

THE SPORTS WORLD'S EVENT MAGAZINE

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Baseball's Global Pitch

The World Baseball Classic Builds on its Momentum
As the Sport Increases its International Appeal 12

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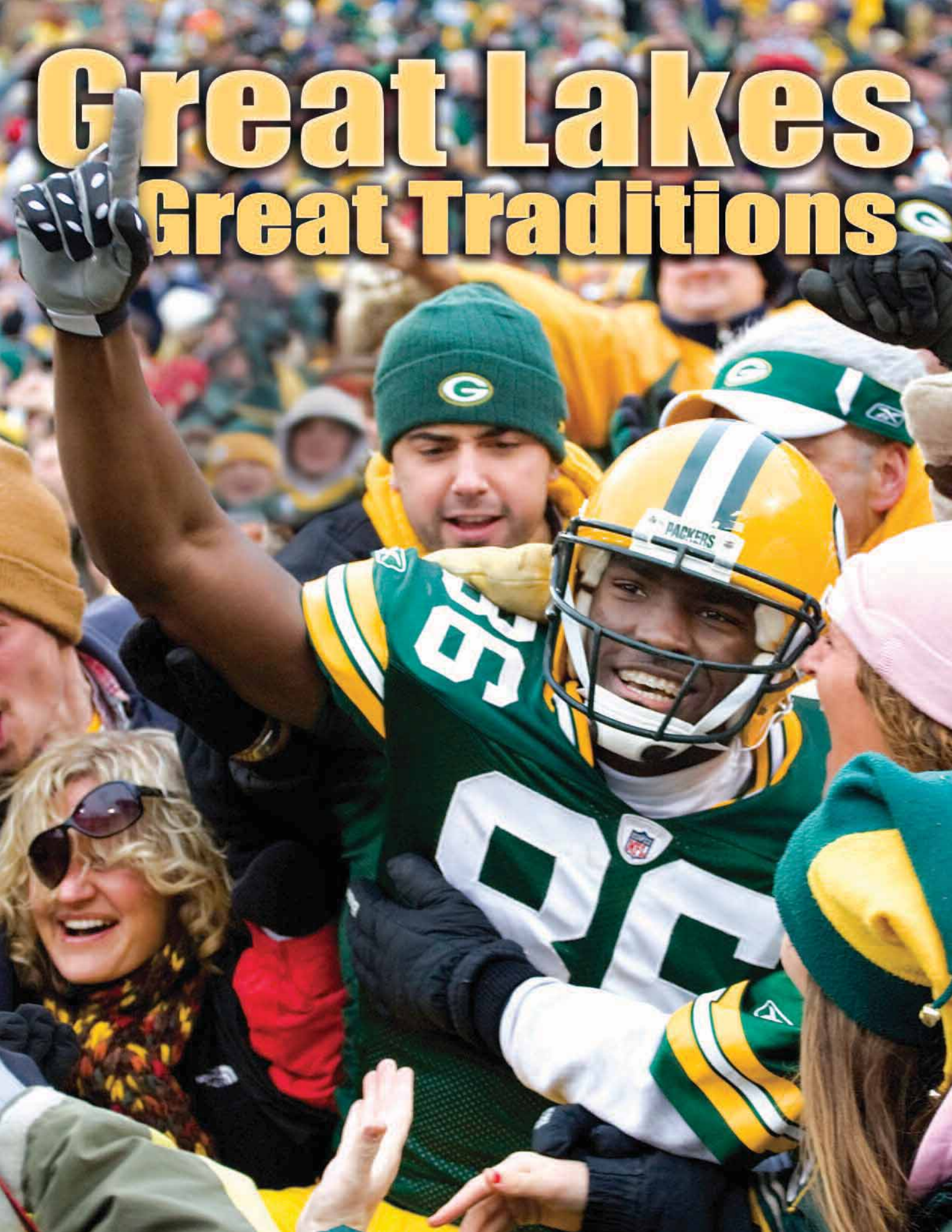
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From Big Ten collegiate powerhouses to well-known sports venues, the Great Lakes region has long welcomed sports enthusiasts. Warm hospitality, sportsmanship and time-honored traditions entice sports lovers to come to the heart of America.

