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November 2026

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BPA WORLDWIDE

EDITOR'S PLAY•BY•PLAY

Fishing for information

Drifting in my 14-foot kayak along the shoreline of an unnamed lake last fall (well, it has a name, but I'm not about to give up a hot spot), I started to wonder if my luck would hold. On each of my previous three drifts, I'd caught a chunky smallmouth bass, so I was hopeful. But as time went on, I was growing increasingly skeptical that it would happen again. Sure enough, just as I reached the "spot on the spot," I felt the familiar tug on the tube jig I was hopping along the bottom, set the hook, and felt a rush of amazement as the fish spun my boat around in its attempt to get free, then exploded out of the water like a submerged football.

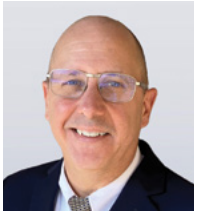
After a little give-and-take, I managed to reel it in alongside the boat, lip it, remove the hook, take a blurry selfie, and slip the fish back into the water to fight another day.

I was reminded in that moment not only of how much I enjoy fishing, but of fishing from a kayak in particular. And judging from the American Sportfishing Association's *2025 Special Report on Fishing*, I'm hardly alone. According to the report, kayak fishing nearly doubled its share of American angling outings over the last decade, climbing from four percent of all trips in 2014 to seven percent in 2024. Meanwhile, the growth of high-level tournament circuits such as the Bassmaster Kayak Series, Kayak Bass Fishing, and USA Bassin shows that kayak fishing has evolved from a casual weekend hobby into a highly structured, professional sport, with hundreds of elite anglers traveling across the country to compete.

That growth translates into new opportunities for planners and destinations. However, organizers say many destinations don't fully understand the differences between kayak tournaments and traditional boat tournaments. For my story, "A different cast," on page 16, I asked organizers what sets kayak tournaments apart and why destinations may want to consider hosting one.

Also in this issue, contributor Paige Townley looks at how deck shuffleboard is evolving and attracting a whole new generation of players (see "Playing against type," on page 12). Meanwhile, writer Keith Loria interviews athletic trainers to find out what planners need to know when arranging medical support for their sports events. Turn to page eight to read his piece, "Behind the sidelines."

For even more practical information, check out the results of our latest Industry Outlook Survey on page five. We trust you'll find the findings both interesting and useful. Finally, as part of our regular series of state spotlights, we've got the details you need to plan events in Arizona, Delaware, Florida, Nebraska, Vermont, and Virginia. Enjoy, and, as always, feel free to drop me a line at bsexton@kenilworth.com with feedback or a story idea. ■



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On The Cover:
North Carolina angler Wyatt Hammond hoists a hefty largemouth bass at the Newport Bassmaster Kayak Series tournament on the Susquehanna River in August 2026.
Courtesy B.A.S.S./Mark Cisneros

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THE COST OF KEEPING THE GAME GOING



Survey results show that the sports event calendar may be holding up, but the economics of staging events are getting tighter

BY BOB SEXTON

More than anyone, planners know the challenges of putting on a successful sports event: finding the right venue, controlling costs, securing sponsors, and delivering a great experience for athletes, teams, and fans. And with expenses rising and staffing challenges persisting, the job isn't getting any easier. Yet demand remains strong, with planners organizing more events and registration holding steady or increasing for most. Our 2026 Sports Tourism Industry Outlook Study explores the pressures shaping the industry, from rising operating costs and limited venue availability to sponsorship hurdles and volunteer shortages. Here's what planners are telling us about the state of the industry, and what it means for the tournaments and events they're planning in the year ahead.

The overview

Respondents to our 2026 Sports Tourism Industry Outlook Study host an average of 24 tournaments and events a year, with 57.7% organizing at least 21 and 44.4% hosting more than 30. Their events also draw sizable fields, averaging 313 participants per tournament or event. More than half of respondents (56.8%) report events with over 300 participants, while one in four report events with over 500 participants.

That activity spans the country, with respondents planning tournaments and events in all 50 states over the next 12 months. Florida was the most frequently cited state, followed by Kansas, New York, and Washington.

But a busy calendar and steady demand don't necessarily translate into an easier operating environment. While registration numbers are holding steady or increasing for most respondents, the cost of delivering events continues to climb. Among those answering the operating cost question, 64.5% said their costs were higher than the previous year. Meanwhile, 89.4% of those answering the registration question reported that registrations were about the same or had increased.

The contrast offers a snapshot of a familiar planning challenge: demand may be holding up, but organizers still have to find ways to pay for the people, places, and services that make events possible.

This study gathered responses from people involved in sports events, including rights holders, event planners, and sports commissions. The results point to several connected pain points: rising operating costs, competition for suitable facilities, difficulty securing sponsors, and a shortage of volunteers.

They also show how planners are responding, from raising registration fees to negotiating better vendor terms and using technology to support event operations.

Figure 1 Issues having the biggest impact on events

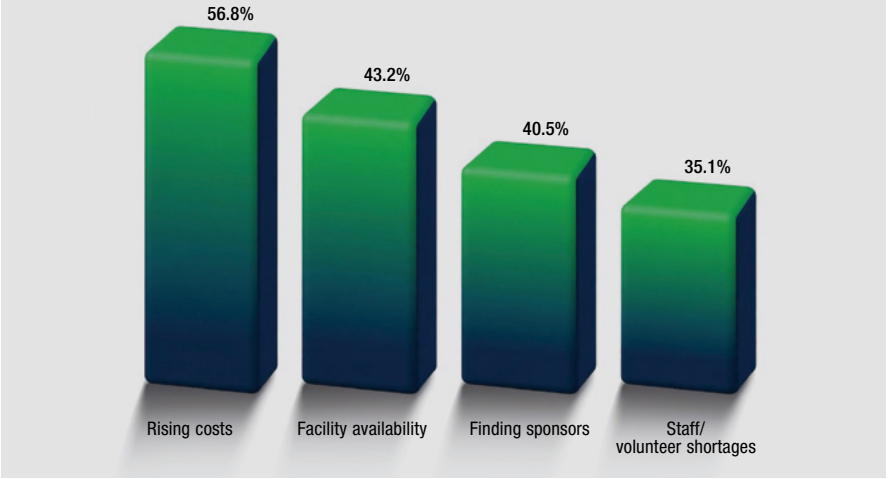
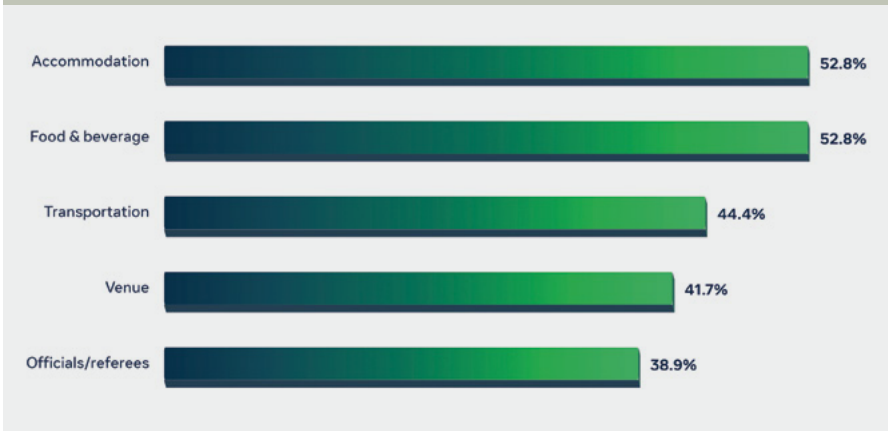


Figure 2 Which event-related costs have increased



The price of putting on a tournament

Among respondents who identified issues affecting their events over the past 12 months, rising costs were the most frequently cited challenge, at 56.8%. Facility availability ranked at 43.2%, followed by finding sponsors at 40.5%, and staffing or volunteer shortages at 35.1% (see figure 1).

The expense categories help explain the pressure. Accommodation and food and beverage were each identified by 52.8% of respondents answering the question about rising costs (see figure 2). Transportation was cited by 44.4%, venue expenses by 41.7%, and officials or referees by 38.9%. Those costs can touch different parts of an event budget, from lodging for traveling teams to the practical expenses of operating a venue and paying qualified officials.

Planners are taking a range of steps to respond. Just over half of those answering the question said they were increasing registration fees (51.7%), while 48.3% were making greater efforts to secure sponsors. About one-third (34.5%) said they were negotiating better vendor contracts or terms. Smaller shares reported changing venues or using more volunteers (17.2% each).

Some are also trimming spending. Food and beverage were the most frequently selected areas for cost cuts, at 37%, followed by marketing (22%), entertainment (18.5%), and venue selection (14.8%). Nearly three in 10 respondents to that question said they had not cut costs.

These responses illustrate the balancing act organizers face: reducing expenses can help protect a budget, but decisions about food, marketing, awards, or entertainment may also affect the experience they want to deliver. The survey does not measure the effects of individual choices, but the mix of strategies suggests planners are looking across both revenue and expense lines for ways to keep events viable.

Finding room to grow

The cost squeeze is only part of the challenge. Suitable facilities can be a limiting factor in whether events grow, and they also play a major role in where organizers choose to host them.

Half of the respondents answering the question about growth challenges selected the availability of suitable facilities. Increasing costs came next at 39.3%, while budgets, competition from other organizations, and securing sponsors each drew 32.1%. Travel costs were cited by 21.4% (see Figure 3).

When asked what most effects destination and venue selection, 66.7% identified venue availability and 55.6% pointed to venue cost. Accommodation costs (40.7%), local or CVB support (37%) and accommodation availability (33.3%) also featured prominently. In other words, a destination may be attractive, but planners still need the right facility at a workable price, along with lodging and local support.

Repeat business appears important in this equation. Among those who answered the question, 88.5% said they host events at repeat destinations or venues. Location was the most frequently selected reason for returning (67.9%), followed by participant feedback (53.6%), venue suitability, and relationships with destination or venue staff (50% each). Destination experiences and local attractions were also a factor for 46.4%, while cost was cited by 42.9%.

For destinations and venues, the findings suggest that retaining an event is about more than a one-time bid. Reliable facilities, good working relationships, and a positive participant experience all matter to organizers deciding whether to return.

People and partnerships matter

Even when a facility is available, events need people to run them and partners to help fund them. The survey identifies both as pressure points. Volunteers were by far the most frequently selected hard-to-fill staffing role, cited by 63.3% of respondents to that question. Officials and referees followed at 23.3%, while medical personnel were cited by 13.3%. Volunteer shortages also appeared among the broader challenges affecting events, selected by 35.1% of respondents answering that question.

Sponsorship is another concern. Of those who answered the question about whether they solicit sponsors, 73.1% said they do. Among respondents who answered the follow-up question about securing sponsors, 52.6% said it had become harder over the past 12 months, while 36.8% said it was about the same. One respondent said sponsorship was easier, and one said it was much harder.

To counter rising expenses, 48.3% of respondents to the relevant question said they were increasing their efforts to secure sponsors. The results do not explain why sponsorship has become more difficult or which approaches are most successful, but they underline the importance of partnerships in the event planning mix.

Figure 3 Biggest challenges to growing events

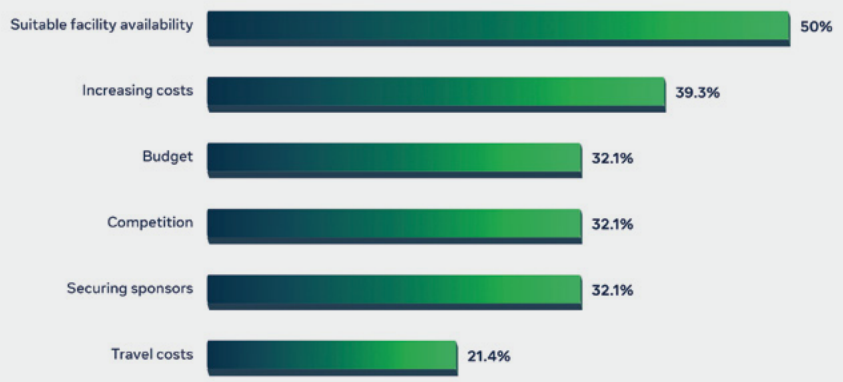
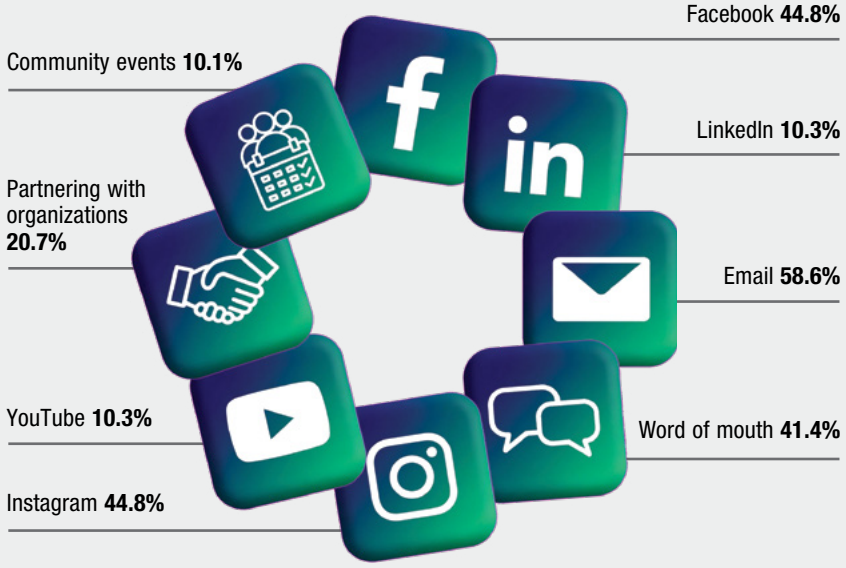


Figure 4 Marketing tactics identified as most successful



For organizers, the practical challenge is to make the event attractive not only to participants, but also to volunteers, officials, sponsors, and local partners whose support helps make it possible.

Evolving use of marketing and technology

Planners are also using familiar marketing channels and event technology to support their work. Email was the most commonly used marketing tactic, selected by 80.6% of respondents answering that question. Instagram followed at 71% and Facebook at 67.7%. Word-of-mouth was used by 54.8%, while YouTube and partnerships with other organizations were each selected by 41.9%.

Asked which tactics were most successful, 58.6% selected email. Facebook and Instagram tied at 44.8%, followed by word-of-mouth at 41.4% (see figure 4). The pattern suggests that planners are relying on channels they already use and, in many cases, consider effective.

Among technologies identified as having a positive impact, live streaming led at 44%, followed by registration software at 32% and scheduling software at 24%. Mobile apps were selected by 20% of respondents, while CRM or marketing software and AI tools each drew 16%.

AI use remains limited among those answering that question: 20% said they use AI tools, while 80% said they do not. Among the small group reporting AI use, common applications included administrative tasks, graphic design, presentations and content creation.

