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How to Take Control of Your Sports Tourism Destiny

By Dawn Reiss

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Linda Logan, executive director for the [Greater Columbus Sports Commission](#) in Ohio, is considered at the top of her game in the sports tourism industry. That's what makes it interesting when she points to another city as a shining example for using athletics to drive business. "Richmond is doing an excellent job of owning and operating its own events," Logan says of the Virginia capital. Logan, who's been promoting Columbus for decades, is describing the growing trend of destinations—through sports commissions—taking control of their own destiny. It's only one of the ways events and sports tours have become key contributors to a city's overall economy. Here are a few ways it's done that in an increasingly competitive market.

Own your own events.

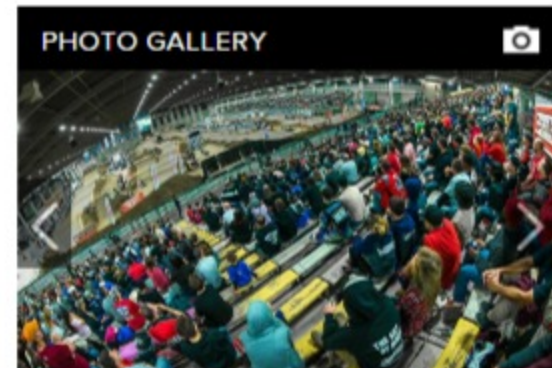
"If the community doesn't have anything in the pipeline, it's about creating your own magic," says Logan. The [Sports Backers](#), a nonprofit local sports commission working in conjunction with Richmond Region Tourism, hosts 13 annual events including the Anthem Richmond Marathon, an outdoor sports music festival called Dominion Riverrock, the Cougar 7v7 Field Hockey tournament and Ukrop's Monument Avenue 10K, which routes 44,000 participants down a tree-lined historic street.

"If you look at some of the biggest sporting events in America, they don't move around," says Jon Luginbill, executive director of Sports Backers. "The Daytona 500 is always in [Daytona, Florida](#), and the Kentucky Derby is always at Churchill Downs. It just makes sense. There's a certain point where you have to ask yourself, 'Why are we limiting ourselves with just what is [up] for bid? Why don't we create something?'"



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Don't be a one-hit wonder.

The key, Lugbill says, is creating a consistent rotation of events throughout the year. "If you have a sudden burst of activity and everything goes away, you don't sustainably build the infrastructure," he says. "Really work to fill the whole calendar."

Think locally.

Building a consistent base of sporting events—ideally with long-term agreements—creates an environment to build support to update old facilities and build new ones, Lugbill says. Not only does that draw in outside events, but it also benefits the host community by promoting increased participation. "Ask yourself: How are you using sports tourism to help people locally," he says, giving one example right off the bat: "An active community attracts millennials."

Promote sports tours as an alternative activity for conventions.

Another avenue to increase sports tourism is promoting tours during conventions and meetings. For example, the Athletic Equipment Managers Association, which rotates its annual national conference across the United States and a few international countries, tries to incorporate a sports tour at a professional, minor league or collegiate facility.

Most recently, that meant offering a behind-the-scenes tour of Lucas Oil Stadium, home to the NFL's Indianapolis Colts, and Indianapolis Motor Speedway during its three-day convention earlier this year. Sam Trusner, AEMA's national office manager, says even non-sports fans typically enjoy the tours because they like seeing the new tech features and behind-the-scenes vantage point.

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PHOTO GALLERY 



Argentinian transplant Cristian Becerine leads the pack on his way to a second No. 1 Vet Pro title.

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Know your audience.

When an organization affiliated with veterans was able to tour Ohio State's football training facility, Logan says they made sure the group saw a wall inside the locker room dedicated to former players who have served the military and those who have traveled overseas to visit the troops. To push the theme further, a coach with military experience gave the tour. "Ask yourself: Is there a way not just to do a guided tour, to make it a little different" Logan says. "Think of any way you can uniquely connect."

Know thyself.

Still not sure how to find new sports-related business? Logan suggests asking the following questions about your destination:

- > What is special in the city?
- > What is the city known for?
- > Is there an iconic sports figure who still lives in the city?

Dawn Reiss is a Chicago-based writer and editor. Contact her at dreiss100@gmail.com.

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PHOTO GALLERY

Minnesota's Alice Poot is the USA's best shot at a gold medal at the Rio Olympics. In Tulsa, she captured her 8th career No. 1 Championship.

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