By Jesse Reeves

Green Bay: Big City Mind-Set

As the smallest American locality with a major-league pro sports team, Green Bay is an unlikely location for the national spotlight. But the city has thrived as long as the NFL's Packers have been winning football championships. In addition to the football team and the legions of "cheeseheads" as their die-hard fans are called, Green Bay is also home to lots of hockey and youth sporting events.

"We are known internationally because of the Packers, and it's because of that big-city mentality that we're able to wow everyone who comes here," said Joel Everts, sports sales manager for the Greater Green Bay Convention & Visitors Bureau. "But we're really about small-city charm. Most people don't realize that the city

of Green Bay is a community of slightly more than 100,000 residents."

Several venues in the city accommodate the area's passion for sporting events. The Resch Center, opened in 2003, plays host to basketball and hockey in a bowl-shaped, 10,200-seat arena. It is home to University of Wisconsin/Green Bay men's basketball, the United States Hockey League's Green Bay Gamblers and the Green Bay Blizzard of the arenafootball2 league. It also hosts volleyball competitions, as it did for the 2007 and 2008 USA Volleyball World League competition.

With a \$33 million expansion completed last year, Kress Events Center is the UW-Green Bay's on-campus arena for basketball and volleyball. It also serves as a practice facility for basketball and has a state-of-the-art fitness center area for all UWGB students.

Tight end Donald Lee of the Green Bay Packers does the Lambeau Leap after scoring a touchdown against the Carolina Panthers at Lambeau Field on November 30, 2008. Photo by David Stluka/Getty Images

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Chicago Fire Photos by Brian Kenney

Given Green Bay's climate, ice hockey is a natural fit for Wisconsin winters. In 2010, USA Hockey girls and women's nationals will feature more than 30 teams in both tournaments coming to Cornerstone Community Ice Center, an Olympic-sized rink that seats about 1,000 people.

In 2011, Green Bay will see a lot of young soccer players as the U.S. Youth Soccer Association Midwest regional championships will be held in conjunction with nearby Fox Cities. More than 200 teams will take part, some coming as far away as Missouri, the Dakotas, Ohio and Kentucky.

But the crown jewel of Green Bay sporting venues remains Lambeau Field. Opened in 1957, the home of the Green Bay Packers has played host to the three-time Super Bowl winners and countless memorable games on "the frozen tundra."

Named for team founder Curly Lambeau, the stadium underwent a \$295 million renovation in 2002 that added 11,600 seats, bringing the stadium's seating capacity to 72,928 and putting a dent in the team's legendary wait list for season tickets. The stadium also features a 25,000-square-foot Packers Hall of Fame and corporate

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While the team has a rich history, in recent years, touchdown-scoring Packers have created their own tradition by jumping into the stands for a "Lambeau Leap," in one of sport's most lasting rituals.

Quad Cities: Five for One

The Quad Cities area, located in the Mid-Mississippi Valley across the border of northwestern Illinois and east central Iowa, includes the cities of Davenport and Bettendorf in Iowa and Moline, Rock Island and East Moline in Illinois. (The region was known as the Tri-Cities—for Davenport, Rock Island and Moline—during the first part of the last century. By the 1960s, the growth of East Moline was reflected in the new "Quad Cities" moniker, which became widely known. By the '70s, Bettendorf had grown large enough that rechristening the area as the "Quint Cities" was considered but was never adopted.)

"We are very well located geographically for sports tournaments," said Lynn Hunt, vice president of sales



Indiana University's 17,456-seat Assembly Hall in Bloomington is home to the Indiana Hoosiers basketball teams. The venue opened in 1971, and the \$1.9 million, state-of-the-art scoreboard was added in 2005.

for Quad Cities Convention & Visitors Bureau. "We're located right in the middle of the country which is very convenient for national events that we host."

With a combined population of about 400,000, the Quad Cities area is emerging as an important destination

for sports enthusiasts. Venues and facilities are located in both states throughout the Quad Cities area. The Greenvalley Sports Complex in Moline offers nine full-size soccer fields.

Softball is big in the Quad Cities as many tournaments are on the books or are being planned. The Greenvalley

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complex has played host to three national ASA championships and will again host the USA/ASA National Fastpitch Softball Tournament in 2010.

The Quad Cities will also host the 2009 International Softball Congress World Tournament and ISC II Tournament of Champions this year. The area last brought in an ISC championship in 1973, and organizers are getting the word out about fast-pitch softball.

