

## Fast Break: Lacrosse is on the Attack in the U.S.

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By: **Peter Francesconi**



Like most team sports during the quarantine era, lacrosse took a hit in participation in 2020, as players curtailed team activities, reversing slight gains in previous years. According to research from 2020 by the Sports & Fitness Industry Association, total participation for lacrosse is just under two million players. But the sport is poised, once again, to score big, as teams and leagues for all ages continue to grow throughout the U.S. These locations offer top venues, and great growth opportunities, for lacrosse tournament owners and directors.

### **Collier County, Florida**

The Naples/Marco Island/Everglades area is known as Florida's Paradise Coast, offering 30 miles of white-sand beaches along the Gulf, plenty of family friendly attractions and great shopping, arts, culture and food. For athletes and fans, there are also state-of-the-art sports venues, too.

"Lacrosse is growing in Southwest Florida, with many clubs merging and expanding," says Nikki King, sports marketing manager for the Naples, Marco Island, Everglades CVB. The largest venues suitable for hosting lacrosse tournaments include the Paradise Coast Sports Complex and North Collier Regional Park.

Paradise Coast currently has five full-size synthetic turf fields, including a 3,500-seat championship field. All fields have LED lighting and scoreboards, and PCSC offers full concessions. King says the next phase of construction at PCSC will include four more fields, then, "at full build, we'll have 16-full size convertible lacrosse fields."

Courtesy of Elizabethtown Sports Park, Elizabethtown, Kentucky

North Collier Regional Park offers eight tournament-size fields, but when not competing, athletes and their families can enjoy a state-of-the-art water park, along with a fitness complex, playground, picnic pavilions and more.

To help ensure the best experience for teams, King says the CVB can assist with connecting rights holders with community partners, helping to arrange group excursions, restaurants, and marketing assistance and promotions.

### **Elizabethtown, Kentucky**

The Elizabethtown Sports Park is a true destination for sports events of all sizes, including lacrosse.

"We want to grow our offerings at Elizabethtown Sports Park," says General Manager Todd Yancey. "As we started developing our lacrosse offerings, people immediately started reaching out. The demand [for lacrosse events] is growing in our area, and at a rapid pace. We look forward to some exciting events this year and hope to add more for next year's calendar."

New lacrosse events this year at Elizabethtown Sports Park include BearPaw Lacrosse, L-1 Lacrosse, Halo Lax and the Commonwealth Lacrosse League Junior Varsity Boys Tournament.

The Sports Park has everything that tournament owners and directors need to develop successful events, including seven natural grass fields (six lighted) and two lighted turf fields. The venue also offers three large pavilions for ceremonies, events and meetings; an event officials' meeting room; officials' locker rooms; playgrounds with misters; vendor areas; a Miracle Field; family restrooms; Wi-Fi throughout the park and much more. Plus, the Sports Park is convenient to hotels and restaurants.

### **Hoover, Alabama**

The Hoover Met Complex has five multi-purpose turf fields that can accommodate lacrosse tournaments for players of all ages.

These NCAA regulation-size fields can host high school and collegiate lacrosse, and each full-size field can be configured to host youth tournaments as well. There's also a viewing tower that can be used by coaches and tournament directors. The complex features a full-service concession stand, as well as plenty of space to bring in food trucks and merchandise vendors.

Recently, the Greater Birmingham Youth Lacrosse Association hosted its season-ending Jamboree at the complex, with 70 teams from around the region and more than 2,000 spectators.

For the past two years, the venue also has hosted Monkey Up Lacrosse's Alabama Shootout, as well as their Harvest Classic event in the fall, each of which typically brings in about 50 teams from around the Southeast. In June the Hoover Met Complex hosted two national lacrosse camps.

"Lacrosse is growing rapidly in the Birmingham area, and we are pleased to have so much activity here at our beautiful facility," says Hoover Met Complex General Manager Dr. E. J. Brophy. "Our five turf fields are ideal for both practices and tournaments, and we plan to offer more lacrosse events for years to come."

### **Lake George/Warren County, New York**

There are a number of great lacrosse facilities in the Warren County, New York area, including four lighted turf fields and four grass fields at Golden Goal Sports Park and 14 fields at local park and rec facilities. At least two more larger fields are expected to come online in the next two years, says Kristen Hanifin of Warren County Tourism.

"Golden Goal Sports Park is an amazing residential facility that can house up to 500 on property for training camps, complete with dining facilities, concessions, medical on-site, an obstacle course for team building, drone videography for training review and parking for over 2,000," says Hanifin.

For the past four years, the Lake George area has hosted the Prime Time Lacrosse's Boys' Invitational in July, with up to 175 teams. This year, Prime Time is adding a second event, the Summer Invitational, which includes a one-day adult tournament. Generally, the tournaments draw from nearly a dozen states and Canada.

"Lacrosse continues to increase in popularity in the Lake George area for both youth and adult leagues," notes Hanifin. "I look forward to working with future event rights holders and continuing to grow lacrosse in the

region."

### **Maryland Sports**

In Maryland, lacrosse is the state's official team sport (trivia point: jousting is the state's individual sport), and throughout the state there are more than 230 lacrosse facilities to accommodate all sizes of tournaments and events, for players of all ages. In fact, with such diverse facilities available, tournament directors/owners can find the location that is perfect for players and their families — whether at the beach, in the mountains or anywhere in between.

