



DSA Sports LLC

Sport Tourism Analysis, Watauga County NC

Commissioned by Boone Area Chamber of Commerce

December 2017

*Prepared by
DSA Sports LLC*

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INTRODUCTION

This report is in response to an agreement dated May 1, 2017 between the Boone Area Chamber of Commerce (BACC) 870 King Street, Suite A, Boone NC 28607 and DSA Sports LLC (DSA) 9880 Forestglen Drive, Cincinnati, OH 45242. This agreement calls for DSA to conduct a sports destination analysis and strategic planning process designed to increase Watauga County's share of the sport tourism market.

DSA proposed a scope of services that was accepted by the BACC. The scope included a sports facilities analysis, a strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats analysis, recommendations on how to best package the capabilities of the area and how to market most effectively your capabilities.

Accordingly, DSA agreed to accomplish at least the following:

- Site surveys of competition quality facilities in the county.
- Interviews with area sports organizers, key stakeholders, representatives of the hospitality industry, and others.
- Preparation of a comprehensive report covering the suitability of existing facilities at varying levels of ability and for which sports and a strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats analysis plus recommendations on ways to best package your features and benefits.
- Projections on the potential for direct visitor spending and economic impact.
- An analysis of the most effective ways to proceed on an organizational basis to produce the best results.

DSA further agreed to make two trips to Boone: one for the site survey and interviews and a second to present findings and recommendations.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The study concludes that Watauga County already benefits from locally produced events. These include running, cycling and equestrian competitions plus events like the Highland Games. Also, Blood, Sweat and Gears and the Boone Roundball Classic. Appalachian State University attracts many thousands of visitors for football and basketball games, and is interested in hosting Sun Belt Conference Championships (they are hosting cross country in 2018), plus future NCAA Championships.

There is no organized effort to market the area to the sport travel industry. This industry has seen continual growth over the past twenty years. Nearby cities have benefitted from this industry. Notable successes are taking place in Kingsport TN, Asheville and Winston Salem, among others. Johnson City TN has made a renewed commitment to sport travel.

Watauga County needs an organized approach. The combined resources of the tourist bureaus and ASU could be a good place to start.

Sport tourism is dependent on the right kinds of facilities and enough rooms at reasonable (for the teams and competitors) rates. Because the county is a year around destination this presents issues. Every summer people leave the heat of the lowlands and each winter they come for the snow. And, Watauga County does not have large numbers of venues for competition.

The recently approved community recreation center and commitment of ASU to conference and national championships suggest that this situation can change. The facility shortage can be addressed by using Varsity Gym at ASU for basketball, volleyball and the mat sports, making sure the new indoor pool meets USA Swimming short course specifications, combining the turf fields at Ted Mackorell and Watauga High School, and having between two and four courts at the new center.

It would also be helpful if the county fields are made “fast-pitch friendly.” Girls fast pitch is very popular, and ASU has a championship quality field for tournaments. If eight to ten 200’ fields could be combined the county would see a significant amount of interest from tournament organizers.

Results will not be achieved overnight. It takes most communities new to the industry about three years to begin showing results from a marketing and sales campaign. It will be necessary to manage expectations in the meantime.

The county delivers for visitors. It is a beautiful destination with plenty of things to see and do. Sport tourism has become the way in which many families work in vacation time. A three-day event may result in a four or five- night stay. DSA believes this will be particularly true for repeat visitors.

Better coordination is needed between the tourist bureaus and the events and hotel community. Evidence was uncovered that indicates some events are planned and scheduled without considering impact on accommodations. As a result, some visitors find themselves booked into private rentals, where multiple night stays are required...but are not what the visitor expects.

DSA feels the best strategy will be to seek smaller events, perhaps with 50 or so teams. Each of these can produce more than \$250,000 in spending, as shown in this report. These dollars will be entirely new dollars to Watauga County, and each dollar spent also produces new taxes that can provide more services to residents.

By joining the National Association of Sports Commissions Watauga County will benefit from the mentoring provided by members. This will shorten the learning curve and help focus efforts on what could happen rather than what is unlikely to occur.