The bottom line

Taken together, the survey's findings show planners working across several fronts: managing expenses, securing the right facilities, finding people and sponsors, and choosing tools to support their work. Registrations may be holding steady for many respondents, but sustaining an event still requires close attention to the details behind the competition. For organizers looking to grow, the task is not simply to attract more participants. It is to build an event model that can keep pace with the costs and resources required to deliver it. ■

BEHIND THE SIDELINES

What athletic trainers wish every sports event planner knew

BY KEITH LORIA

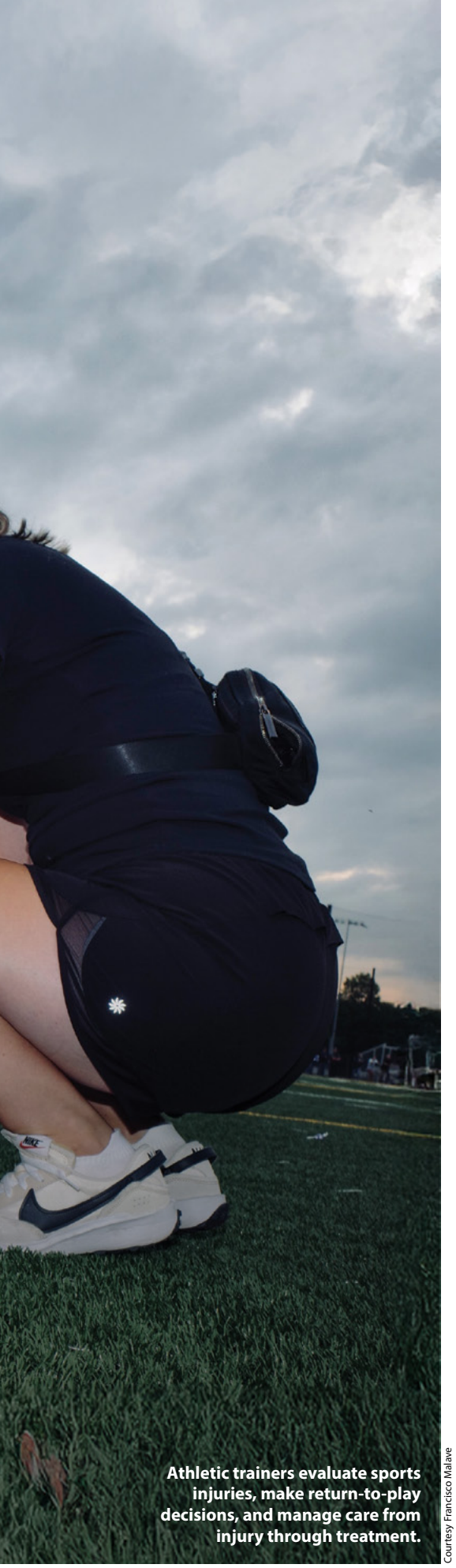


Sports event planners have a lot on their plates, and while they do their best to map every field, schedule every game, and brief every volunteer, if they're not thinking about athlete care, they are missing an important component of the day or tournament.

In fact, too often those responsible for the care of athletes at these events are simply given little more than an address and a start time. That information gap can slow routine treatment and complicate the response to a serious emergency.

Today's athletic trainers want planners to see medical coverage as part of event operations rather than a service added shortly before competition. After all, their work begins well before an injury occurs. They help identify risks, determine appropriate staffing, inspect venues, establish communication systems, stage lifesaving equipment, and develop an emergency action plan that fits the event taking place that day.

Here are 10 top tips from trainers with experience at sporting events to provide planners a practical starting point for building medical coverage into an event from the beginning.



Athletic trainers evaluate sports injuries, make return-to-play decisions, and manage care from injury through treatment.

Courtesy Francisco Malave

1 Bring the medical team in at the start

Athletic trainers can help shape decisions that become difficult or expensive to change later, including the event footprint, staffing model, treatment space, equipment needs and ambulance access.

Erica Marcano, MS, LAT, ATC, CSCS, founder of The Notorious ATC, helps coordinate coverage for large rugby tournaments through the Rugby Research and Injury Prevention Group. Her rugby tournament directors offer a model for that collaboration.

Medical consent forms are included in registration packets, medical questions are given time during coaches' and captains' meetings, and the clinicians are notified when schedules or the run of show change.

"Include an athletic trainer as soon as possible in the planning process," Marcano says. "Our expertise in emergency action planning and appropriate medical coverage structure will complement yours and allow you to focus on the other elements of tournament planning while we help ensure that safety standards are met and hopefully exceeded."

Pat Helma, a licensed chiropractic physician and assistant professor at University of Western States, brings more than 30 years of clinical experience and a sports chiropractic perspective to field-of-play care and is unequivocal about when clinical planning should begin.

"From inception," Helma says. "The event medical manager will be able to identify potential risks that participants and spectators may be likely to encounter."

2 Hire the right health care professionals

The credential after a person's name does not automatically make that person the right clinician for sideline care. Athletic trainers are trained to evaluate sports injuries, make return-to-play decisions, and manage care from the moment an athlete is hurt through the next step in treatment.

"Sometimes people think that if a parent is a nurse, that's enough, or if our coaches are CPR certified, that's enough," says K Ellis F Mair, EdM, LAT, ATC, founder and chief clinical officer of Go4, who has worked extensively with athletic trainers and youth sports organizations. "A lot of times, that's not quite what you need, and there's a lot of conflict of interest there."

EMS remains an essential partner, but its role is different. Athletic trainers manage sport-specific assessment and sideline care; EMS provides emergency stabilization and transport. Other licensed clinicians, including physicians and board-certified sports chiropractors, can strengthen the team when their duties, supervision, malpractice coverage, and scope of practice are defined in advance.

Helma notes university and community partnerships can expand field-of-play care, including through properly supervised clinical interns.

3 Share the complete event picture

An assignment listing should provide far more than the venue address and competition hours. Athletic trainers need the current schedule, expected attendance, athlete ages, sport and competition level, field or court map, number of medical staff, treatment location, weather policies, available equipment, emergency procedures, and contact information for decision-makers. Planners should also explain whether 1,000 athletes will compete at once or in separate morning and afternoon sessions because that distinction affects workload.

The event's communication protocol should include a way to distribute last-minute changes. "Referees and athletic trainers are always the last people to find that stuff out," Mair says. "They're like, 'Oh, I didn't know it was moved.'"

Marcano recommends recurring touchpoints between event and medical leaders before a large tournament. Those meetings give both sides time to review staffing, policies, procedures, and emergency plans, and to address unresolved concerns.

Courtesy K. Ellis F. Mair



Athletic trainers want medical coverage integrated into event operations, not added at the last minute.

Courtesy Erica Marcano



Erica Marcano assesses a youth athlete's acute injury

4 Match staffing to risk and geography

No single ratio fits every event, and head count alone cannot determine staffing. "It depends largely on the age level and risk level," Mair says. "If things are spread apart and it's going to take a while for the medical staff to get back and forth, that's something you want to take into consideration."

Planners and their medical lead should consider the sport, athletes' ages, intensity of competition, number of simultaneous games, distance between playing areas and likely volume of routine care. Mair says middle school tournaments can be deceptively demanding because athletes of the same age may differ greatly in size, coordination, and physical development.

Recruiting events can also raise the stakes when athletes feel pressure to play through an injury. Marcano's ideal is one athletic trainer at every field or court, plus clinicians at a central area for taping, wound care, and nonurgent assessments. When distances make that impossible, place staff strategically and provide transportation such as a golf cart. A satellite field should never become a medical blind spot.

5 Make the emergency plan specific to the event

An emergency action plan, or EAP, must reflect the venue, competition, staffing, and conditions on that date. At one venue, basketball and hockey may require different patient-removal routes; a concert or construction closure may change ambulance staging or access altogether.

"Just because it was the plan they used last week doesn't mean that it necessarily applies to you," Mair says. "Make sure all the information on that plan is accurate for that day." Marcano identifies six essential elements: personnel and their roles; communication methods and information; maps, directions, and access points; emergency equipment and who can reach it; transportation, destination, method, and response time; and written documentation of the plan, rehearsals, and actual activations.

"An emergency action plan doesn't exist alone," Marcano says. "It should live alongside a comprehensive sports medicine plan that includes detailed policies and protocols for specific incident types."

6 Assign every emergency role

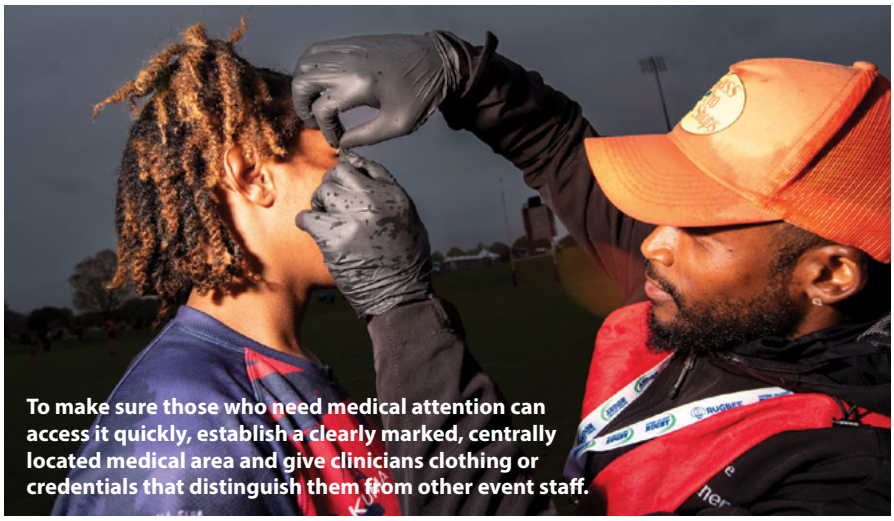
The moment an athlete goes down is the wrong time to decide who calls 911, retrieves the AED, meets the ambulance or clears a sideline. Write those responsibilities into the plan and name the people who will perform them. Include the athletic trainers, event director, officials, field coordinators, coaches, security personnel, and volunteers whose jobs may change during an emergency.

Mair recommends a pre-event medical timeout with everyone who could be involved. The group can quickly review how an injury is reported, which radio channel to use, who controls the crowd, and how responders will reach the patient.

"The field coordinator radios for the athletic trainer, the athletic trainer responds, the coaches handle the sidelines and crowd control, and the

referees can spot things ahead of time," Mair says. "It's really a team effort, so everybody gets read in on the plan before the event starts."

Helma also recommends posting the EAP in multiple locations so staff members can identify the people responsible without searching for the event director.



To make sure those who need medical attention can access it quickly, establish a clearly marked, centrally located medical area and give clinicians clothing or credentials that distinguish them from other event staff.

7 Protect the route for emergency responders

Ambulance access requires more than a line on a map. A street address may lead responders to a sprawling sports complex without getting them to the correct field. "Scouting the venue beforehand is the most important thing you can do to understand specific needs," Marcano says. "We need to understand ingress and egress routes for an ambulance, and what access points to a field or indoor venue are available."

Planners should physically inspect those routes, verify gate widths and locks, keep lanes clear of parked vehicles and equipment, and designate someone who can meet EMS at the entrance and guide responders to the injury site. That guide needs a radio or phone and enough familiarity with the property to adjust if the primary route is blocked. Helma identifies ambulance ingress and egress, along with a person assigned to direct the ambulance, as details organizers frequently overlook.

8 Supply the equipment the emergency plan requires

Athletic trainers often arrive with personal kits, but organizers should never assume one clinician can supply everything a tournament needs. Equipment responsibilities must be settled before game day. "At least have lifesaving supplies, including an AED," Mair says. "If it's going to be warm, make sure you have a cold tub and ice designated for the cold tub only."

That ice cannot disappear into drink coolers or bags for routine injuries. Marcano also advises checking whether the venue has water to fill a cold-immersion tub, shelter for a lightning delay and accessible AEDs. Routine consumables deserve the same advance conversation. A basketball tournament that generates heavy demand for taping may need to purchase additional tape or compensate the athletic trainer for bringing extra supplies.

Clarifying responsibility before the event prevents a shortage from becoming the medical team's problem on game day.

9 Make the medical team easy to find and reach

Medical coverage loses value when athletes, officials, and volunteers cannot locate it. Establish a clearly marked, centrally located medical area and give clinicians clothing or credentials that distinguish them from other event staff. If one athletic trainer covers several competition areas, everyone should know that person's base location and how to summon help.

"If only one athletic trainer is available, I typically advise that they remain in one location when possible," Marcano says. "Whether they are needed for an emergency or nonemergent care, everyone knows where to find them."

Equip the athletic trainer with a two-way radio, choose a dedicated channel, and tell each field who is responsible for making the call. A useful radio message should identify the exact location and describe the athlete by team, uniform color, and jersey number. By the time the clinician arrives, an athlete may have returned to play, blended into the bench, or left with a family member. Specific information saves time and helps officials enforce removal-from-play decisions.

10 Rehearse the response before the competition

An EAP becomes useful when the people named in it have practiced their roles. Marcano recommends annual updates, review with every relevant group, and rehearsal whenever possible. Helma says emergency scenarios should be practiced repeatedly so assignments are familiar when pressure rises.

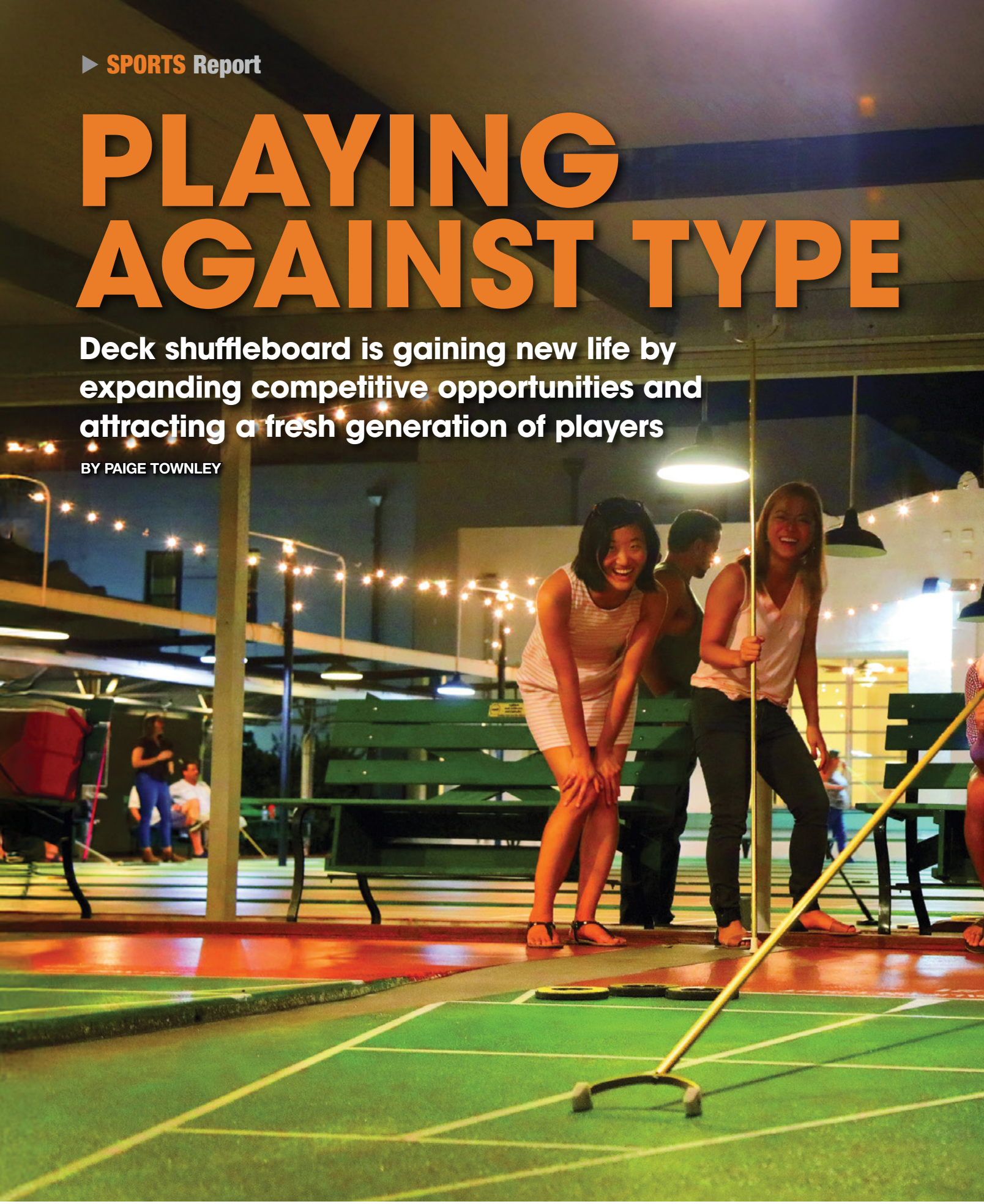
Mair saw the value during an event this past summer. The medical team reviewed its EAP each morning and practiced its response to sudden cardiac arrest. Three hours after one drill, a person collapsed in the vendor area outside the venue. Someone had already begun CPR when Mair ran through the building, collected the AED, and reached the patient. The team applied the AED within two minutes, delivered a shock and transferred the person to EMS conscious and breathing. Mair says the person is doing well today.

