, and tennis courts

- Gilford Village Field includes four lighted tennis courts, a lighted basketball court, a soccer field, and two baseball diamonds
- Stonewall Park in Gilford has an enclosed baseball diamond and dugouts, and bleachers

Contact: Lakes Region Tourism Association, lakesregion.org.

MANCHESTER

Nestled in south-central New Hampshire along the Merrimack River is Manchester. The largest city in northern New England, Manchester is just 20 miles from the Massachusetts border and 58 miles from Boston.

Hotel rooms: 1,858

Hotel tax rate: 8.5 percent

Major facilities:

- Home to the Minor League Baseball team, the New Hampshire Fisher Cats, Delta Dental Stadium is a ballpark with a capacity of 6,500
- SNHU Arena is a multipurpose venue that seats up to 9,852 for ice hockey and 11,140 for basketball
- McIntyre Ski Area is a local ski hill with 11 trails, two lifts, two magic carpets, and conveyor-served snowtubing

- JFK Memorial Coliseum is an indoor ice rink
- West Side Ice Arena is an indoor ice rink
- Derryfield Country Club is an 18-hole public golf course

Contact: Greater Manchester Chamber, manchester-chamber.org.

NASHUA

Nashua stands out as a unique and attractive destination for sporting events due to its combination of accessibility, facilities, and local charm. Conveniently located near the Massachusetts border and just an hour's drive from Boston, Nashua is easily accessible via major highways like Route 3 and I-93, making it an ideal location for regional events.

Hotel rooms: 1,228

Hotel tax rate: 8.5 percent

Major facilities:

- Holman Stadium is a 2,800-seat ballpark
- Mine Falls Park includes six soccer fields, one softball field, roller hockey rink, basketball courts, and baseball fields
- Greeley Park has baseball/softball fields and tennis courts

Contact: Greater Nashua Chamber of Commerce, nashuachamber.com. ■



Artificial turf

BY BOB SEXTON

Wherever you land on the artificial turf debate, there's no question it has had a major impact on the way sports are played and facilities are managed. Not only does artificial turf make it possible to create recreational playing surfaces in places where grass doesn't normally grow, but in some ways, it literally changed sport dynamics—the way balls bounce and roll, for example. First developed by the Monsanto company in the early 1960s as a durable surface for inner-city playgrounds, artificial turf's first real connection to sports came about because of a design error at the then-new Astrodome in Houston. When the stadium opened in 1965, it had natural grass, and clear Lucite panels in the roof to let the sun in. However, during the Houston Astros' inaugural season, players complained they couldn't see the ball in the glare from the sun, so the panels were painted over. That helped with the glare, but the grass died, so in 1966, the stadium installed the turf, originally called ChemGrass, but what soon became known

as Astroturf. It didn't take long for it to catch on, and by the mid-1970s, it had found its way into virtually every major sport. Not that the first generation of Astroturf didn't have detractors. Just ask anyone who may still have rug-burn scars from falling on it. Indeed, most of the criticism around artificial turf centers around athlete safety. That's especially so in the NFL, where it's been blamed for ending or altering the careers of numerous players, such as Wendell Davis and Aaron Rodgers. Of course, artificial turf has come a long way since the early days when it was little more than rough nylon carpet laid over a thin layer of foam atop concrete or asphalt. Today, it's made with hi-tech polymers and infilled with rubber pellets, sand, or other environmentally friendly materials, giving it the feel and cushioning of natural grass. Ultimately, it has transformed athletics by enabling year-round play and dramatically reducing field maintenance. More than six decades after its invention, artificial turf remains one of the most influential innovations in sports. ■

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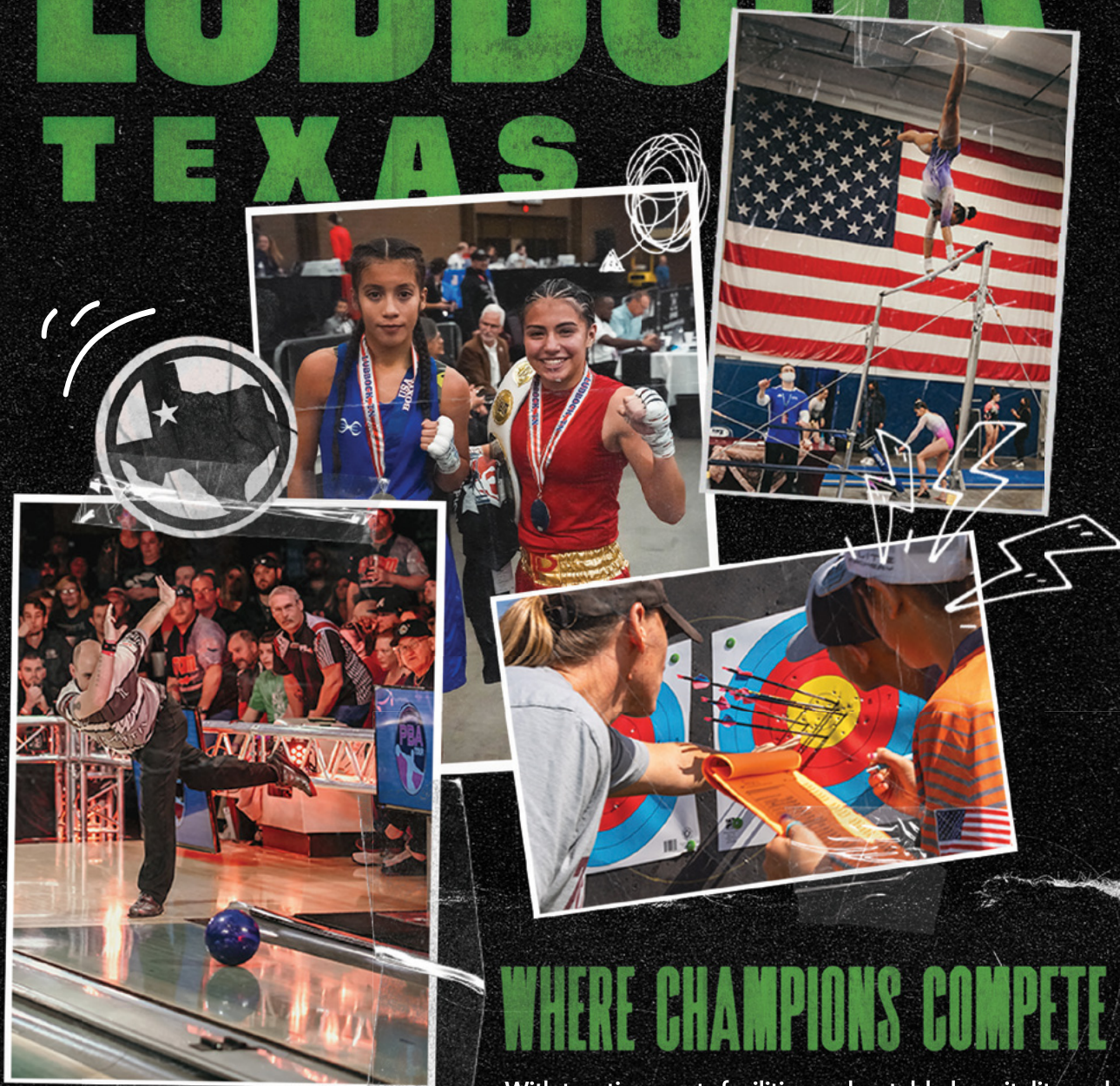
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