BACKGROUND

The site visits and interviews were conducted between July 10-12, 2017. Arrangements for these interviews were made by the Watauga County Parks & Recreation Department on behalf of the entities sponsoring the study. DSA received the full cooperation of each person interviewed. Every sports facility of sufficient quality to host sport tourism events was visited. An exception was that only one of the three major ski resorts was visited, due solely to a lack of time.

The study itself was made possible by six community minded organizations:

- Appalachian State University
- Watauga County Parks and Recreation
- Boone Area Chamber of Commerce
- Watauga TDA/Boone TDA
- Watauga County Economic Development Commission
- Town of Boone

Most of the facilities are located on the campus of Appalachian State University, at area schools, or in parks. And, because the area has a history of running and cycling events, mountain biking, triathlons and events hosted by ASU the natural features of the county play a major role, too.

Recently approval was granted for the construction of an indoor recreation center and pool. Planning has begun and DSA will point out where its features could play a future role in sport tourism.

Nothing in this report suggests that the events currently taking place should be modified or expanded except where that would make sense to the organizers and competitors. Most communities would consider themselves blessed with the number of locally created and managed events that already attract visitors. These competitors and family and friends are either day-trippers (in on the day of the event and out after) or overnights. Most local events attract a mix of both.

Watauga County was recognized by the Economic Development Partnership of North Carolina as the number two market in the state in increased visitor spending! Sports play a role in this result.

DSA agreed to complete this draft in about ten weeks from the time of the survey trip. That deadline has been met.

One of the significant parts of this project is to address choices between organizational structures that would do the work.

The next sections address characteristics of the sport travel market and issues relating to economic benefit. Then, each facility is reviewed in the context of what the industry is looking for and the possible results that can be achieved.

THE SPORT TOURISM INDUSTRY

In the late 1980's, fewer than 40 cities were competing to attract sports events. In 2017 there are more than 450 markets represented by host organizations. Events are pursued primarily by sports commissions, tourist bureaus, private sports facilities, chambers of commerce, hotels and colleges and universities.

North Carolina cities are well-represented in the National Association of Sports Commissions (NASC), as are markets throughout your region.

Fortunately, more and more events become available for bid every year. And, more and more communities are either creating events or helping existing events grow by attracting more and more visiting teams.

The types of events fall into two categories:

1. Ticketed events (i.e. an event in Holmes Arena).
2. Participant events (i.e. events at Ted Mackorell Soccer Complex).

The primary focus of this study is participant events. These events bring athletes, officials, family, and friends for the duration of the competition. To repeat, these trips often become "mini-vacations" that permit visits to area attractions before or after the competition.


Participant events usually do not require substantial seating, especially in the early rounds. Even championships can be conducted with limited seating.

Participant based events can be broadly defined by whether they are bid or are locally developed and bring visitors to Watauga County.

Three recent surveys of bid cities suggest the annual total amount of direct visitor spending from amateur sports has risen to just over \$10 billion.

The following observations are important to an understanding of your ability to capture room bookings for sporting events.

1. A knowledgeable sales staff and venue managers connected in the amateur sports industry.
2. The ability to assemble a group of local volunteers to help evaluate an event before bidding.
3. A room contribution system (rebates) when required and a way to capture the revenues.
4. A method to protect room blocks, maybe even a "stay to play" policy, which requires all participants to stay within the block of rooms set aside for the event or they will not be permitted to participate.
5. The difficulty in knowing exactly who will be coming before the normal cutoff (qualifying events may not be over in time to meet the deadline).
6. Hotels that "go it alone" often have difficulty assisting with event operations.
7. Local organizing committees are needed for many events.
8. Limited service (or select service) properties may have difficulty committing rooms a year or more in advance.
9. Privately owned sports facilities that "go it alone" need to package their efforts with area tourism experts. For example, although one of the ski operators may be able to book an event by themselves, the event itself would prefer a community invitation built around the specific resort.
10. Some competitors will consider rent free facilities to overcome a lack of overall destination attractiveness.



Successful pursuit of this market does require an understanding of the local needs for each event. A good way to gather this information begins with the early and continual involvement of your local sports community.

Also, the number and condition of the sports venues determines the type of events that might be bid upon or created locally to attract visitors.

Important: Owners of sports facilities are not primarily concerned with generating room nights and visitor spending. They did not design and build for the market (except for ordinary use for school and/or league competition) and do not concern themselves with issues of condition or availability that could present difficulties to the event schedulers.