"That's why we do all the planning, and that's why we're so annoying about some of these details sometimes," Mair says. "Some people are like, 'It'll be fine.' I'm like, 'No, because one day it's not going to be.'" And if (or when) that day comes, as the old Boy Scout saying goes, it's always better to be prepared. ■

PLAYING AGAINST TYPE

Deck shuffleboard is gaining new life by expanding competitive opportunities and attracting a fresh generation of players

BY PAIGE TOWNLEY





The St. Petersburg Shuffleboard Club has attracted a new generation of players with its Friday Night Shuffle social events.

Courtesy St. Petersburg Shuffleboard Club

For generations, shuffleboard has been easy to stereotype: sunshine, Florida, retirement communities, and a leisurely game played more for recreation than competition. But that familiar picture doesn't tell the whole story. Shuffleboard has always had a competitive side, with players honing their strategy and skills on courts around the country. What's changing is who's showing up to play—and how and where they're playing it.

Today, a younger generation is embracing shuffleboard for its social appeal while also stepping into its competitive ranks. Bars, social clubs, tournaments, and dedicated shuffleboard venues are creating new opportunities to play, connect, and compete. The courts may be familiar, but the energy around them is changing, bringing a fresh audience to a sport that has never stopped taking competition seriously.

"I think shuffleboard is resonating with younger players because it has so much to offer," says Shirley Eager, president of the USA National Shuffleboard Association. "It's social, strategic, and anyone can compete in it."

Whether you want to start playing yourself or add the sport to your planning portfolio, here's what you need to know to get in on the action.

A sport with staying power

Though the sport is known for its connection to the Sunshine State, its roots stretch across the Atlantic. The game originated in England centuries ago and later made its way to the United States, where it found a receptive home in Florida. In 1931, the USA National Shuffleboard Association was established in St. Petersburg, helping formalize the sport. Today, the USA National Shuffleboard Association represents 23 member states, including Hawaii, and oversees a competitive calendar that includes national, amateur, and youth tournaments.

That competitive tradition remains firmly in place—the association held 20 national tournaments in 2025, Eager adds—but the player base is changing. The association is seeing more players aged 40 and younger, many of whom travel to tournaments while working remotely. "At the recent Can-Am Games in Canada, roughly 13 to 15 of the 40 U.S. players were working, non-retired competitors," Eager says. "It definitely has changed from solely being a retired person's game."

Where tradition meets change

That evolution can be seen at one of shuffleboard's most historic homes. Established in 1924, the St. Petersburg Shuffleboard Club is the world's oldest and largest shuffleboard club, says Amy Marshall, the club's executive director, which today counts nearly 3,000 members. Its membership and programming reflect the full range of the sport, from recreational leagues played three nights a week to district, state, and national tournaments featuring amateur and professional players. "We say shuffleboard is easy to learn and difficult to master," Marshall says. "There's something for everybody there depending on how serious you want to get with it."

Even the club's traditional programming is adapting to the changing audience. Recreational leagues are held at night, making them accessible to people who work during the day, while the club has pushed for more weekend tournaments to accommodate players who cannot take time off during the week. This year, additional weekend tournaments were approved, giving the club an opportunity to bring more working and younger players into tournament play. "We felt it was important because the players are asking for it," she adds. "The younger players want to participate, and we're excited to have it approved so this younger demographic can take part."

The club's growth among younger players started with a simple calendar addition: Friday Night Shuffle. The open-play nights offered an inexpensive, low-pressure way to try the sport, and many of those players eventually moved into leagues and tournaments, Marshall says. "That Friday Night Shuffle experience brought young people



Courtesy Alex Mendoza

Adapting to a changing audience, many clubs hold recreational leagues at night, making them accessible to people who work during the day.

looking for something fun to do on a Friday night," she explains. "That's when we started seeing young people come to the sport, and it let them see that they could partake at the casual level but also competitively. It's not just one or the other."

A new place to play

That blend of social and competitive play is becoming an important part of shuffleboard's renewed appeal, and St. Petersburg isn't the only place where a new generation is discovering it. In other cities, the game is being introduced in an entirely different setting—one that puts shuffleboard alongside drinks, food, and a fun night out.

One of the most notable examples is Royal Palms Shuffleboard Club, which grew out of founder Jonathan Schnapp's memories of playing shuffleboard with his grandparents in Florida. "We'd drive down every winter from New York, and I'd play shuffleboard with them at their retirement home," he says.

Years later, while visiting Florida, Schnapp returned to the game at the St. Petersburg Shuffleboard Club. A Friday night event rekindled his interest—and gave him an idea for bringing that same experience back to Brooklyn. "It was magical," he says. "Everyone was hanging out, having a few drinks, making friends—it was a moment that I wished I could bring back to Brooklyn."

In 2013, Schnapp opened the first Royal Palms Shuffleboard Club location in Brooklyn, followed by a Chicago location five years later. But Schnapp says the goal was never simply to create a bar with shuffleboard courts. From the beginning, Royal Palms aimed to function as a true club—teaching people how to play the game and giving them a reason to keep coming back. "We have always been committed to teaching people how to play and how fun the game can be if you're actually playing the game," he says.

That approach quickly pushed Royal Palms beyond the social side of the sport. Leagues were part of the plan before the first location even opened, and today, about 800 players participate in leagues at each location. The clubs also host nationally recognized tournaments, while members have helped establish shuffleboard associations in New York and Illinois.

For Schnapp, that progression—from a first game on a night out to regular league play and tournament competition—is central to Royal Palms' role in the sport. "I've got to believe that every person who walks in this place is a potential league member," he says. "We wanted a league, a community, and we've created something beyond just the game. The game is a great place to start, but there's more to enjoy, too."

From night out to tournament play

Royal Palms' impact is perhaps clearest in what happens after players walk through the door. For some, a night of drinks, friends, and shuffleboard becomes a weekly league. For others, league play opens the door to a deeper interest in strategy, travel, and tournament competition.

Thirty-four-year-old Mark Malatt first came to Royal Palms Chicago in 2018 after a college friend suggested joining a league. He had no expectation that the Monday-night activity would become a serious pursuit. "I fell into it," he says. "It was a wonderful reason to go do something on a Monday night."

The social atmosphere hooked him, but the game itself kept him coming back. Malatt says he liked that shuffleboard was accessible to anyone while still offering plenty of room to improve. "I never expected to do what I've just done the last two years," he says. "It was truly about going and meeting new people and having the social side of it."

By 2023, Malatt was traveling to play, competing against players from across the country and discovering a much larger shuffleboard community. In 2024, he won his first International Shuffleboard Association World Championship in San Benito, Texas. He followed that with another world title in Germany in 2025.

His progression illustrates the range of the game and challenges one of the assumptions that still surrounds it. "People automatically believe it's more of a retirement activity," Malatt says. "I don't think people really understand the nuance of how strategic it is."

That progression is also reshaping the organized game beyond Royal Palms. Lauren Seesel, president of the Illinois Shuffleboard Association, says the organization grew directly from the



Courtesy St. Petersburg Shuffleboard Club

club's league community. Formed in 2022, the association now has nearly 300 members, up from 177 at the end of its first year. "All of our members start as league members at Royal Palms," Seesel says. "They end up falling in love with the sport, then join the association when they're looking to get more involved and have more opportunities for play."

In New York, Anna Balchunas followed a similar route. She first played at Royal Palms as a college senior and joined a league in 2019 simply because she and her friends thought it would be fun. After the pandemic, she returned with a different goal: "I wanted to be more competitive."

Today, Balchunas serves as president of the New York Shuffleboard Association, which has about 250 members. "We're competitive, but we're all there to have fun," she says.

That balance—taking the game seriously without losing the fun—is what is drawing a new generation to shuffleboard. Many players may start with a casual night at Royal Palms or a Friday Night Shuffle, but those first games can open the door to strategy, competition, and a larger community. And as more younger players step onto the courts, longtime players are there to share the knowledge they've built over decades, Marshall says. "They love sharing their knowledge with them and having another generation of players come up," she says. "We want it to continue to grow. It's fun and special." ■



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A DIFFERENT CAST

Kayak fishing tournaments provide destinations a new way to host events and gain economic benefits beyond a single marina

BY BOB SEXTON





When kayak fishing, getting to connect with nature in a unique way is a large part of the experience.

Courtesy B.A.S.S./Mark Cisneros

Kayak bass fishing is often cited as the fastest-growing segment of competitive fishing, fueled by increasing interest, evolving boat designs, specialized catch-photo-release apps, and major media attention. But while the sport is growing fast, tournaments aren't always easy to plan and execute. Indeed, organizers say one of the biggest challenges occurs before an event even begins: educating destinations about how kayak tournaments differ from traditional boat tournaments.

This guide offers practical information planners can use to get destinations up to speed on how kayak tournaments work and why they should consider hosting one.

Accessibility

One of the best things about kayak fishing is its low barrier to entry. For under $1,500, you can get a fishing vessel that's solid, versatile, effective, and highly portable. For a couple of grand more, you can get one with a pedal-drive system, a GPS trolling motor, and advanced electronics, which is still a lot more affordable than a tricked-out bass boat that can cost north of $100,000. Kayaks are also prized for their flexibility. They can float into areas with six inches of water and reach places a traditional boat can't.

The appeal of kayak fishing is diverse and multifaceted, says Chad Hoover, founder of Kayak Bass Fishing (KBF), which runs 400 online tournaments in 40 states and two live events a year, with plans to host more in-person tournaments in the coming years.

"It's more challenging, but more fulfilling, and more rewarding," Hoover says. "There are movies now where the seat rumbles, and it sprays mist on you and stuff, they call it 4D. Well, kayak fishing is 4D. You get the water splashed in your face when the fish gets close to the boat because you're right there."

Kayak anglers are closer to the fish and more connected to their environment, he says. That can make them better anglers, particularly in competition, because they can't simply fire up the motor and run to every part of the lake in search of fish. They have to make better decisions.

Courtesy B.A.S.S./Mark Cisneros



In a kayak, anglers sit lower, go slower, and get closer to the fish.

Another bonus is that, unlike regular fishing boats, kayaks often don't need a trailer because they can be transported on a car's roof or in the back of a truck.

Accessibility, adaptability, and flexibility apply not only to the boats anglers use to fish in kayak tournaments but also to the communities where those tournaments can be held. Unlike traditional boat tournaments, which need a large marina capable of hosting hundreds of anglers and a parking lot big enough to accommodate their vehicles and trailers, kayak tournaments typically use multiple public ramps and launches within the tournament boundaries.

Part of the reason is that kayak anglers have to be more strategic in their approach to tournament fishing. Most rely on paddle or pedal power. Motorized fishing kayaks are becoming more common, but kayak anglers generally don't have the same range as traditional bass boats, meaning they can't zip around the water body from one spot to the next on a whim.

For destinations, that means the action and economic benefits aren't concentrated at a single marina and even small communities without major boating infrastructure may be well-positioned to host a kayak fishing tournament.

Environmental impact

Unlike traditional boat tournaments, where anglers typically keep fish in an onboard livewell until the weigh-in, kayak fishing tournaments use catch-photo-release. Anglers photograph their catches on an official measuring board, with fish measured by length rather than weight. Once the photo is uploaded to the tournament app and approved, the fish is released where it was caught.

Research suggests that immediate-release formats can reduce some of the stress associated with traditional tournament procedures, including livewell confinement and transport to a central weigh-in. A 2026 study published in *Fisheries Research* compared largemouth bass caught in traditional tournaments with those released immediately after capture. During warm summer conditions, fish released immediately returned to normal activity levels sooner than fish held for a traditional weigh-in. Differences were smaller in cooler water. The researchers concluded that immediate-release tournaments should be considered to minimize impacts on individual fish.

"The environmental impact is lower because you catch the fish and release it right where you caught it," Hoover says. "So, it goes back to its natural behavior pattern, back to its natural spawning pattern, back to its natural everything."

Kayak tournaments can also distribute fishing activity across a wider area than traditional boat tournaments, which often concentrate anglers around a central launch site and popular fishing locations. That may appeal to communities concerned about pressure on local fisheries, although the actual impact will depend on the tournament and the water body.

Inclusivity

While you can spend a small fortune on a fishing kayak and outfit it with all kinds of accessories, electronics, and tools, you don't need a top-of-the-line unit to compete, says Chad Brock, marketing and media manager with USA Bassin, a traditional boat tournament operation that launched a kayak series in 2023.

Based in Bedford, Indiana, USA Bassin currently runs kayak tournaments in eight states and is preparing to expand into additional markets. Brock says one angler in the series competes in an inflatable kayak he stores in the trunk of his car.

"He's not got one of the big expensive rigs, and he's won several national-level tournaments here this past year," he says. "It's pretty impressive that he's doing it with minimal items and still beating some of the guys in the power kayaks. I think that's where the inclusivity comes from: being able to have as little as you possibly want or have as much as you possibly want."

The kayak-fishing community is also close-knit, says Brock. "People get into kayak fishing because it's accessible. Anybody can get into it because it's relatively affordable," he says. "As they grow into kayak fishing, some people find the tournament scene, and they find that camaraderie and competition appealing. They find a group that they mesh with, and it just becomes a very inclusive, accepting sport."

Steve Owens, tournament director of the Bassmaster Kayak Series, which consists of six regular-season events and a championship tournament each year, agrees that the community's camaraderie is a big part of the appeal.

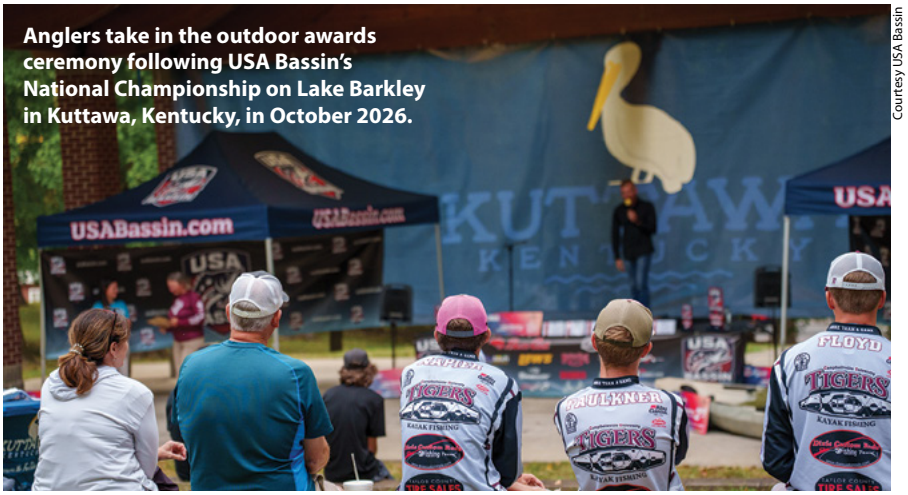
"We're all kind of together. We're brother and sister in this, so to speak. When we travel, there's still a lot of people sharing campsites, hotel rooms, short-term rentals and stuff. There's still a ton of good sportsmanship. You see anglers on the water helping one another, sacrificing things that they may use later on in that tournament."

Owens cites a recent example in which one angler loaned a fellow competitor a spare battery, only to have his own main battery die. Rather than ask for the battery back, he let the other angler keep it because the other angler was on the leaderboard, thereby sacrificing his own tournament. That battery ended up saving the borrower's day, and he went on to qualify for the Bassmaster Kayak Championship. It's a telling example of the relationships that develop within the sport, where competition and camaraderie go hand in hand.



An angler measures his catch on an official measuring board.

Courtesy B.A.S.S./Mark Cisneros



Anglers take in the outdoor awards ceremony following USA Bassin's National Championship on Lake Barkley in Kuttawa, Kentucky, in October 2026.

Courtesy USA Bassin

Technology

Kayak fishing tournaments rely on specialized apps to build and manage events. KBF uses Fishing Chaos, while Bassmaster and USA Bassin use TourneyX.