Upcoming lacrosse events include the 2022 World Lacrosse Women's Championships at Towson University, with teams representing at least 30 countries. In May, the 2021 NCAA Women's Lacrosse Championships were held at Towson's Minnegan Field. This year also sees the return of events such as the Naptown Challenge presented by Hogan's Lacrosse in Annapolis, the Under Armour All-America Lacrosse event from Corrigan Sports and numerous other tournaments and showcases throughout the state.

"The CVBs and DMOs that we work with are all part of TEAM Maryland, a statewide initiative designed to collectively market Maryland to the entire sports industry," says Graham Whaples of Maryland Sports. "While the sport of lacrosse has exploded nationally over the last two decades, the East Coast remains the sought-out location for young athletes who want to learn from the best and who want to showcase their talents at the highest level. Our location puts us right in the middle of everything."

### **Palm Beach County, Florida**

Palm Beach County has long been home to prestigious lacrosse tournaments, as the sport continues to prosper in Florida, says Austin Lee of the Palm Beach County Sports Commission.

The Gardens North County District Park in Palm Beach Gardens, one of the county's newest facilities, features 10 lighted fields and has recently hosted the Future Phenoms College Combine, the Holiday Lacrosse Shootout and the Sunshine State Games Summer Kick Off. Spanish River Athletic Park has been home to numerous sports events including the Florida Lacrosse Cup, an elite summer tournament. The International Polo Club Palm Beach has seven polo fields that can be converted into more than 45 regulation lacrosse fields, and it has hosted the Intercollegiate Women's Lacrosse Coaches Association President's Cup.

The PBC Sports Commission can provide event owners with a wide range of support and services, from helping find a venue, lodging and transportation, to help with public relations, on-site staff assistance, logistical support, volunteer recruiting and more.

"From youth to collegiate to professional lacrosse, our numerous venues have hosted some of the world's finest competitions," says Lee. "Our Sports Commission is prepared to help lacrosse events at all levels. Just bring your game – we'll help with all the rest."

### **Panama City Beach, Florida**

Panama City Beach Sports Complex has 13 total fields – four natural grass and nine AstroTurf with Z-Cap cooling technology — plus state-of-the-art LED lighting and covered spectator seating for all fields. The Sports Complex also features three concession buildings with restrooms, a second-story tournament office with view of the turf fields, and a conference room for team check-in.

The PCB complex recently held the 30A LAX Sandy Stix Spring Jamboree, and also hosts several local high school lacrosse events during the season. In June, the Gulf Coast Girls Lacrosse Tournament, hosted by Southern Edge Tournaments, brought in about 60 teams. This December, the Boathouse Tournament of Champions, hosted by Monkey Up Tournaments, will have up to 70 teams, and the 30A LAX Sandy Stix event in April 2022 will bring more than 50 teams.

"Lacrosse is an emerging sport in the panhandle area and the PCB Sports Complex is excited to contribute to that growth," says PCBSC General Manager Jamie Cox. "Our team will help connect tournament owners with local clubs, providing a solid network for any potential volunteer or operational requirements for their events."

### **Richmond, Virginia**

River City Sportsplex in Midlothian, Virginia is a multi-purpose complex with 12 all-weather lighted turf fields, with bleachers for each field. There's also a warm-up area, concessions and bathroom facilities, plaza and commons area that are ideal for a vendor village, Wi-Fi, office and storage space, and parking for more than 1,600 cars.

The Sportsplex hosted the USA Lacrosse 2017 National Championship, Global Legacy Sports 2017 Brine National Lacrosse Classic, and has been the longtime home to the Intercollegiate Women's Lacrosse Coaches Association (IWLCA). "From 2015 to 2017 we hosted the IWLCA Capital Cup and from 2015 to 2020 the Champions Cup — each of these national girls' lacrosse events brings 200 to 300 teams," says Jerrine Lee, director of sports development for Richmond Region Tourism. "This July, we'll again host the IWLCA Capital Cup, which is expected to bring over 200 teams."

From site visits, to planning, to execution, the Sports Richmond team works closely with each event planner. Services include vendor and venue sourcing, hotel assistance, connections to restaurants and attractions, marketing and public relations assistance and volunteer support.

"Being centrally located, we are easy for teams and families to travel to," notes Lee. "We're within a day's drive of half of the U.S. population, we have major airlines and low-cost carriers, as well as three train stations."

### **Round Rock, Texas**

The Round Rock Multipurpose Complex features eight fields, 120 yards long by 75 yards wide, (four artificial turf, four natural grass), along with two championship fields (one turf, one natural grass) with shaded stadium bleacher seating. Each field size can be customized. The main clubhouse houses two multi-purpose meeting rooms and a training room, and the facility has four sets of restrooms, in-house concessions, plus space and utilities for outside food vendors.

The complex has hosted a variety of lacrosse events, including the Men's Collegiate Lacrosse Association (MCLA) Invitational Tournament in May. It hosted the Women's Collegiate Lacrosse Association (WCLA) Championship in 2018 with 28 teams that brought in nearly 2,500 spectators. In 2019, the Bitter Lacrosse Texas LAX Festival brought 52 teams to Round Rock.

"We chose the Round Rock Multipurpose Complex because it exceeds both our quality and quantity expectations," says Kim Rogers, director of special events for USA Lacrosse. "After meeting with our accommodating hosts at the Round Rock CVB and the operations staff at the complex, we knew that this was a place we wanted to bring the WCLA National Tournament."

Adds Nancy Yawn, director of the Round Rock CVB: "We want all of our visitors to have a memorable trip filled with lacrosse and fun in the Sports Capital of Texas." **SDM**

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