There has been a good deal written and said about the sport tourism industry. Please refer to *Appendix I – Small-Scale Event Sports Tourism* for useful detail on the value to a community of utilizing existing facilities to host events that attract visiting teams. This report is a formal university case study on the industry.

VISITOR SPENDING/ECONOMIC BENEFIT

The primary element (some will say the only element) in economic impact is visitor spending. When people travel to a destination, the money left behind is new to the market. These dollars produce economic impact as they enter the economy.

When residents spend during the event, that spending is treated as part of normal economic activity. It is assumed these dollars would have been spent in another way. They are not new dollars. They are redirected dollars.

Interestingly, when local teams travel to distant locales, the money spent on the trip is lost to the home economy. It should be obvious that teams will want to travel a portion of each year. If, however, there are enough local facilities to host more tournaments, some of the trips will become unnecessary.

Everyone can agree that having a substantial number of overnight visitors is a good thing. Sports events have become an increasingly effective and dependable way to produce visitor spending.

The NASC conducted a 2014 study with the University of Texas of 5 events held in Round Rock, TX. The study determined the average direct spend per person was estimated at about \$75 a day. This was calculated on the per-person cost of a hotel room plus meals and other retail expenditures.

An example of the impact one event might have could be useful, based upon these inputs:


- 50 team girl's fast pitch tournament
- Each team brings 15 players and another 30 family and friends
- The event requires a two-night stay
- 50 teams' x 45 people x two nights equals 3,500 visitor nights
- Each night (day of the stay) visitors spend an average of \$75 (share in the price of the room plus food, beverages, retail purchases, etc.).
- 3,500 times \$75 equals estimated direct visitor spending of \$262,500.

It is important to note this does not represent an estimate of the economic impact. Estimates of economic impact produce higher numbers due to the application of multipliers to account for the turnover of new dollars in the local economy. The NASC and DSA do not estimate economic impact.

In thirty years of research, DSA has concluded the highest multiplier should be no more than 1.7. Direct spending multiplied by 1.7 yields a reasonable estimate for what the economic impact might be. In the example above, application of the multiplier produces an estimated economic impact of \$446,250.

In recognition of the growing importance of sport tourism, some cities are investing in new sports facility development with twin goals. It should be obvious that cities want the additional visitor spending. The other part of the facility development process is the beneficial impact on residents. More fields and courts allow greater participation. When participation rates increase, everyone benefits from increased fitness and the potential for visitor spending.

Since the amount of visitor spending and its beneficial impact on the local economy are so important to host organizations (sports commissions, convention and visitor bureaus, chambers of commerce, etc.) there is understandable anxiety any time the right facilities are unavailable, either due to scheduling, costs, or condition. Campus facilities are not always available whenever opportunities may arise. Park facilities are usually scheduled no later than the end of the previous year and these schedules can be difficult or impossible to change with only a few weeks' notice.



Every host organization must deal with these problems, and often the solution is not to bid. It may be possible to defer to a later date or year, but fixing what might be needed is a more complex issue because it can involve school boards, city or county government, colleges and universities, or private owners.

Please refer to *Appendix II – Tourist Towns* for helpful information on how park and recreation departments are partnering with convention and visitor bureaus to produce economic impact. This information is important considering the important roles played by park and recreation departments in the region.

The Watauga County Department of Parks & Recreation will be actively involved in sport tourism. They have and maintain the fields needed and will do the same in the new community recreation center and pool.

INTERVIEWS

As noted, DSA experienced excellent cooperation from each person interviewed. It is evident everyone is interested in doing what is reasonable to increase visitor spending through sports.

The area already attracts events. From ASU men's and women's teams to skiing, marathons, bike racing, mountain biking and many thousands of athletes, family and friends are coming to the county. These events should be encouraged and supported by whatever kind of organization is chosen to help build more sport tourism.

Watauga County does not have an abundance of sports facilities. The terrain, elevation and climate are primary reasons for locally produced events. Obviously, ASU draws competition and visitors for regular season games, conference championships, and perhaps in the future, NCAA championships.

Apart from ASU driven competitions, the bulk of the annual events are staged on roads, pathways and waterways. Whether one of the Blood, Sweat and Gears events, the Highland Games, or the Grandfather Mountain Marathon, competitions take advantage of the natural terrain and roads.