Although there are differences between the platforms, both allow anglers to register for tournaments, submit catches online and view live leaderboards. Organizers can access real-time statistics, mass-messaging tools and reports, among other features.

The apps also allow organizers to monitor competitors' exact locations, contact anglers directly if there are questions about submitted photos, and send weather alerts and other safety messages. Those capabilities help organizers keep track of competitors and respond quickly when issues arise on the water. Of course, anglers need to make sure their phones are charged and securely tethered. "We have people dropping their phones in the water every single tournament," Owens says.

Economic impact

Because kayak tournaments use multiple launch points, they can distribute economic benefits across a wider area, Hoover says. "A bass tournament goes to the same marina over and over again. So, the adjacent businesses benefit, but we like to move it around. We can have our award ceremony at a brewery, at a restaurant, at a convention center, or at a park."

To show destinations the potential economic impact of his tournaments, Hoover uses a proprietary system that pulls data from public sources in real time to develop projections and reports customized for each destination. He says KBF also uses AI to aggregate information and calculate return on investment.

There is no cookie-cutter answer to the economic impact question, Hoover says, touting the benefits of his customizable reports. "We don't just rival anybody in fishing, I think we rival most sports for reporting and economic impact calculation," Hoover says.

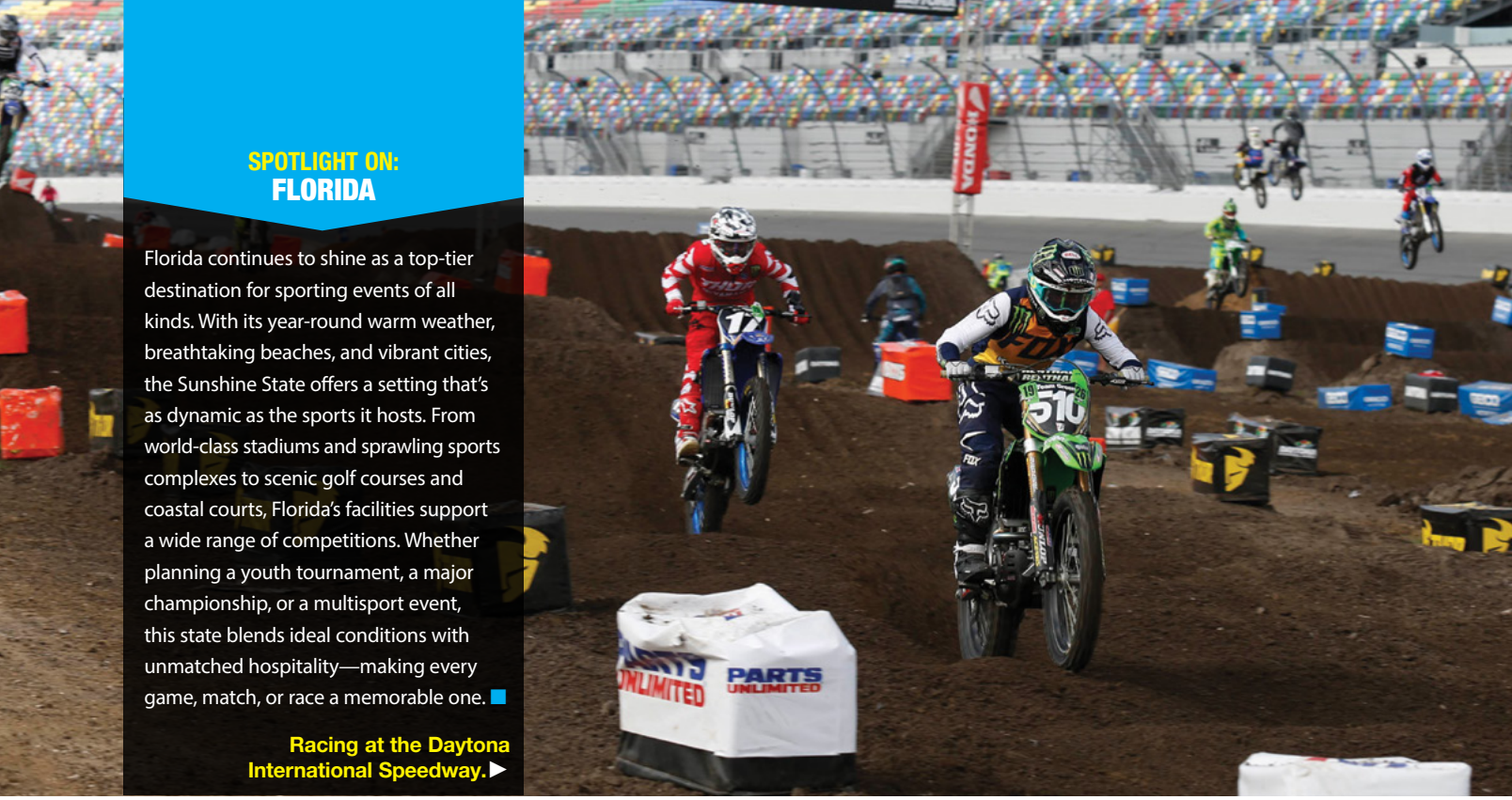
Owens and Brock also emphasize the potential benefits to local businesses. Tournament participants spend money at tackle shops, grocery stores, restaurants and other retailers, in addition to accommodations and other travel-related expenses.

"We've got enough data now to show that each angler spends X amount of dollars because we go to tackle shops, just like the boat world," Owens says. "We go to CVS, Walmart, your grocery stores, and your restaurants. So, we're spending almost as much as they do minus gasoline."

For destinations looking to attract new sporting events, kayak fishing tournaments offer an opportunity to think beyond the traditional playbook. They don't require a massive marina or a single central venue, and their relatively low barriers to entry make the sport accessible to a broad range of competitors. With suitable launch sites, local partnerships, and an understanding of how these events operate, even small communities can throw their line in the water and reel in a big tournament. ■

SPOTLIGHT ON:
FLORIDA

Florida continues to shine as a top-tier destination for sporting events of all kinds. With its year-round warm weather, breathtaking beaches, and vibrant cities, the Sunshine State offers a setting that's as dynamic as the sports it hosts. From world-class stadiums and sprawling sports complexes to scenic golf courses and coastal courts, Florida's facilities support a wide range of competitions. Whether planning a youth tournament, a major championship, or a multisport event, this state blends ideal conditions with unmatched hospitality—making every game, match, or race a memorable one. ■



Racing at the Daytona International Speedway. ▶

Courtesy Daytona Beach Area CVB

FLORIDA

BRADENTON

The Bradenton Area couples athletic spirit with leisurely adventure. Teams come here to compete on top-quality fields, courts, and facilities, but they stay for the classic Florida experience encompassing beaches, outdoor adventures, local restaurants, and a relaxed coastal vibe.

Hotel rooms: 5,774



MUST SEE:

Central Florida Zoo

Wildlife takes center stage at the Central Florida Zoo & Botanical Gardens. Home to hundreds of animals from around the world, the zoo combines up-close encounters with lush botanical landscapes and interactive experiences. From feeding giraffes to exploring the zoo's trails and animal habitats, it's an easy addition to a Central Florida itinerary. ■

Courtesy Orlando North, Seminole County Tourism

Hotel tax rate: 13 percent

Major facilities:

- IMG Academy is the world's largest and most advanced multisport training and educational institution
- Premier Sports Campus South has 23 FIFA regulation-size fields and one 3,500-seat stadium, with two new turf fields coming soon
- Coming in early 2027, the new Premier Sports Campus North will offer a 50-meter pool and 24 pickleball courts
- UMR Sports Complex, coming in 2027, will offer five synthetic softball fields, one multipurpose turf field, two synthetic LLB fields, and one turf baseball field

Convention center: The Bradenton Area Convention Center offers nearly 70,000 square feet of space for indoor sports such as basketball, volleyball, taekwondo, jujitsu, and wrestling, as well as gymnastics, cheer, and dance.

Contact: Bradenton Area CVB, bradentongulfislands.com.

CENTRAL FLORIDA

Central Florida's Polk County is conveniently located right in the middle of the state and between two major international airports. The area offers a wide variety of dining, outdoor adventure, theme parks, and more.

Hotel rooms: 8,600

Hotel tax rate: 12 percent

Major facilities:

- Lake Myrtle Sports Park in Auburndale is a multipurpose complex with nine collegiate-sized baseball fields and 11 lighted international-sized soccer fields
- Lakeland's Holloway Park has an 18-hole disc golf course and an elite series of three- to 10-kilometer cross-country running trails
- DiamondPlex in Winter Haven features five softball fields
- Publix Field at Joker Marchant Stadium in Lakeland has six MLB-size fields; it's the spring training home of the Detroit Tigers
- AdventHealth Fieldhouse has a 58,400-square-foot multiuse gymnasium suitable for large sports competitions, including basketball, volleyball, gymnastics, cheerleading, and more.

Contact: Central Florida's Polk County Sports Marketing, centralfloridasports.com.

COLUMBIA COUNTY

Columbia County is located at the intersection of two interstates and within a three-hour drive of many of Florida's most popular attractions.

Hotel rooms: 1,800

Major facility:

- Southside Recreation Complex offers 13 baseball fields, 12 softball fields, and five soccer fields





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- South Columbia Sports Park has four lighted 200-foot baseball and softball fields, and two lighted 300-foot baseball fields
- Alligator Lake Recreation Area features 12 miles of trails ideal for cross-country meets

Contact: Columbia County Sports Commission, columbiacountysportscommission.com.

DAYTONA BEACH

Daytona Beach is known as a sports destination well beyond the Daytona International Speedway. The area also offers a variety of other appealing sports venues for everything from baseball to pickleball.

Hotel rooms: 12,000

Hotel tax rate: 12.5 percent

Major facilities:

- Daytona International Speedway seats more than 100,000
- Jackie Robinson Ballpark is a 4,200-seat minor league baseball stadium
- Pictona Pickleball Complex in Holly Hill boasts 49 courts
- Ormond Beach Sports Complex has four T-ball fields, four baseball fields, five softball fields, nine soccer fields, and three multipurpose fields
- Daytona Stadium is a 10,000-seat football stadium with artificial turf

Convention center: Ocean Center Convention Center houses a 93,028-square-foot Exhibit Hall and has a ceiling height of 32 feet.

Contact: Daytona Beach Area CVB, daytonabeach.com.

DESTIN/FORT WALTON BEACH

Situated in northwest Florida, Destin-Fort Walton Beach is an idyllic destination that offers sports facilities and venues, along with a serene escape after gameplay, on its pristine 20-mile stretch of coastline. Whether visiting for a cheerleading competition, baseball tournament, or equestrian event, families will find an exciting opportunity to ignite their sense of adventure.

Hotel rooms: 14,544

Hotel tax rate: 12 percent

Major facilities:

- Preston Hood Athletic Complex has five baseball fields, four beach volleyball courts, three soccer/multipurpose fields, two softball fields, and a skate park
- Raider Arena at Northwest Florida State College is a 74,500-square-foot basketball arena that seats 2,400 fans
- Morgan Sports Center offers six baseball/softball fields and three soccer fields
- Rigdon Center offers nearly 50,000 square feet of flexible event space across indoor and outdoor venues

Convention center: The Destin-Fort Walton Beach Convention Center boasts more than 32,000 square feet of flexible indoor and outdoor event space.

Contact: Destin Fort Walton Beach, destinfwb.com.

FORT LAUDERDALE

Greater Fort Lauderdale offers a unique combination of year-round warm weather, easy accessibility, versatile sports venues, and an iconic beach setting. With Fort Lauderdale-Hollywood International Airport providing convenient access for athletes, teams and spectators, the destination is easy to reach from major domestic and international markets.

Hotel rooms: 34,000

Hotel tax rate: 12 percent

Major facilities:

- Fort Lauderdale Aquatic Center features two 50-meter pools and one 25-meter diving pool with a 27-meter dive tower
- FTL War Memorial Auditorium includes the Baptist Health IcePlex with two regulation-size rinks
- The Fort is a 42-court pickleball facility
- InterMiami Stadium is a 34-acre facility, including the 21,500-capacity stadium
- Amerant Bank Arena is a multipurpose indoor arena
- Ansin Sports Complex houses one of only four Class 2 internationally certified tracks in the U.S.

Convention center: The Broward County Convention Center boasts more than 1.2 million square feet of space and is connected to the 801-room Omni headquarters hotel.

Contact: Visit Lauderdale, visitlauderdale.com.

GAINESVILLE

Home to the University of Florida, elite facilities are easy to come by in Gainesville. But the area, known for its unique blend of small-town charm and big-time sports energy, offers so much more beyond the campus.

Hotel rooms: 5,700

Hotel tax rate: 12.5 percent

Major facilities:

- Alachua County Sports and Event Center at Celebration Pointe is a 130,000-square-foot indoor facility with 97,000 square feet of open court space
- Stephen C. O'Connell Center is a 292,000-square-foot facility housing an eight-lane natatorium, as well as courts for basketball and volleyball
- Legacy Park Multipurpose Center is a 40,000-square-foot facility with a full-size court for basketball and volleyball
- Champions Park in nearby Newberry has 16 lighted youth baseball and fast-pitch softball fields

Contact: Gainesville Sports Commission, gainesvillesportscommission.com.

JACKSONVILLE

Jacksonville is a sports destination like no other, a coastal city with big-league infrastructure, diverse venues, and a deep-rooted culture of sports and community engagement. From traditional sports like football, basketball, and baseball to unique offerings like surfing, bull riding, and esports, Jacksonville brings unmatched versatility to the table.

Hotel rooms: 20,000

Hotel tax rate: 13.5 percent

Major facilities:

- Home to the Jacksonville Jaguars, Everbank Stadium is an NFL stadium with a capacity of 67,000
- Dream Finders Homes Flex Field at Daily's Place is a 94,000-square-foot multipurpose venue and indoor football practice field
- VyStar Veterans Memorial Arena is a multipurpose venue with a 16,250-square-foot arena floor
- Home to the Jacksonville Jumbo Shrimp Minor League Baseball team, VyStar Ballpark has a capacity of 11,000
- Jacksonville Equestrian Center is a 2,000-acre complex
- Community First Igloo houses two NHL-sized rinks

Convention center: The Prime F. Osborn III Convention Center features 78,000 square feet of space divisible into two separate halls with 33-foot ceilings.

Contact: Visit Jacksonville, visitjacksonville.com.

KISSIMMEE

Kissimmee delivers what sports participants want most out of a destination—warm weather and sunshine invite year-round play in a wide range of sporting events. Beyond top-notch venues, teams and spectators will find a huge variety of affordable accommodations with easy access to Orlando International Airport, plus convenient access to world-famous theme parks and South Florida via the new Brightline high-speed rail service.

Hotel rooms: 25,000

Hotel tax rate: 13.5 percent

Major facilities:

- Osceola Heritage Park includes a multipurpose arena of over 33,000 square feet and a capacity of 10,000, and an Events Center with 60,000 total square feet of exhibition and meeting space
- Austin-Tindall Sports Complex has 10 fields, including a championship stadium
- ChampionsGate Sports Field Complex features eight regulation-sized soccer fields and is designed to host teams and sports clubs for training and tournaments.

Contact: Kissimmee Sports Commission, experiencekissimmee.com/sports.

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Bradenton Area SPORTS
FLORIDA'S WEST COAST



Courtesy Palm Beach County Sports Commission

Palm Beach County hosted the Nautique WWA Wakeboard and Wakesurf National Championships in July 2026.

LEE COUNTY

Lee County is situated in southwest Florida and includes the beaches of Fort Myers and Sanibel Island. A relaxed, tropical feel welcomes visitors, along with an excellent selection of facilities for sports such as baseball, softball, basketball, soccer, and pickleball.

Hotel rooms: 12,000

Hotel tax rate: 11.5 percent

Major facilities:

- Lee Health Sports Complex and Hammond Stadium offer multiple baseball and softball fields
- JetBlue Park at Fenway South in Fort Myers is the spring training facility for the Boston Red Sox
- Hertz Arena in Estero has three hockey rinks that can be converted to host most indoor sports
- Cape Coral Sports Complex is a 52-acre park with four softball fields, five soccer fields, and four baseball fields
- The Courts Cape Coral features 32 pickleball courts and 12 tennis courts
- Suncoast Credit Union Arena is a junior college basketball facility with seating for 3,500 fans

Convention center: Caloosa Sound Convention Center boasts 42,000 square feet of exhibit and event space. The venue has hosted gymnastics, cheerleading, and martial arts events.