"We've been able to show we have a lot of expertise and that people are willing to step up and serve as host chairs—we bring a love for the game and a lot of excitement to the volun-

teers," Hunt said. "We have tremendous opening ceremonies, the hospitality is top-notch, and our media really takes hold of the events. The municipalities get it; they know the economic impact will be there if they work to make it happen."

The Quad City Sports Center in downtown Davenport offers meeting space in addition to its more than 70,000 square feet of playing surfaces, including two full hockey rinks with room for recreational ice skating. Also taking to the ice are the Moline-based Quad City Flames of the American Hockey League, a farm team of the

NHL's Calgary Flames. The team shares the 12,000-seat I Wireless Center with the Quad City Steamwheelers, an af2 arena football team.

The Quad Cities athletics scene includes five colleges: Augustana College, St. Ambrose University, Palmer College, Scott Community College and Black Hawk College.

Bloomington: Full of Fans

Bloomington, the home of Indiana University, has a population of nearly 70,000, many of them sports enthusiasts.

The city's most recognizable venue is Assembly Hall, home of the IU Hoosiers basketball team, which has played championship seasons before capacity crowds of 17,456. But the city shoots for more than hoops.

"When most people hear Bloomington, they think basketball, but we've worked hard to offer other events," said Eric Marvin, director of sports development for the Bloomington Convention & Visitors Bureau. "We're starting to see some of the fruit of the labor as we attract more and more events like soccer and swimming. So, while we love being known as a basketball town, we always try hard to incorporate other events into our town."

The IU football team takes the field at 52,000-seat Memorial Stadium, which recently added club level seats, new weightlifting facilities, an athletic study area, and food service and banquet facilities.

The Bloomington SportsPlex offers fitness facilities, basketball, soccer, volleyball, flag football and youth camps. Housing five indoor basketball courts and a full-size, synthetic-grass soccer field, the SportsPlex has played host to the Adidas May Classic basketball tournament, AAU national basketball tournaments and various soccer instructional camps.

Since Indiana is the home state of one of the world's most famous auto races in the Indianapolis 500, it's only natural to have tributes to that famous event. The Little 500 is a bicycle race held each year since 1951 at Bill Armstrong Stadium at IU. Riding is limited to IU students, and 25,000 onlookers cheer the women's and men's teams. The next Little 500 will take place April 24-25.

Another Bloomington cycling tradition is the Hilly Hundred, whose 42nd annual staging will be Oct. 23-25. "Bikers from all over the country come by," said Laura Newton, assistant director of the Bloomington CVB.

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"There are all kinds of festivities along the way that they participate in."

Other participatory venues include Twin Lakes Sports Park, which has four 300-foot lighted softball fields, and Winslow Sports Park, with four softball diamonds and two full-size baseball fields.

Also gaining prominence in the community is swimming. Obviously, following global phenom Michael Phelps's Beijing Olympic golden games, swimming is hot. Coincidentally, Bloomington is the old stomping grounds of the man Phelps surpassed: Mark Spitz. The Counsilman-Billingsley Aquatic Center houses an eight-lane Olympic-sized pool and is the site of both collegiate level events and high school championships.

Upcoming Bloomington events include the state high school track-and-field state championships, the Hoosier Hoedown club ultimate tournament and the Indiana State Senior Swim Competition.

Grand Rapids: Enjoying a Boom

In a sports-crazy state such as Michigan, Grand Rapids is the type of



West Michigan Sports Commission

DeVos Place Convention Center in Grand Rapids hosts the Michigan Juniors Volleyball Association State Tournament, which attracts nearly 500 teams. More than 10,000 people visit the city for the event.

city that has the venues and facilities to host every size and type of competition imaginable.

"Grand Rapids has seen a building boom of amateur sports facilities in the past year," said Mike Guswiler, the executive director of the West Michigan Sports Commission, based in

Grand Rapids. "Our high school facilities are like mini college campuses hosting multiple sports from rugby, lacrosse and bowling to ice hockey and even equestrian events."

Van Andel Arena, with up to 12,000 seats depending on configuration, is home of the Detroit Red Wings' AHL



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affiliate the Grand Rapids Griffins. It has also hosted U.S. Figure Skating Synchronized Nationals, USA and AVP volleyball and high school basketball.