The Blowing Rock Charity Horse Show, which DSA understands is the longest running annual equestrian competition, has its own facilities as do each of the ski mountains.


The number and type of sport facilities usually depends upon the size of the year around population and the needs of the schools in the area. To build and maintain larger numbers of facilities, local unmet needs must be identified. The soon to be developed recreation center is a recognition of the need for gym space and an off-campus swimming pool.

DSA does not attribute comments to their source. Instead, interviewees are asked to speak freely so all opinions are considered.

Comments and Opinions

The following represents a summary of two days of interviews:

- The Town of Boone owns land across the river from the Ted Mackorell Soccer Complex. This land could hold several more fields, with a pedestrian bridge connecting them.
- It is essential that Watauga County, Boone, Blowing Rock and others cooperate and communicate well together.
- ASU holds summer camps that bring visitors.
- The new community recreation center could be a game-changer. With at least two indoor courts and an indoor 25-meter competition, lap and therapy pool (lap and therapy pool separate from main pool) our local programs can expand and we can host events.
- The Grandfather Mountain marathon is one of the toughest in the country.
- Biking and running events are very popular.
- Our climate has always attracted people from the low lands and coast.
- Athletes like to train here because of the altitude.
- There is a world class running camp.
- There are two climbing competitions.
- The Ted Mackorell Soccer Complex is exceptional. Two full size turf fields for ASU, High Country Soccer and Watauga County Parks & Recreation soccer programs.
- The county has always lacked sports facilities. This holds back participation and programming.
- There are issues with events using the roads. Lane closures cause backups and the cost of police is a factor when dealing with the roads.

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- The running events start with packet pickup on Friday and an after-ride party Saturday, which encourages a two-night stay.
 - The existing pool is very well run but has limitations that cannot be overcome.
 - ASU Student Recreation Center does not allow outside use of its competition pool, except in limited circumstances. This is an underutilized asset for competitions.
 - The park and recreation department will need to operate and schedule the new community recreation center. It will be important not to make long term use agreements.
 - The new community recreation center will be packed on winter days when school is cancelled. These are currently programmed at the Hardin Park Gym/School area.
 - ASU can be an asset with larger events during tourist season. They have about 5,700 beds, some of which are off-line each summer and some of which are needed for existing programming. The Grandfather Marathon does use some campus housing.
 - There was universal agreement that a good locally produced event needs many years to develop and lots of volunteers!
 - ASU is interested in hosting Sun Belt Conference Championships and perhaps future NCAA National Championships. Strong local support, including financial, will be required since bid fees and/or guarantees are usually required.
 - ASU is hosting the Sun Belt Cross Country Championships in 2018.
 - Hotel rates are higher than Sun Belt schools are accustomed to. This may be a factor in future bids for in-season events.
 - Rates show dramatic increases on football weekends.
 - Some visiting teams choose to stay in Hickory and Banner Elk, because they are seeking full service hotels and airport access.
 - The ASU athletic department and Holmes Center are interested in learning about event opportunities. Each will be evaluated to see how they would fit with ongoing programs.
 - With 18,000 students plus faculty and a wide variety of club practices and competitions time is just not available.
 - Sports that are popular, and where students do well, include volleyball, track and field, cross country, soccer and wrestling.
 - The Boone Greenway Trail extends about 5 miles.
 - There are 27 miles of horse trails.
 - Events need to use more care in scheduling: events have been set without knowing whether rooms are available.
 - Many clients do not read their vacation rental agreement carefully; they come with a two-night minimum.
 - The new pool, properly planned, will make it possible to host the conference swimming meet and non-conference events too.
 - Large numbers of international travelers come to ski, particularly during the holiday season.
 - Events that appeal to seniors (pickleball, shuffleboard and bridge as three examples) can take place mid-week in winter. Room rates may continue to be an issue, however.

DSA believes these comments, selected from the many conversations that were held, fairly represents the current situation. A pattern emerged of primarily locally produced outdoor events, a relatively small number of facilities, an interest in bringing collegiate championship events to the county, and the need for good cooperation and communication between event producers, the hospitality community, and sports venues.