Contact: Lee County Sports Development, leegov.com/sports.

LAKE COUNTY

Just 30 miles west of Orlando, Lake County blends quality sports facilities with natural beauty and small-town hospitality. With more than 1,000 lakes, charming communities and scenic outdoor spaces, athletes and families can compete, connect, and enjoy an authentic, laid-back Florida experience.

Hotel rooms: 2,700

Major facilities:

- Hickory Point Recreation Complex is a 68-acre multiuse facility with six soccer fields, 12 boat ramps, and 21 lighted beach volleyball courts
- Legends Way Ballfields has five fastpitch softball fields
- National Training Center has a 70-meter by 25-yard pool, 400-meter track, and grass infield
- Sleepy Hollow Complex has four adult softball fields, two regulation size baseball fields, and two soccer/football fields
- The Big House offers nine basketball courts and 16 volleyball courts

Contact: Discover Lake County Florida, discoverlakefl.com.

MIAMI

Miami is one of the few cities in the world that can host a World Cup match, a College Football National Championship, a Formula 1 Miami Grand Prix, a Grand Slam-caliber tennis event, as well as MLB, NFL, and NBA games, a World Baseball Classic, and a NASCAR championship race—all within the same calendar year. Remarkably, these events take place at venues located within about 45 minutes of each other.

Hotel rooms: 65,000

Hotel tax rate: Ranges from 11 percent to 14 percent

Major facilities:

- Hard Rock Stadium is a 65,326-seat football stadium
- Homestead-Miami Speedway features a 1.5-mile oval and a 2.21-mile road course
- Kaseya Center is a multipurpose indoor venue that seats 19,600 for basketball
- loanDepot park is a 37,442-seat baseball venue

Convention center: The Miami Beach Convention Center sits just 12 miles from Miami International Airport and features 1.4 million square feet of total flexible space.

Contact: Greater Miami CVB, miamiandbeaches.com.

NAPLES

Known as Florida's Paradise Coast, Naples is located in southwest Florida, on the Gulf side of the state, in Collier County. The area around Naples includes Marco Island, Everglades City, Immokalee, and Ave Maria.

Hotel rooms: 9,000

Hotel tax rate: 11 percent

Major facilities:

- Paradise Coast Sports Complex is a 180-acre facility featuring multiuse fields, a stadium, sand volleyball courts, and more
- USOP National Pickleball Center offers 65 courts

Contact: Naples, Marco Island & The Everglades CVB, paradisecoast.com.

OCALA

Situated in Marion County, Ocala provides top-notch facilities for various sports such as golf, baseball, basketball, softball, soccer, tennis, adventure runs, and more. The area is also renowned worldwide as an equestrian hub.

Hotel rooms: 5,955

Hotel tax rate: 11.5 percent

Major facilities:

- Rotary Sportsplex houses 11 baseball fields, four full-size rectangular fields, and one multipurpose field
- Shocker Park has six softball fields
- Ocala Regional Sportsplex features five softball fields, four rectangular fields, two lighted basketball courts, and four lighted sand volleyball pits
- Big Sun Soccer Complex consists of seven fields
- Florida Horse Park is a 500-acre multipurpose venue with 80,000-square-foot clear-span covered arena
- World Equestrian Center includes five 140,000-square-foot climate-controlled, clear-span indoor horse show arenas, two 130,000-square foot climate-controlled, clear-span indoor expo arenas, and more

Contact: Ocala Marion County CVB, ocalamarion.com.

ORLANDO

Orlando's sports landscape is as diverse as it is dynamic, featuring professional basketball and soccer, major NCAA football matchups, the state-of-the-art United States Tennis Association (USTA) National Campus, world-renowned golf courses and tournaments, miles of running and biking trails, and pristine fishing spots.

Hotel rooms: 130,000

Hotel tax rate: 12.5 percent

Major facilities:

- Kia Center is an 18,846-seat multipurpose arena
- Camping World Stadium is a football stadium with 65,000 seats
- Inter.co Stadium is a soccer facility with a capacity of 25,500
- ESPN Wide World of Sports Complex features 11 baseball and softball diamonds, 17 outdoor multipurpose fields, 700,000 square feet of playing space, and more than 15,000 spectator seats on its 220 acres
- United States Tennis Association has a 63-acre complex with more than 100 courts

Convention center: The Orange County Convention Center hosts an array of volleyball, dance, cheer, wrestling, basketball, and fitness events.

Contact: Visit Orlando, visitorlando.com.

PALM BEACH COUNTY

Palm Beach County offers a rare combination of world-class sports infrastructure, year-round ideal weather, and an unmatched destination experience. Home to 47 miles of beautiful beaches, more than 145 championship-caliber golf courses, world-renowned equestrian and polo facilities, Major League Baseball spring training venues, and premier indoor and outdoor sports complexes, The Palm Beaches can accommodate events of virtually every size and sport.

Hotel rooms: 22,000

Hotel tax rate: 13 percent

Major facilities:

- Wellington Sports Academy sits on a 120-plus-acre campus with indoor and outdoor competition spaces
- Roger Dean Chevrolet Stadium is a 6,800-seat baseball stadium
- Gardens North County District Park has seven lighted multipurpose fields
- National Polo Center features seven fields that can be converted into 47 multipurpose playing surfaces suitable for soccer, rugby, lacrosse, football, field hockey, and more

Convention center: The 350,000-square foot Palm Beach County Convention Center provides space for any event need, including a 100,000-square foot exhibition hall.

Contact: Palm Beach County Sports Commission, palmbeachsports.com.

PANAMA CITY BEACH

Panama City Beach is a one-of-a-kind destination where world-class sports facilities meet a laid-back, family-friendly beach town. With 27 miles of sugar-white sand, top-tier accommodations, and sunshine year-round, it's the ultimate blend of competition and vacation.

Hotel rooms: 18,000

Hotel tax rate: 12 percent

Major facilities:

- Frank Brown Sports Complex boasts nine baseball/softball fields, a 50-meter pool, three



soccer/football fields, and 22-acre multipurpose event field
- Publix Sports Park offers 12 multipurpose turf fields, 13 diamonds, eight full-size football fields, 12 soccer fields, and two championship fields

Convention center: The Panama City Beach Events Center at Edgewater Beach & Golf Resort offers 13,000 square feet and is typically used for sports such as gymnastics, boxing, and cheer and dance.

Contact: Visit Panama City Beach, visitpanamacitybeach.com.

PASCO COUNTY

Pasco County is in an area known as Florida's Sports Coast, which is just 30 minutes north of Tampa International Airport and 90 minutes west of Orlando International Airport. The area is a trusted destination for competitions and training, with world-class facilities.

Hotel rooms: 3,750

Major facilities:
- AdventHealth Center Ice is the largest indoor ice complex in the southeast
- Wiregrass Ranch Sports Campus of Pasco County is a new 98,000-square-foot indoor venue with eight basketball courts and 16 volleyball nets
- Sarah Vande Berg Tennis Center offers clay, hard, and pickleball courts

Contact: Florida's Sports Coast, flsportscoast.com.

PENSACOLA

With nearly 40 miles of sugar-white sand beaches between Pensacola Beach and Perdido Key, Pensacola also includes a walkable historic downtown, great local dining, unique attractions, and more. Secondly, it's a smaller city, so it's more affordable, easier to navigate, and has a wonderful small-town personality.

Hotel rooms: 12,000

Hotel tax rate: ranges from 12.5 to 14.75 percent, depending on location

Major facilities:
- Blue Wahoos Stadium is a 5,038-seat minor league ballpark
- Ashton Brosnaham Athletic Park has 13 soccer fields
- Roger Scott Tennis Center features 18 hard courts and 10 clay courts
- Escambia County Equestrian Center includes a multipurpose covered arena that seats 4,500
- Pensacola Bay Center, located in the historic downtown area, has a capacity of 10,00 and hosts sports like hockey, bull riding, cheerleading, boxing, and basketball

Contact: Visit Pensacola, visitpensacola.com.

SARASOTA COUNTY

Sarasota County is a unique sporting event destination where athletes and their families can easily extend their competition into a vacation. The destination has welcomed everything from traditional championship events to unique and niche competitions, including rowing, equestrian, BMX, dragon boat racing, stand-up paddleboarding, beach soccer, ultimate frisbee, croquet and even bridge tournaments.

Hotel rooms: 6,000

Hotel tax rate: 13 percent

Major facilities:
- Nathan Benderson Park is a 600-acre multiuse facility with a 400-acre lake, FISA Class-A certified 2,000-meter sprint rowing course and a parallel 1,500-meter course
- Ed Smith Stadium and Buck O'Neil Complex feature a 7,500-seat MLB spring training stadium
- CoolToday Park holds 8,000 in an MLB spring training stadium
- Sarasota Polo Club features 130 acres of manicured grounds and four polo fields
- Selby Aquatic Center houses a 50-meter Olympic-sized pool and 25-meter warm up pool
- Fox Lea Farm is a 46-acre equestrian facility

Contact: Sarasota County Sports Commission, sports.visitsarasota.com.

ST. AUGUSTINE

Florida's Historic Coast offers a distinctive combination of world-class sports facilities, year-round outdoor recreation and a destination experience that extends well beyond the competition. Athletes and spectators can compete and play in a setting that is home to TPC Sawgrass and THE PLAYERS Championship, while taking advantage of facilities for golf, tennis, pickleball, running, cycling, swimming, and a wide range of watersports.

Hotel rooms: 10,000

Hotel tax rate: 11.5 percent

Major facilities:
- Set to open in Spring 2027, the St. Johns County Sportsplex is a 40-acre athletic complex designed to support a variety of sports and will include eight lighted fields and a stadium with a track
- THE PLAYERS Stadium Course is home to THE PLAYERS Championship played every year
- Old Coast Pickleball has two indoor courts
- Treaty Park offers 20 pickleball courts

Convention center: St. Johns County Convention Center hosts sports such as cheer, gymnastics, and dance.

Contact: St. Augustine Ponte Vedra, floridashistoriccoast.com.

ST. PETERSBURG/CLEARWATER

Beyond promises of sunshine and memories made in the sand, St. Petersburg/Clearwater delivers discovery far beyond the shoreline. Its award-winning sugar-sand beaches are world-class, but this experience lets you bask in so much more than endless sunshine.

Hotel rooms: 22,100

Hotel tax rate: 13 percent

Major facilities:
- Sprowls Horizon Sports Park has six MLB spring training-inspired diamonds
- The Long Center houses a 50-meter, Olympic-sized pool
- Pelican Golf Club is a par-70 course
- Eddie C. Moore Softball Complex has nine fields
- North Shore Aquatic Complex is a waterfront venue that houses a 50-meter by 25-yard pool with a diving board
- Joe DiMaggio Sports Complex contains four multipurpose fields and hosts MLS Preseason training
- Oldsmar BMX Supercross Track is a world-class, two-tiered track

Convention center: Tropicana Field offers 140,400 square feet of space and has a seating capacity of 30,000-plus.

Contact: St. Pete-Clearwater Sports Commission, visitstpeteclearwater.com/sports.

SEMINOLE COUNTY

A short drive from all the major attractions of Central Florida and home to Orlando Sanford International Airport, Orlando North, Seminole County offers first-rate accommodations for less, varied meeting & event venues, and diverse dining and shopping in its charming communities. Known as "Orlando's Natural Oasis," the destination offers visitors a wide array of thrilling outdoor activities from an aerial adventure course with zip-lining to paddling alongside manatees in clear freshwater springs and rivers.

Hotel rooms: 5,000

Hotel tax rate: 12 percent

Major facilities:
- Boombah Sports Complex boasts 15 state-of-the-art lighted athletic fields
- Boombah Soldiers Creek offers six natural turf softball fields

Contact: Seminole County CVB, playorlandonorth.com.

TALLAHASSEE

Tallahassee combines championship-caliber facilities with the energy, hospitality, and amenities of Florida's

Capital City. Known as the Capital of Cross Country, Tallahassee recently hosted the 2026 World Athletics Cross Country Championships at Apalachee Regional Park—the first U.S. host of the event since 1992.

Hotel rooms: 6,500

Hotel tax rate: 12.5 percent

Major facilities:

- Apalachee Regional Park hosts regional, state, and national cross-country championships each year and features a pristine multi-surface trail
- FSU Seminole Rec-Sports Complex is a 108-acre facility boasting 21 fields, including 12 multipurpose fields for soccer, flag football, and other field sports, and five softball diamonds
- James Messer Sports Complex has nine lighted baseball/softball fields, including one Miracle League field for children or adults with disabilities
- Morcom Aquatic Center includes 30 practice lanes and a diving well

Convention center: The Donald L. Tucker Civic Center at Florida State University features a 12,500-seat arena and more than 54,000 square feet of meeting and exhibition space.

Contact: Visit Tallahassee, visittallahassee.com.

TAMPA BAY

Thanks to an impressive portfolio of top-notch facilities, attractions, hotels, dining, and entertainment options, Tampa possesses the capabilities and experience to host a multitude of professional, collegiate, youth, and amateur events.

Hotel rooms: 25,000

Major facilities:

- Home of the Tampa Bay Lightning, Benchmark International Arena is a multipurpose venue used for hockey, basketball, arena football, concerts, and other events
- Home to the Tampa Bay Buccaneers, Raymond James Stadium can seat 75,000 fans
- The Tournament SportsPlex of Tampa Bay features 15 multipurpose fields

Convention center: The Tampa Convention Center hosts premier cheerleading, dance, gymnastics, volleyball, and basketball events, among other sports.

Contact: Tampa Bay Sports Commission, visittampabay.com.

TREASURE COAST

Florida's east-central coast is known as the Treasure Coast. The area comprises Indian River, St. Lucie, and Martin Counties and has unique sports venues that host 35 different sports.

Hotel rooms: 7,700

Major facilities:

- The Jackie Robinson Training Complex in Vero Beach includes five baseball fields, four softball fields, an indoor facility, and a multipurpose soccer/lacrosse field
- The IG Recreation Center has two basketball courts
- North County Regional Park in Sebastian has four softball fields, two soccer fields, and an Olympic-sized competition pool and diving well
- South County Regional Park in Punta Gorda features baseball, softball and soccer fields, basketball and tennis/pickleball courts, an RC car track, and an 18-hole disc golf course
- Lawnwood and Lakewood Regional Parks boast 10 baseball fields, eight soccer/lacrosse fields, a football stadium, and 12 tennis courts

Contact: Treasure Coast Sports Commission, playtreasurecoastflorida.com. ■



SPOTLIGHT ON:
VIRGINIA

Virginia boasts a strong mix of sports infrastructure, accessibility, and destination appeal. With facilities equipped for everything from youth tournaments to major championships, the state offers plenty of options for organizers across a wide range of sports. Its location along the East Coast makes it convenient for teams traveling from major population centers, while Virginia's cities, coastal communities, and mountain destinations give athletes and fans plenty to explore between competitions. "Virginia offers a plethora of things for event attendees to engage in outside of the sporting event and makes for a great family sports vacation destination," says Danish Saadat, national sales and marketing manager for Sports Virginia. "From museums, amusement parks, to beautiful hiking trails, and beaches, Virginia has something for everyone." ■



The Old Glory DC rugby team plays at Fairfax's George Mason Stadium. ▶

Courtesy Old Glory DC

VIRGINIA



MUST SEE:

Mount Vernon

George Washington's Mount Vernon presents a firsthand connection to one of the most defining periods in American history. As the most-visited historic home in the United States, the estate offers visitors a chance to explore Washington's home, gardens, and working farm while gaining a deeper understanding of the man and the era behind the history books. ■

ABINGDON

Abingdon is located off Interstate 81 and is a central hub to some of southwest Virginia's best scenic outdoor destinations. The city is home to the Rails to Trails Hall of Fame Virginia Creeper Trail, a 34-mile biking and walking trail that starts in Abingdon and ends at Whitetop Mountain.