DeVos Place, in the heart of downtown, is a prime venue for sporting events—not only because of location, but also size: 250,000 square feet. It annually hosts Michigan junior indoor volleyball state tournaments with more than 5,000 athletes on 40 courts. In addition, the facility has hosted events ranging from indoor quarter-track stock car racing to the Golden Gloves Tournament of Champions. The venue is being considered for U.S. Fencing, USA Taekwondo, USA Gymnastics and Spirit Cheer competitions.

Soccer, football and lacrosse games are held at 46,000-square-foot MVP Fieldhouse, which has basketball and volleyball courts. Recent events were the Midwest rugby's men's collegiate and women's U23 championships.

Area schools in NCAA Division II and III and the NAIA have undergone recent additions and renovations: Davenport University's 85,000-square-foot field house, the Grand Valley State University Lakers' 138,000-square-foot turf center and indoor track building, and Calvin College's sports campus



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including a 5,000-seat arena, natatorium and track and tennis facility.

Guswiler said that facility accessibility is key to keeping the athletic community involved.

"What is most important is the school's willingness to work with the West Michigan Sports Commission to open their buildings to outside youth and amateur events that we bring into the area," he said.

Guswiler also added his thoughts as to why Grand Rapids is such a successful sports town: "Our people, our local media coverage, the atmosphere and Midwest hospitality of Grand Rapids, our focus on making each event special for the participants and all there is to do after the event concludes within Michigan's West Coast."

Ann Arbor: All About the Wolverines

A true college town, Ann Arbor is home to the University of Michigan, and it's obvious that most athletic events revolve around the maize and blue. All seasons provide for sporting events at UM, but autumn brings out the legendary rivalries. The epicenter for statewide football is Michigan Sta-

dium, opened in 1927 and able to pack in the crowds like nowhere else. This venue has seen it all: national championships, future NFL stars and arguably one of the most bitter feuds in American sports with neighbor and century-old foe, the Ohio State Buckeyes.

With only four stadiums in the United States capable of holding 100,000 fans, the Big House is certainly deserving of such a name (for the record, the other three are also NCAA football stadiums at Ohio State, Penn State and the University of Tennessee.). And the Big House is going to get bigger: Already capable of housing more than 106,000 fans, it will undergo an expansion project to raise that total to 108,000 by 2010.

As Kay Seaser of the Ann Arbor Area Convention & Visitors Bureau said about the stadium: "With the Big House, on college game days, the population of the entire city pretty much doubles. You can imagine the high enthusiasm and energy level when there are home football games."

Elsewhere on campus, construction of a new \$23 million basketball player development center next to Crisler Arena, the home arena for the men's and women's UM basketball teams, is

planned. Opened in 1967, the arena has a capacity of 13,751.

"UM is the big presence, and it has the bulk of the facilities," Seaser said. "The community embraces sports, whether participating or spectating."

Speaking of participating, beyond the NCAA, UM has 40 club sports, which range from water skiing to kayaking to ultimate Frisbee. There is an intramural sports facility complete with a climbing wall at the Outdoor Adventures Center.

Local city parks also offer such pastimes as disc golf, ice rinks, canoeing, swimming, softball fields, tennis and basketball courts and more. Fun, healthy activities such as these are why Ann Arbor consistently ranks high in such national lists as best place to live, best place to retire and top place to raise a family.

Twin Cities: That's Minnesota

Quick pop quiz: What major metropolitan area in the United States is home to three professional sports franchises, but the city's name is not in the team's title? That would be Minneapolis. And while the baseball

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Ann Arbor Area CUB

The Canham Natatorium at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor boasts a 50-meter pool and diving pool. It was named after athletic director Don Canham, who retired in 1988, the year the natatorium opened.

Twins, basketball Timberwolves and football Vikings all go by the first name "Minnesota," Minneapolitans know where all three call home.

For two of these franchises, the Hubert H. Humphrey Metrodome has hosted their home seasons for many years. With an attendance figure rang-

ing from 46,564 for the Twins and 64,111 for the Vikings, the dome was opened in 1982, thus making it the seventh-oldest MLB park. But, new digs are in the works for the Twins to leave the Vikings home alone. With a groundbreaking held in summer 2007, the Twins will soon play ball at the

40,000-seat Target Field—scheduled to be ready for the first pitch of Opening Day 2010.