Hotel rooms: 684

Hotel tax rate: 12.3 percent

Major facility:

- Meadows Sports Complex has four baseball/softball fields and two soccer fields that can also accommodate youth football and lacrosse

Contact: Abingdon CVB, visitabingdonvirginia.com.

ALEXANDRIA

Alexandria is located just five miles from Washington, D.C., along the banks of the Potomac River. It is only a 10-minute drive from Reagan National Airport and a short drive to both Dulles International Airport and Baltimore/Washington International Airport. Additionally, it's just a quick walk to the city's historic Amtrak station. Conveniently situated off the I-95 corridor and featuring over 200 independently-owned restaurants and boutiques, Alexandria offers something for every sports enthusiast.

Hotel rooms: 3,872

Hotel tax rate: 12.5 percent plus $1.25 per room, per night

Major facilities:

- Episcopal High School is a 130-acre campus with eight playing fields, three synthetic turf fields, two Bermuda grass fields, an outdoor track, baseball and softball fields, tennis courts, gyms, squash courts, wrestling facilities, and a 5,500-square-foot golf center
- George Washington Middle School features Stephen F. Osisek Stadium, tennis courts, and a baseball/softball field
- Joseph Hensley Park features a synthetic turf diamond field and a full-size natural turf softball field
- Eugene Simpson Stadium Park includes two natural turf diamond fields, two natural turf rectangular fields, four pickleball courts, two tennis courts, and a basketball court

Contact: Visit Alexandria, visitalexandria.com.

PLAY HARDER. PLAY BOLDER.

From the first warm-up to the final whistle, this is a city that knows how to show up for sports.

FIND YOUR GAME at Boo Williams Sportsplex, Hampton Coliseum, the Aquaplex and Hampton Roads Convention Center.

GO BEYOND FAMILIAR.



VISIT HAMPTON VIRGINIA

VISITHAMPTON.COM

ALLEGHANY HIGHLANDS

The Alleghany Highlands offers beautiful mountain views, endless outdoor recreation and two walkable downtowns with locally-owned shops and restaurants.

Hotel rooms: 356

Major facilities:

- The Jackson River Sports Complex in Covington is home to five multipurpose lighted baseball/softball fields, 10-plus lighted soccer fields, and lighted tennis courts
- The Jackson River Scenic Trail is a 14.4-mile trail
- Lake Moomaw covers 2,530 surface acres and 43 miles of undeveloped shoreline and Douthat State Park

Contact: Alleghany Highlands Chamber of Commerce & Tourism, visitalleghanyhighlands.com.

ARLINGTON

Arlington is a vibrant, fitness-focused urban community with 39 hotels and excellent public transportation in the heart of the D.C. metro area.

Hotel rooms: 9,259

Hotel tax rate: 14.25 percent

Major facilities:

- Long Bridge Aquatics & Fitness Center is a 92,000-square-foot venue with a 50-meter competition pool
- Boeing Fields at Long Bridge Park features three full-size lighted synthetic multisport fields
- MedStar Capitals Iceplex features two indoor NHL-sized ice rinks

Contact: Arlington Convention & Visitors Service, stayarlington.com.

BLUE RIDGE

Virginia's Blue Ridge has an impressive inventory of well-maintained, centrally-located fields and facilities across five cities and counties that can accommodate all types of sports, ranging from collegiate to professional events. With over 1,000 miles of trails, Virginia's Blue Ridge has established itself as a premier destination for outdoor recreation and adventure.

Hotel rooms: 5,000

Hotel tax rate: 12 percent or 13 percent, depending on county/city

Major facilities:

- Taliaferro Sports and Entertainment Complex features the 7,000-seat Salem Civic Center, 7,157-seat Salem Football Stadium, and the 6,300-seat Salem Memorial Ballpark
- Roanoke College's Cregger Center is a 155,000-square-foot venue with a 2,000-seat arena and field house with eight-lane, 200-meter track
- James I. Moyer Sports Complex includes four fields and 13 lighted pickleball courts
- Botetourt Sports Complex features a cross-country course and soccer fields
- River's Edge Sports Complex has one baseball field, two softball fields, five soccer fields, and six tennis courts

Convention center: Berglund Center includes a 10,500-seat coliseum, a 10,000-square-foot Exhibit Hall, and a 46,000-square-foot Special Events Center. The venue hosts a variety of sports, including basketball, hockey, volleyball, gymnastics, wrestling, boxing, cornhole, and cheerleading.

Contact: Visit Virginia's Blue Ridge, visitroanokeva.com

CHESAPEAKE

Chesapeake is situated in the heart of Coastal Virginia on the Intracoastal Waterway and offers lots of outdoor adventure with 22 miles of fresh and salt waterways.

Hotel rooms: 4,000



GO TO TOWN! BLACKSBURG CHRISTIANSBURG

MONTGOMERY COUNTY, VA

VIRGINIA IS FOR LOVERS



For premier sport and event venues, convenient travel access, high-volume lodging options, and the region's top visitor destination, look no further than Blacksburg, Christiansburg, and Montgomery County, Virginia.

With venues made for region-wide baseball and softball tournaments, large-scale swim invitationals, travel soccer, lacrosse, volleyball, and more, you'll discover a community heavily invested in youth sports.

Our outdoor venues are second to none. Find over 10 baseball and softball fields across the county, including three at Harkrader Sports Complex in Christiansburg and four at Teel Park in Riner. For soccer, lacrosse, and football, consider utilizing four artificial turf fields at Christiansburg Huckleberry Park, or other options throughout the county.

You'll find the region's best selection of indoor venues right here. Discover an Olympic-size competition pool with space for over 1,400 athletes and spectators at the Christiansburg Aquatic Center. Host volleyball and basketball tournaments at the Christiansburg Recreation Center with four courts.

No venue is located more than 20 minutes away from shopping, dining, and recreation options in both Blacksburg and Christiansburg. With the New River, vast trail systems throughout the community, and Virginia Tech, athletes and their families will love exploring during their stay.

Learn more about our extensive list of offerings and connect with us at

GoToMontVA.com/Sports

Major facilities:
- Western Branch Park offers five multipurpose lighted fields for softball, football, rugby, lacrosse, field hockey, and soccer, as well as six lighted tennis and pickleball courts
- Chilled Ponds Ice Sports Complex is a 90,000-square-foot dual rink complex
- Deep Creek Park has four lighted multipurpose fields for soccer, football, rugby, lacrosse, and field hockey, as well as four lighted baseball/softball fields
- Centerville Park features 11 multipurpose fields

Contact: Visit Chesapeake, visitchesapeake.com.

FAIRFAX COUNTY

Fairfax County offers world-class tourism infrastructure and is close to the nation's capital. Last spring, the county welcomed the new Patriot Park North, a six-diamond complex.

Hotel rooms: 19,000
Hotel tax rate: 15 percent
Major facilities:
- Patriot Park North offers six synthetic-turf ball diamonds
- The St. James is a 450,000-square-foot indoor mega sportsplex with full-size turf field, four NBA basketball courts, two NHL-sized ice sheets, 10-lane, 50-meter Olympic pool, eight international singles squash courts, and a gymnastics training center
- George Mason University's EagleBank Arena is a 10,000-seat multipurpose venue
- George Mason Stadium is a 5,000-seat venue

Contact: Visit Fairfax, fxva.com/sports.

FREDERICKSBURG

Fredericksburg is located just off I-95, halfway between Washington, D.C. and Richmond. It's easy to get to with access from Route 17, Route 3, and I-95, and accessible by Amtrak.

Hotel rooms: 910
Hotel tax rate: 13.3 percent
Major facilities:
- The Virginia Credit Union Baseball Stadium is a 5,000-seat stadium

Convention center: The Fredericksburg Convention Center is a 110,000-square-foot facility.
Contact: City of Fredericksburg, fxbg.com.

HALIFAX COUNTY

From the arts to outdoor sporting opportunities to history to motorsports, there's something for everyone in Halifax County.

Hotel rooms: 452
Major facilities:
- Edmunds Park Disc Golf Course is a permanent 7,000-foot course
- Staunton River State Park Disc Golf Course is a permanent 3,475-foot course
- Virginia International Raceway is considered one of the top six road courses in the country

Contact: Halifax County Tourism, gohalifaxva.com.

HAMPTON

Hampton is located in the heart of Coastal Virginia between Williamsburg and Virginia Beach and within a short driving distance to hundreds of world-class attractions.

Hotel rooms: 2,500
Hotel tax rate: 15 percent plus $2 arts and athletic fee
Major facilities:
- Boo Williams Sportsplex has eight basketball courts, 12 volleyball courts, and a 200-meter, six-lane indoor track





Courtesy City of Lynchburg

Lynchburg City Stadium is a historic multiuse sports and event venue.

- Hampton Coliseum accommodates wrestling, basketball, hockey, ice skating, indoor racing, tumbling, gymnastics, and more
- Hampton Virginia Aquaplex & SplashDown Park hosts diving, swimming, water polo, and more
- Buckroe Beach offers a three-quarter mile beachfront with eight acres of beach
- War Memorial Stadium is a 3,750-seat baseball stadium

Convention center: Hampton Roads Convention Center offers a variety of spaces, including a 102,600-square-foot exhibit hall, and hosts sports such as volleyball, basketball, gymnastics, cheerleading/dance, martial arts, and more.

Contact: Hampton Roads Chamber, hrchamber.com.

HENRICO

Henrico's central East Coast location offers convenient access by interstate, rail, and air. With the Henrico Sports & Events Center, tournament-quality fields and 24 lighted pickleball courts, Henrico provides a versatile lineup of venues for events of all sizes. Continued investment includes a new six-field baseball complex at Glover Park, expected to welcome play in spring 2027.

Hotel rooms: 10.200

Major facilities:

- Henrico Sports & Events Center is a 185,000-square-foot facility with 12 basketball courts or 24 volleyball courts, as well as a 3,500-seat championship court
- Dorey Park offers six multipurpose fields, a baseball stadium, and seven additional baseball/softball fields
- Glover Park includes six lighted synthetic turf multipurpose fields , with a six-field baseball complex opening for the 2027 spring season
- RF&P Park features seven baseball/softball fields, as well as a football field and tennis court
- Pouncey Tract Pickleball boasts 24 pickleball courts

Contact: Henrico Sports & Entertainment Authority, henricosea.com.

LOUDOUN

Loudoun's close proximity to Washington, D.C., major airports and interstates makes it an easy choice as a top sports destination in northern Virginia. Loudoun is also connected to the nation's capital on the Washington Metro Rail Silver Line, which stops at Dulles Airport and two additional Loudoun locations.

Hotel rooms: 6,200

Hotel tax rate: 15 percent

Major facilities:

- Hal & Berni Hanson Regional Park is a 257-acre complex with 11 multipurpose fields, four baseball/softball fields, eight pickleball/four tennis courts, and more
- ION: The Rinks at Compass Creek is a 90,000-square-foot venue with two NHL-sized sheets of ice
- Raventek Park is a 37-acre complex with four FIFA One Star certification turf fields
- Philip Bolen Park offers nine baseball/softball diamonds and 10 multisport fields for soccer, lacrosse, field hockey, and football
- Opening in 2027, the USTA Mid-Atlantic Campus will include 20 outdoor tennis courts, eight outdoor pickleball courts, 10 indoor tennis courts, 12 indoor pickleball courts, and a 3,500-seat stadium

Contact: Visit Loudon, visitloudon.org.

LYNCHBURG

Nestled at the base of the Blue Ridge Mountains along the historic James River, Lynchburg is a vibrant, walk-friendly city that combines small-city charm with big-city sports infrastructure. Anchored by five colleges and universities, the region boasts NCAA Division I facilities, year-round mountain terrain, and a long-standing track record of hosting elite regional and national competitions.

Hotel rooms: 2,338

Hotel tax rate: 11.8 percent plus $1 per room, per night

Major facilities:

- Lynchburg City Stadium Complex has a capacity of 9,000
- Home of the Hill City Howlers Minor League Baseball team, Bank of the James Stadium is a 4,000-seat facility
- Vines Center at Liberty University is a multipurpose venue
- Liberty University Baseball Stadium is a 2,500-seat ballpark

Contact: City of Lynchburg, lyhlovesyou.com.

NEWPORT NEWS

Newport News offers a combination of small- to mid-size meeting accommodations, quality sports facilities, world-class attractions, excellent transportation access, and a variety of hotel options at moderate price points. Its location in the heart of Hampton Roads also gives event organizers access to additional regional facilities and amenities.

Hotel rooms: 3,000

Hotel tax rate: 14 percent plus $1 per room, per night

Major facilities:

- TowneBank Stadium at Christopher Newport University has a capacity of 4,200
- John B. Todd Stadium is an artificial turf stadium with a capacity of 7,700
- The Freeman Center at Christopher Newport University hosts basketball, volleyball, and indoor track and field
- Williamsburg Sports & Events Center boasts 200,000 square feet of indoor space with 12 basketball courts, up to 24 volleyball courts, and indoor track

Contact: Visit Newport News, newport-news.org.

NORFOLK

Norfolk offers a variety of unique venues for sport events. It operates outside the standard sports complex and provides visitors and hosts with a unique space in a city rich in history, cuisine, and art.

Hotel rooms: 5,200

Hotel tax rate: 15 percent plus $3 per room, per night

Sponsored Content

Competitive spirit blends with coastal charm in Virginia Beach, the ultimate destination for championships, tournaments and team bonding by the sea.





Where the Atlantic Ocean meets the Chesapeake Bay, Virginia Beach offers world-class sports facilities amid an ideal setting to combine a love of the game with a vibrant beach destination.

State-of-the-art facilities include the 285,000-square-foot Virginia Beach Sports Center, which accommodates 12 basketball courts, 24 volleyball courts and a 200-meter, hydraulically banked track, hosts competitions and tournaments from basketball and volleyball to indoor track and field and indoor field hockey.

Other facilities include the Princess Anne Athletic Complex, with 16 Muscolit fields for lacrosse, football, soccer or softball; the LEED® Gold-certified Virginia Beach Convention Center, with over 250,000 square feet of space for wrestling, badminton, fencing, gymnastics, cheer and dance; and the Hampton Roads Soccer Complex, with two lighted turf fields and 22 Bermuda grass fields for soccer or lacrosse camps and clinics. Of course, the Oceanfront is the ultimate setting for surfing, sand soccer, beach volleyball and marathons.

Whether on the sand, in the water or at a sports facility, Virginia Beach is where athletes come for their favorite sport and leave with a lifetime of memories.



GET TO KNOW:

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Dani Timm has worked in the sports industry for over a decade. During this time, she has booked more than 1,000 sports-oriented events ranging from high school tournaments to NCAA college athletic conferences. She graduated from the University of Iowa and earned her Sports Tourism Specialist (STS) designation through the Sports Events and Tourism Association.

HOT TOPICS

The sports team at Visit Virginia Beach works alongside you from first call to final whistle, with facilities built for tournament play, hotel inventory that can actually handle your numbers, and a team that treats your event like it's the only one on the calendar. Add three miles of oceanfront for families to recharge between games, and you've got a destination that keeps players happy and planners sane. When it's time to book your next competition or tournament, look no further than Virginia Beach for an MVP-level experience.

Submit your RFP today at www.visitvirginiabeach.com/sports.




Courtesy Visit Virginia Beach

The NHSCA High School Wrestling Nationals at the Virginia Beach Sports Center.

Major facilities:
- Norfolk Scope Arena is a multipurpose venue with seating for 11,000
- Harbor Park Stadium offers seating for more than 11,800
- Norfolk Boxing Center is a 13,000-square-foot facility with two rings
- Norfolk State University can host basketball, football, volleyball, wrestling, baseball, softball, tennis, track and field, and more

Contact: Visit Norfolk, visitnorfolk.com.

PRINCE WILLIAM COUNTY

Prince William County is 30 miles outside of Washington D.C. and less than 45 minutes from two international airports. The county currently has over 3,000 acres of recreational greenspace for outdoor sports tournaments and events.

Hotel rooms: 5,117

Major facilities:
- Ali Krieger Sports Complex features two artificial turf fields and two grass fields for soccer, field hockey, and lacrosse
- James S. Long Regional Park includes seven soccer fields
- NOVA BMX Track hosts BMX races
- Prince William Ice Center houses two ice rinks
- Veterans Memorial Park accommodates pickleball, soccer, lacrosse, baseball, field hockey, and skateboarding
- Freedom Aquatic and Fitness Center has a 50-meter Olympic-sized pool

Contact: Prince William Sports, visitpwc.com/sports.

RICHMOND

Richmond boasts championship-caliber venues for everything from baseball and NASCAR to volleyball, swimming, soccer, field hockey, and outdoor adventure sports. The Region is also home to the nation's only urban Class III and IV whitewater rapids on the James River, creating a unique backdrop for endurance events and outdoor recreation.

Hotel rooms: 20,000

Hotel tax rate: 16 percent

Major facilities:
- River City Sportsplex is a 115-acre complex with 16 all-weather turf fields
- Located just north of the city, the Henrico Sports & Events Center is a 185,000-square-foot building with 115,000 square feet of contiguous court space
- SwimRVA houses a 50-meter, eight-lane competition pool
- Harry G. Daniel Park at Ironbridge showcases six fast pitch and slow pitch lighted diamond fields
- Dorey Park features seven multipurpose fields, a new 60/90 baseball stadium, and four baseball/softball tournament fields

Convention center: The Greater Richmond Convention Center is a 700,000-square-foot facility featuring 180,000 square feet of contiguous space and hosts volleyball, field hockey, fencing, cheer and dance, boxing, and more.

Contact: Richmond Regional Tourism, visitrichmondva.com.

SALEM

Salem is located in western Virginia between Roanoke and Blacksburg. The city boats outstanding facilities, either city or college owned, and the people necessary to maintain those facilities and provide a welcoming atmosphere to visitors.

Hotel rooms: 1,080

Hotel tax rate: 13.3 percent

Major facilities:
- Salem Football Stadium is a 7,157-seat municipal stadium
- Salem Memorial Ballpark is a 6,300-seat ballpark
- Creger Center at Roanoke College seats 1,800 and hosts volleyball and basketball
- Spartan Field is a 1,200-seat venue

Contact: City of Salem, visitsalemva.com.

STAFFORD

Located halfway between Washington, D.C., and Richmond, Stafford connects two metropolitan areas with sophisticated assets. Stafford County is a go-to place for sports tournament rightsholders seeking a location with ample event facilities, hotels, and other infrastructure to support players on and off the field.

Hotel rooms: 5,400

Major facilities:
- Embrey Mill Park is a multisport complex that boasts eight fields for soccer, lacrosse, football, and field hockey
- Jeff Rouse Swim and Sports Center houses a 50-meter by 25-yard competition pool
- Chichester Park offers five lighted baseball/softball fields
- The Potomac River hosts a variety of fishing tournaments

Contact: Tour Stafford, gostaffordva.com.

VIRGINIA BEACH

Virginia Beach offers a unique mix of sports facilities and 38 miles of coastline, giving sporting events the opportunity to pair competition with an unforgettable beach destination experience.

Hotel rooms: 13,000

Hotel tax rate: 14 percent plus $2 per room, per night

Major facilities:
- Virginia Beach Sports Center offers 285,000 square feet of space, including 12 basketball courts, 24 volleyball courts, a 200-meter hydraulically-banked track, and seating for 5,000
- Princess Anne Athletic Complex includes eight lighted softball fields and eight multipurpose playing fields for football and soccer
- Hampton Roads Soccer Complex includes eight turf fields with lights and 18 Bermuda grass fields
- The Virginia Beach Field House has six turf fields, eight regulation volleyball courts, four basketball courts, multiple party rooms, an arcade, and an indoor Fun Zone

Convention center: The Virginia Beach Convention Center has 150,000 square feet of column-free space and hosts sports like gymnastics, cheerleading, and dance.

Contact: Virginia Beach CVB, visitvirginiabeach.com/sports. ■

SPOTLIGHT ON:
ARIZONA

Few destinations bring together big-time sports, standout facilities, and a setting quite like Arizona. From professional franchises and powerhouse college programs to major events that draw athletes and fans from across the country, the state has built a reputation as a place where sports thrive. Beyond the competition, Arizona delivers plenty of sunshine, distinctive desert scenery, and the infrastructure to make hosting an event as memorable as the action itself. ■



Scottsdale is home to several polo venues. ▶

Courtesy Experience Scottsdale

ARIZONA



MUST SEE:

McDowell Sonoran Preserve

The McDowell Sonoran Preserve offers an expansive look at the natural beauty that defines Scottsdale. Spanning more than 30,500 acres, it is the largest urban preserve in North America, with more than 230 miles of interconnected trails winding through the Sonoran Desert and McDowell Mountains. Hiking, biking, and horseback riding provide plenty of ways to explore the picturesque landscape and experience a side of Scottsdale that can't be found anywhere else. ■

Courtesy Roger Naylor (top) and Sean O'Brien (bottom) for Experience Scottsdale

FLAGSTAFF

At 7,000 feet, Flagstaff's elevation is perfect for high-altitude training. Meanwhile, summer there is the epitome of perfect weather for outdoor sports, with bragging rights to weather averaging a high of 85 degrees.

Hotel rooms: 5,000
Hotel tax rate: 11.386 percent
Major facilities:

- Thorpe Park offers four adult softball fields, three youth baseball fields, and two soccer fields
- Mark Grace Field includes one youth baseball field
- Adrian Garcia Sr. Field includes one youth softball field
- Continental Park features three lighted youth baseball fields and one lighted softball field
- Joe Garagiola Field has one youth baseball field
- Foxglenn Park features one adult baseball field, one adult softball field, and two soccer fields

Contact: Discover Flagstaff, flagstaffarizona.org.

GILBERT

Gilbert has invested in tournament-level sports facilities and offers a consistently recognized downtown for its food scene. The small-town feel and big-city amenities make Gilbert a friendly place to visit, too.

Hotel rooms: 1,200
Hotel tax rate: 14.27 percent
Major facilities:

- Gilbert Regional Park is a 272-acre master-planned park with 16 pickleball courts, six tennis courts, and six sand volleyball courts
- Cactus Yards includes eight replica fields for baseball and softball
- Inspire Courts is a 52,000-square-foot indoor basketball and volleyball facility

Contact: Discover Gilbert, discovergilbert.com.

MESA

What sets Mesa apart is the sheer variety of venues available within one destination. The city is home to two Major League Baseball spring training stadiums: Sloan Park, home of the Chicago Cubs, and Hohokam Stadium, home of the Athletics. It also has extensive multiuse fields, two premier competition aquatic facilities and access to more than 30 golf courses.

Hotel rooms: 5,548
Hotel tax rate: 14.27 percent
Major facilities:

- Arizona Athletic Grounds spans 275 acres and includes eight baseball and softball fields, 16 basketball courts, and 24 multipurpose fields for soccer, football, and lacrosse, as well as 50 indoor volleyball courts, 12 beach volleyball courts, 41 pickleball courts, and a performance training center
- Sloan Park is the spring training home of the Chicago Cubs and has a total capacity of 15,000
- Hohokam Stadium is the spring training home of the Athletics and is equipped with 7,500 fixed seats and can accommodate an additional 2,500
- Red Mountain Soccer Complex features 16 flat natural grass soccer fields



Courtesy Aaron Soto/Tempe Tourism

Riding the course at the Street League Skateboarding Tempe Takeover.

Convention center: The Mesa Convention Center and Amphitheatre offers nearly 40,000 square feet of space, including a 19,000-square-foot main exhibit hall and a 9,000-square-foot ballroom.
Contact: Visit Mesa, visitmesa.com.

PHOENIX

Phoenix stands as a beacon for sporting event excellence, where sun-drenched skies and an average of 300 days of sunshine set the stage for unforgettable moments. The city's evolution into a powerhouse destination is marked by state-of-the-art venues like Footprint Center and Chase Field, which host everything from championship games to world-class tournaments.

Hotel rooms: 72,000
Hotel tax rate: 12.57 percent
Major facilities:
- Mortgage Matchup Center is a multipurpose facility that hosts up to 17,071 for basketball
- Chase Field is a 48,330-seat baseball stadium
- Desert Diamond Arena is a 19,000-seat multipurpose venue
- State Farm Stadium is a football stadium with a capacity of up to 72,200

Convention Center: The Phoenix Convention Center hosts a myriad championship events, including gymnastics, fencing, volleyball, and cheerleading.
Contact: Visit Phoenix, visitphoenix.com.

SCOTTSDALE

With more than 70 resorts and hotels, spectacular sunsets and over 300 days of sunshine each year, Scottsdale is an ideal destination for sports events. The city is also home to premier facilities for national showcases and top professional and youth tournaments, all set against a lush Sonoran Desert backdrop.

Hotel rooms: 14,770
Hotel tax rate: 13.97 percent
Major facilities:
- Scottsdale Stadium is the spring training headquarters for the San Francisco Giants and has a seating capacity of 11,000
- Salt River Fields at Talking Stick is the home of Arizona Diamondbacks and Colorado Rockies spring training and boasts an 11,000-seat ballpark and 12 practice fields
- Scottsdale Sports Complex is a 71-acre facility with 10 fields for sports like lacrosse, soccer, football, and rugby
- Bell94 Sports Complex has six lighted grass fields for soccer, lacrosse, football, and rugby
- TPC Scottsdale is a premier destination for golf and the host of the WM Phoenix Open
- WestWorld of Scottsdale is an equestrian facility with 300,000 square feet of space

Contact: Experience Scottsdale, experiencescottsdale.com.

SURPRISE

Surprise is nationally recognized as the spring training home of the Kansas City Royals and Texas Rangers. In 2025 and 2026, Surprise Stadium was named the #1 Spring Training Facility in the nation in the 2026 USA Today 10Best Readers' Choice Awards program

Hotel rooms: 900
Hotel tax rate: 14.59 percent
Major facilities:
- Surprise Stadium is a 10714-seat stadium that also has 12 Major League practice fields
- Surprise Tennis & Racquet Complex offers 25 lighted courts
- Surprise Pickleball Complex has 16 lighted courts
- Mark Coronado Park offers eight acres of fields for soccer and football

Contact: City of Surprise, exploresurprise.com.

TEMPE

Tempe offers a vibrant mix of historic charm, local culture, new experiences, and people as diverse as the scenery. From candy-colored skies to moonlit lake nights, Tempe is the heart of it all and your bridge to the best of big-city excitement and Arizona's stunning natural beauty.

Hotel room: 6,911
Hotel tax rate: 14.07 percent
Major facilities:
- Mullett Arena is a 5,000-seat multipurpose arena on the campus of ASU
- Grass Clippings Rolling Hills is Arizona's only fully lighted 18-hole day/night golf course
- ASU Mona Plummer Aquatic Center houses an Olympic-sized pool
- Mountain America Stadium is a 56,599-seat venue with a natural grass playing surface
- Sun Devil Fitness is a 234,000-square-foot complex with multipurpose rooms, courts, pools, and fields
- The 20-acre Benedict Sports Complex consists of five lighted multipurpose fields
- Tempe Sports Complex is a 60-acre complex with seven multipurpose fields, four lighted baseball/softball fields, and eight lighted pickleball courts

Contact: Tempe Tourism, tempetourism.com.

TUCSON

During the fall, winter, and spring, Tucson offers incredible weather for outdoor sports such as soccer, lacrosse, cycling, golf, and swimming. On average, temperatures are in the low to mid-70s from November to March.

Hotel rooms: 16,600
Hotel tax rate: 12.05 percent plus $4 per room per night
Major facilities:
- Kino Sports Complex offers three different complexes: Kino Main Complex, with one stadium baseball field, two half fields, and five regulation baseball fields; Kino North Complex, which houses eight soccer fields; and Kino South Complex, which has 12 natural grass multisport fields and 20 pickleball courts
- Sporting Chance Center houses nearly 40,000 square feet of indoor space for five basketball courts, eight volleyball courts, and other indoor courts
- Lincoln Regional Park totals 191 acres and includes an eight-field softball complex, two soccer fields, four sand volleyball courts, and a one-mile walking path

Convention center: The Tucson Convention Center, nestled in the heart of downtown, houses Tucson

Arena and showcases 233,000 square feet of new and remodeled event space.
Contact: Visit Tucson Sports, visittucson.org.

YUMA

Yuma offers the perfect combination of year-round sunshine, outstanding sports facilities, and a welcoming community. Its warm winter climate allows athletes to compete outdoors when much of the country is experiencing cold weather.

Hotel rooms: 3,600
Hotel tax rate: 10.412 percent
Major facilities:

- Pacific Avenue Athletic Complex houses six softball fields
- Ray Kroc Sports Complex has three baseball fields, four soccer fields, and eight flag football fields
- Desert Hills Golf Course is an 18-hole, par-72, 6,800-yard championship course with a driving range, putting and chipping greens, a par-three course, a FootGolf course, and a restaurant and bar.
- Yuma Civic Center seats 3,000

Contact: Visit Yuma, visityuma.com. ■



Courtesy City Of Yuma

Taking a swing at Yuma's Desert Hills Golf Course.



SPOTLIGHT ON:
NEBRASKA

Nebraska may be best known for its passion for college sports, but its appeal to event organizers goes well beyond game day. A central location makes the state accessible for teams traveling from across the country, while a strong network of sports facilities and experienced host communities can accommodate competitions of all sizes. Add welcoming communities, a genuine enthusiasm for athletics and plenty of room to gather, and Nebraska offers the complete sports package. "Nebraska has high-end venues and well-equipped surrounding districts for welcoming fans and visitors," says Ben Jones, marketing content specialist for Visit Nebraska. ■



Inline speed skating in Lincoln. ▶

Courtesy USA Roller Sports

NEBRASKA

KEARNEY

Kearney is centrally located right off I-80. The city frequently hosts statewide and regional tournaments.

Hotel rooms: 1,971

Major facilities:

- Patriot Park features four lighted baseball diamonds and four lighted softball fields
- Viaero Center is a 54,000-plus square-foot multipurpose arena with seating for 5,500
- Kearney Raceway Park is the only drag strip in the state

Contact: Kearney Visitors Bureau, visitkearney.org.



MUST SEE:

Museum of American Speed

The Museum of American Speed in Lincoln puts the history and culture of the automobile on full display. Boasting an impressive collection that spans generations of cars, racing memorabilia, and automotive artifacts, it's so much more than a museum for car enthusiasts, offering a unique look at how speed, design, and innovation have shaped American culture. ■

Courtesy Museum of American Speed

LINCOLN

Lincoln, Nebraska's state capital, has a tremendous passion for and tradition of hosting major national and international sports competitions. Lincoln's commitment and small-town feel make it an attractive destination for any size event.

Hotel rooms: 5,600

Hotel tax rate: 16.25 percent

Major facilities:

- Sandhills Global Youth Complex has seven all-turf baseball/softball fields
- Kinetic Sports Complex is a 93,000-square-foot venue with eight basketball courts that convert to 12 volleyball courts
- Pinnacle Bank Arena is a 15,500-seat venue
- Sandhills Global Event Center is a multipurpose venue with more than 400,000 square feet of space
- Bob Devaney Sports Center is a multipurpose sports complex on the campus of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln
- Lincoln Sports Foundation has 18 soccer fields, six basketball courts, and 12 volleyball courts

Contact: Visit Lincoln, lincoln.org.

NORTH PLATTE

North Platte is located right in the middle of the United States, just four hours from Denver, Colorado, and Omaha, Nebraska. The city also has the facilities to host successful sporting events and a brand-new state-of-the-art airport.