Having lost a pro basketball team in 1960 as the Lakers moved to Los Angeles, Minneapolis waited 29 years to land another. In 1989, the T-wolves entered the NBA and had a long string of playoff appearances at the Target Center. Able to seat 25,000 for basketball games, the downtown facility also is the home to the Wolves' WNBA counterparts, the Minnesota Lynx. The venue can also seat up to 19,500 guests for concerts and other entertainment.

Another pro franchise is just down the road in St. Paul, which is home to the Minnesota Wild of the NHL, and their home arena is the 18,064-seat Xcel Energy Center. With Minnesota's icy winters, an annual tradition takes place each January with the U.S. Pond Hockey Championships. Broken up into several divisions (open, women's, 40+, 50+ and others), men and women, young and old take to their skates and hit the ice.

For running enthusiasts, Minneapolis offers an annual marathon that has earned a reputation as "The Most Beautiful Urban Marathon in America." Usually held the first weekend of October, the Twin Cities Marathon begins at the



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Metrodome, winds along the banks of the Mississippi, goes into neighboring Saint Paul and ends at the state capitol building. Natural beauty notwithstanding, experts consider it one of the top three most demanding foot races in the United States. Nearly 8,000 runners completed the trek in 2008.

This is a trend for the locals, according to Connie Stelter, public relations manager at the Minneapolis Convention & Visitors Association.

"Minneapolis residents participate in sports at much higher rates than the national average—33 percent more than the average of cities surveyed," Stelter said. "Minneapolis also has 66 percent more tennis courts per capita than the average city and also has significantly more basketball courts and golf courses than average."



The Minnesota Vikings—including safety Husain Abdullah, who joined the team last year—play their home games in downtown Minneapolis' Metrodome, recognized as one of the loudest NFL stadiums.

Dayton: High-Flying Sports

The Ohio city that has given itself the nickname of the "Birthplace of Aviation" may be overshadowed in pro sports when it comes to big brother Cincinnati, just an hour drive south down I-75, but Dayton—home to the Dragons, Bombers and Flyers—is a sporting hub in its own

right and shouldn't be overlooked when planning events.

Dayton's Single-A minor league baseball team is affiliated with the Cincinnati Reds. The Dragons trot onto the diamond at Fifth Third Field, capacity 8,200, and city visitors may want to plan ahead if they want to see

some action, as tickets can be scarce. Wait... to a minor league game? Believe it or not, the Dragons are the first—and, to date, only—minor league team to sell out an entire season before it began. This trend continues, as eight consecutive seasons have been sell-outs, with even *Sports Illustrated* nam-

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For action on the ice, the ECHL's Dayton Bombers take the rink at the 12,000-seat Ervin J. Nutter Center on the campus of Wright State University. The Nutter also plays host to collegiate athletics as Wright State Raiders men's and women's basketball teams take to the hardwood.

Another hit with the alumni and college sports fans is the namesake of the city, the University of Dayton. The Flyers, so named to honor Orville and Wilbur Wright's first flight, pack UD Arena with a sell-out capacity of 13,409. The men's basketball team consistently ranks in the top 25 when it comes to attendance. The arena will also be used during the opening round of this year's March Madness as teams square off in the men's NCAA basketball tournament.

The 13th annual U.S. Air Force Marathon will take place September 19 at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base in Dayton. Participants can get their hearts racing in the marathon, wheelchair marathon, half marathon and 10K. In addition, a 5K race will take place the day before at Wright State University.

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To some, Dayton is regarded as the soccer capital of the Midwest, hosting two of the nation's biggest youth amateur gatherings: the annual Memorial Day weekend Adidas Warrior Soccer Tournament and the annual Labor Day weekend CUSA MEAD Cup Soccer Tournament. Each brings approximately 500 teams and 20,000 people into the Dayton area.

"Dayton is an ideal location for hosting highly successful youth and amateur sports events," said Jacquelyn Powell, president and CEO of the Dayton/Montgomery County Convention & Visitors Bureau. "Our community boasts a vast array of state-of-the-art facilities, as well as affordability and accessibility."

Great Lakes Sports

These varied states offer sports event organizers many venues and choices when planning functions and tournaments. Throw in the climates for both winter and summer sports, a heap of Midwestern hospitality and a history of organizing and running large sports events, and the Great Lakes area lives up to its reputation as a friendly and accommodating destination. ■



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