Hotel rooms: 1,700

Hotel tax rate: 14.5 percent

Major facilities:

- Cody Park Pickleball & Tennis Facility has 14 dedicated pickleball courts and eight tennis courts
- Dowhower Softball Complex has seven lighted diamonds with scoreboards
- Wild West Arena is a PRCA outdoor rodeo arena with seating for 4,000
- D&N Event Center is a 40,000-square-foot building suitable for a variety of sports and events
- With renovations expected to be finished in the spring of 2027, the North Platte Recreation Center will feature a 10-lane competition pool, 25,000 square-foot indoor turf area, and six regulation basketball /volleyball courts

Contact: Visit North Platte, visitnorthplatte.com.

OMAHA

Omaha is a city known for hosting all its sporting events with Olympic-level zest and expertise. The city is centrally located, making travel easy.

Hotel rooms: 15,000
Hotel tax rate: 18 percent
Major facilities:
- CHI Health Center Omaha is a 17,100-seat multipurpose arena
- Baxter Arena is a 7,800-seat multipurpose venue
- Union Bank & Trust Sports Complex is a 178,000-square-foot complex for volleyball and basketball
- Moylan Iceplex houses an NHL-sized sheet of ice and an Olympic-sized sheet of ice
- Koch Tennis Center has 31 courts, some of which are lined for pickleball
- First Interstate Bank Sportsplex features six soccer fields and four baseball diamonds

Contact: Visit Omaha, visitomaha.com.

SARPY COUNTY

Located just south of Omaha, Sarpy County sits at the heart of the state's most dynamic metropolitan area. While it is Nebraska's smallest county by area, it is also its fastest-growing. Home to the communities of Bellevue, Gretna, La Vista, Papillion, and Springfield, the county boasts a population of more than 200,000 residents.

Hotel rooms: 2,200
Hotel tax rate: varies by city
Major facilities:
- CHI Health Multisport Complex Nebraska has 12 multipurpose fields
- Papillion Landing Sports Complex includes six baseball/softball fields
- Papillion Landing Community Recreation Center consists of 96,000 square feet of space with a natatorium, three basketball courts, and six volleyball courts
- Gretna Crossing Park is a 157-acre park with four softball fields, four baseball fields, four soccer fields, 18-hole disc golf course, and eight-lane competition pool
- Home to the Omaha Storm Chasers, the Triple-A Affiliate of the Kansas City Royals, Werner Park is a 6,434-seat ballpark

Contact: Sarpy County Tourism, gosarpy.com.

SOUTH SIOUX CITY

Located along the Missouri River in northeast Nebraska, South Sioux City offers the feel of a small community with the sports infrastructure to host events of all sizes. Hotels and facilities are conveniently located, transportation is easy, and local businesses and community partners are invested in making events successful.

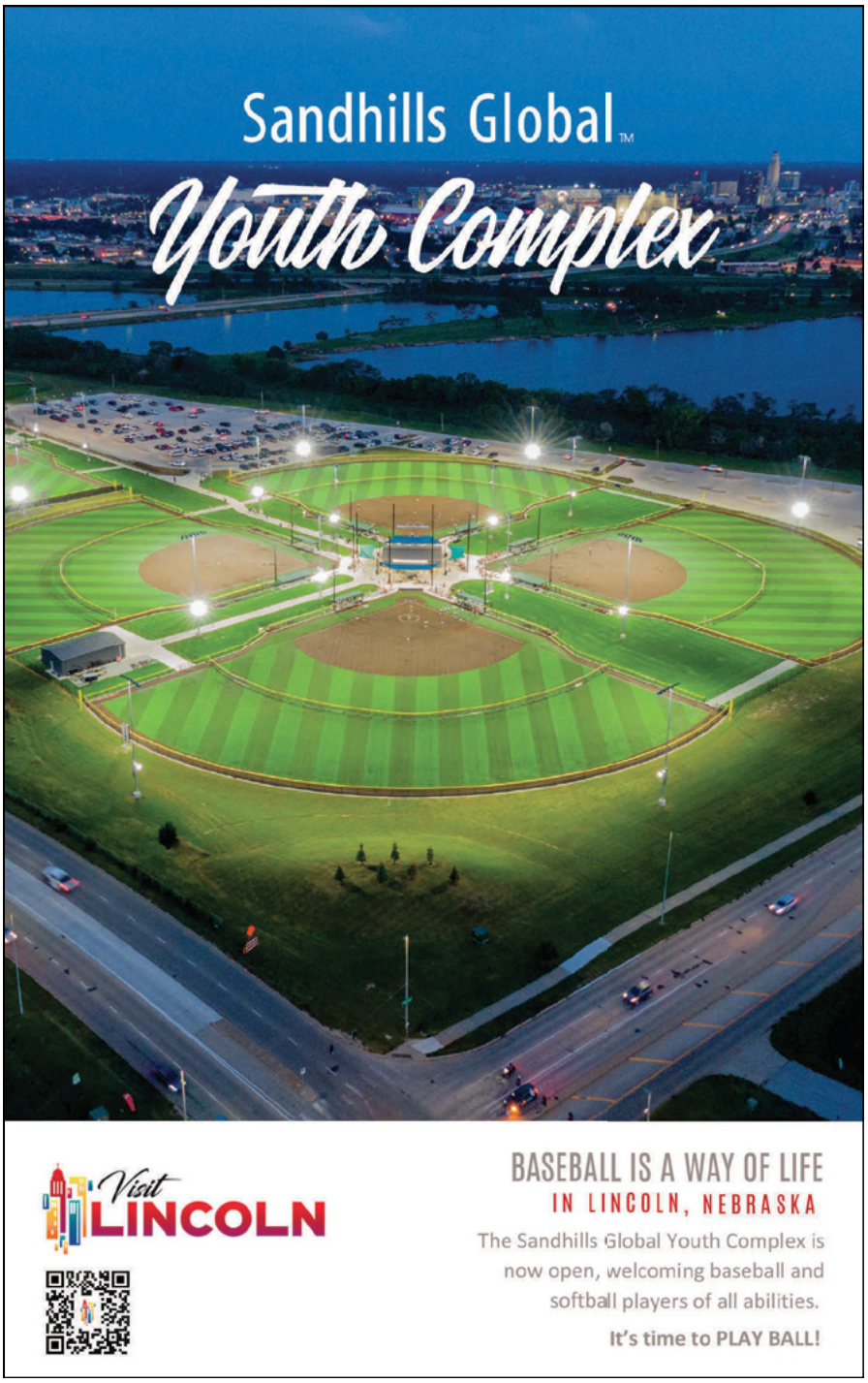
Hotel rooms: 242
Hotel tax rate: 12 percent
Major facilities:
- Scenic Park has five baseball/softball fields and 15 soccer fields
- First Serve Tennis Center features six indoor courts and a configuration for 12 pickleball courts
- Riverview Sports Complex has five fields for baseball and softball
- Marriott Event Center offers 23,000 square feet of flexible space

Contact: South Sioux City Area Chamber of Commerce, visitsouthsiouxcity.com. ■



A batter gets ready for the pitch in Sarpy County.

Courtesy Sarpy County Tourism



SPOTLIGHT ON:
VERMONT

Vermont may be known for its mountains and outdoor recreation, but its sports event offerings are just as compelling. From skiing and cycling to soccer, lacrosse, and other competitive pursuits, the Green Mountain State provides a range of venues and settings for events throughout the year. Experienced host communities, strong sports organizations, and a welcoming atmosphere make Vermont a smart choice for planners looking to bring teams and athletes together in a destination that offers plenty to do beyond competition. ■



Crossing the finish line at the Burlington Criterium. ▶

Courtesy Ian MacDonald/Hello Burlington

VERMONT

BURLINGTON

The Greater Burlington area offers a destination experience for both athletes and spectators. Apart from the top-tier collegiate amenities and regional sports complexes, the region boasts an energetic local sports culture where players can hit the fields, courts, and rinks.



MUST SEE:

ECHO Leahy Center

Set along the city's waterfront, this science and nature museum brings Lake Champlain to life through hands-on exhibits, interactive experiences, and more than 50 live species. Don't miss the newly renovated Into the Lake exhibit, home to Vermont's largest freshwater aquarium, or explore exhibits highlighting everything from local wildlife to the legendary lake monster Champ. ■

Courtesy VT Department of Tourism & Marketing

Hotel rooms: 3,500
Hotel tax rate: 13 percent
Major facilities:
- Gutterson Field House houses a 4,035-seat ice rink
- Patrick Gym is a multipurpose venue with seating for 3,228
- Home of the Vermont Lake Monsters, Centennial Field is a 4,415-seat ballpark
- Cairns Arena offers two rinks
- Tree Farm Soccer Facility boasts 13 fields

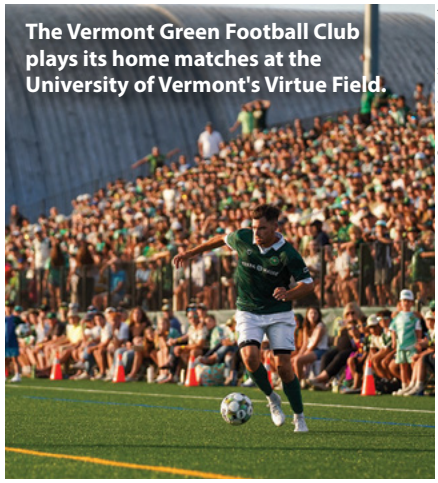
Convention center: The Champlain Valley Exposition Center hosts an assortment of sporting events, from indoor soccer to equestrian. The venue is flexible and offers more than 100,000 square feet of indoor space.
Contact: Hello Burlington, helloburlingtonvt.com.

MANCHESTER

Manchester is a quaint mountain town with plenty of charm. The area is steeped in history and has been a popular travel destination.

Hotel rooms: 500
Major facilities:
- Applejack Stadium has a natural grass field for soccer and lacrosse, and a historic grandstand with seating for 850
- Riley Rink at Hunter Park houses one Olympic-sized rink

Contact: Discover Manchester, manchestervermont.com.



The Vermont Green Football Club plays its home matches at the University of Vermont's Virtue Field.

Courtesy Anya Kazmierczak

STOWE

Stowe is located at the foot of Mt. Mansfield, Vermont's tallest peak. Year-round, the city offers endless opportunities to enjoy its natural beauty while participating in a range of activities, including cycling and skiing.

Hotel rooms: 1,500
Major facilities:
- Stowe Arena offers an NHL-sized ice arena from June through March and a turf arena from April through May
- Stowe Recreation Fields has space for 15 soccer fields
- Stowe Mountain Resort/Stowe Mountain Lodge hosts tennis, skiing, and cross country events

Contact: Stowe Area Association, gostowe.com. ■

SPOTLIGHT ON:
DELAWARE

Delaware may be small in size, but it delivers plenty for sports events. A growing mix of tournaments across baseball, softball, soccer, and lacrosse has put the First State on the radar for teams and event organizers looking for accessible, well-equipped destinations. Strong sports facilities, easy travel connections, and a mix of coastal communities and cultural attractions give athletes and families plenty to do beyond the competition, making Delaware a destination that works both on and off the field. ■



Playing ball at the Chase Fieldhouse in Wilmington. ▶

Courtesy Joe del Tufo

DELAWARE

CENTRAL DELAWARE

Central Delaware is a short drive from major cities like Baltimore and Philadelphia, and a 30-minute drive from the Delaware beaches.



MUST SEE:

Fort Miles

Located in Central Delaware, the Air Mobility Command Museum offers a fascinating look at the aircraft and people that have shaped U.S. Air Force history. More than 30 aircraft are on display, ranging from vintage biplanes and a restored B-17 to a combat-veteran C-47 and Air Force Two. Visitors can also step inside an air traffic control tower, try out flight simulators, and explore the museum's collection and exhibits, making it a memorable stop for anyone interested in aviation and military history. ■

Courtesy Visit Central Delaware

Hotel rooms: 2,424
Hotel tax rate: eight percent
Major facilities:
- DE Turf Sports Complex offers 12 lighted synthetic fields and is the largest all-synthetic turf complex in the Mid-Atlantic region, and recently added upgrades, increasing the stadium capacity to 2,000 seats
- Dover Motor Speedway has a capacity of 85,000
- Delaware State Fairgrounds sits on 270 acres and offers indoor and outdoor arenas

Convention center: Bally's Dover Casino Resort offers an 18,000-square-foot column-free ballroom with a 22-foot ceiling.
Contact: Visit Central Delaware, visitcentraldelaware.com.

SOUTHERN DELAWARE

Southern Delaware offers five-star beaches great for surfing and other watersports. Located on a coastal plain, the flat terrain is also ideal for running and cycling as well.

Hotel rooms: 4,800
Hotel tax rate: ranges from eight to 12 percent
Major facilities:
- Sports at the Beach is a premier youth baseball facility with 16 baseball fields
- Hudson Fields offers up to 12 multipurpose fields
- Sandhill Fields houses eight regulation-sized fields
- River Soccer Club Complex has seven fields

Contact: Southern Delaware Tourism, visitsoutherndelaware.com.

WILMINGTON

Greater Wilmington is an affordable region that is within driving distance to a large percentage of East Coast travelers. The area is very family-friendly, with a walkable riverfront that offers free parking, and our state and local parks offer options for fresh air and relaxation between tournaments.

Hotel rooms: 7,125
Hotel tax rate: ranges from eight to 11 percent, depending on location
Major facilities:
- Chase Fieldhouse offers 161,000 square feet of space and houses three full-size NBA basketball courts and an indoor turf field, along with three outdoor turf fields
- Kirkwood Soccer Complex consists of 14 outdoor fields and an indoor turf field
- Patriot Ice Center has dual rinks
- Midway Complex includes five baseball fields
- The University of Delaware offers a range of athletic facilities

Convention center: Chase Center on the Riverfront has a 20,000-square-foot exhibit hall suited for cheer and dance competitions.
Contact: Greater Wilmington CVB, visitwilmingtonde.com. ■



Courtesy Omega

The electronic starting pistol

BY HELEN JACOB

Few sounds in sport are as dramatic as the sharp bang of a starting pistol to signal that a race has begun. Traditional starting pistols were blank-firing handguns. Instead of live ammunition, they used blank cartridges or caps, producing a loud report and plume of smoke without firing a projectile. While some purpose-built versions were modified so they couldn't fire bullets, they still looked and sounded like firearms. However, their job was strictly theatrical: make noise, make smoke, and tell athletes to go at the same time.

Simple enough, except for one tiny problem. Sound that seems instantaneous to the human ear takes time to travel: roughly 1,125 feet per second, so the athlete standing closest to the starter heard the gunshot a few milliseconds before someone farther away. In a short race, milliseconds are not trivial; they're the difference between gold and silver. The problem worsens with staggered starts, where runners are separated by considerable distances. The starting pistol was supposed to create a perfectly fair start, but physics had other ideas.

Technology provided a solution. Instead of relying on the pistol's muzzle blast alone, major competitions began wiring the starter's gun to microphones and speakers positioned behind the athletes. An official still fired the pistol, but the sound travelled electronically, so competitors received the signal virtually at the same time.

Nowadays, most venues have moved toward electronic systems, and today's starter pistol looks more like a futuristic toy gun or a signaling device. Press the button, and it simultaneously produces a simulated gunshot through speakers, flashes a light, and starts the official timing system. This system has another advantage: it's versatile. In some sports, the signal sounds like a gunshot, while in swimming, it sounds like a horn, beep or buzzer. For deaf competitors, visual signals such as flashes provide the start cue.

All-electronic pistols have been the official starting method for track and field events at the Olympics since 2012, and the humble "bang" has effectively evolved into a synchronized digital signal. From smoke and noise to precision electronics, the starting pistol has come a long way, but the bang—and its purpose—remains. ■



From championship tracks to open sand, Virginia Beach is built for competitors and the people who love watching them. World-class indoor and outdoor venues, a coastline for recovery days, and enthusiastic fans in every crowd make Virginia Beach the right call for your next tournament or event.

VISITVIRGINIABEACH.COM/SPORTS

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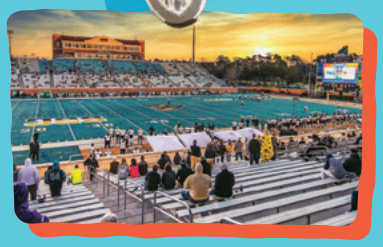
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