SITE VISITS

Sites visited included the school system, ASU, park and recreation facilities, and one of the ski resorts. Most of the visits were in Boone and Blowing Rock along with some in the county itself. DSA was surprised to find four turf fields plus those at ASU, plus an excellent competition quality aquatics center, also at ASU.

Appalachian State University

Discussions were held with leadership of the athletic department, facilities managers and a representative from university housing. DSA followed these conversations by inspecting each venue, including those off campus. ASU has been upgrading and improving all facilities. Each has received special care and attention, most recently with scoreboards for football and basketball.

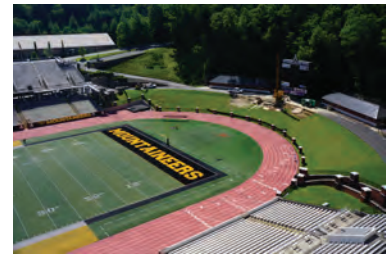
Kidd Brewer Stadium

This year, a totally new score and video board has been installed. Interestingly for a place known as “The Rock,” that is exactly what the contractor hit when installing the supporting pillars for the new board.

Some of the features include 23,150 permanent seats (with a stadium record of over 35,000, set in 2017), an excellent press box, luxury suites and club seats and an excellent FieldTurf playing surface. The stadium setting provides a spectacular view of the mountains surrounding Boone.



It is an excellent Division I football stadium and contributes significantly to the local economy with each home game. Economic impact projections are provided at the end of the ASU facilities section.



Holmes Convocation Center and Seby Jones Arena



The convocation center includes 200,000 square feet of floor space. Besides hosting Mountaineer basketball and volleyball, it is the entertainment center for the region.

There is an indoor track, too but the sightlines are not good for a major event. Video boards would be needed to see the running events.

Events that have used the arena include wrestling, concerts, bull riding, arena football and monster trucks. Entertainers represent a “who’s who” of the concert industry.

Holmes Convocation Center seats 8,325. A new center-hung video board was installed in 2017.

[Varsity Gym](#)

Once the home of basketball, it is now used for wrestling and as a venue for volleyball when Holmes Center is in use for other purposes. When DSA visited, there were multiple wrestling mats set for a camp. This is a perfect site for major competitions in youth wrestling, gymnastics and the martial arts.

DSA feels this is an excellent venue for events that will attract visitors.

[Beaver Field at Jim and Betty Smith Stadium](#)

This is the home for Mountaineer baseball. It is a true Division I baseball stadium, completely equipped with FieldTurf, lights, excellent team rooms and lounges and about 1000 permanent seats. Additional seating is available on the grass berms, like those at Kidd Brewer Stadium.

ASU has compiled an excellent won-loss record since the stadium opened.



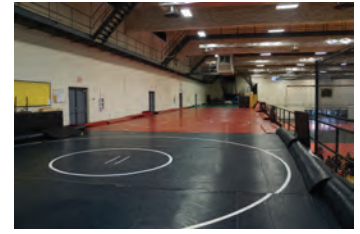
[Sywassink/Lloyd Family Stadium](#)

The home field for ASU's fast-pitch softball team is in excellent condition, and has all the features needed for top-flight competition. It has lights, an excellent press box, permanent concessions, bull pens and an irrigated grass field.

There are 1000 permanent seats.

[Appalachian Soccer Stadium at the Ted Mackorell Soccer Complex](#)

This stadium, with the adjacent field, was the big surprise of the visits. DSA did not expect to find two lighted soccer fields with turf. These are the equal of the best playing surfaces anywhere.





They are lighted, and the ASU stadium has bleacher seating for 1000, along with excellent team bench areas and a very nice press box.

These fields would combine well with those at the nearby Watauga High School for a tournament.

The Town of Boone owns property across the adjoining South Fork New River that is being considered for the construction of additional fields. Should that occur, Watauga County could become a mecca for soccer competition, particularly for teams from the beaches and lowlands seeking cooler air.

[Brandon & Erica M. Adcock Field](#)

This is a perfect example of ASU's determination to provide the best possible competition sites. It is a field hockey specific stadium. The turf is artificial, with shorter blades than those for football or soccer. This turf provides the proper conditions for field hockey.

There is a watering system that adds moisture when needed, insuring increased playability.

The field has 450 permanent seats.



[Appalachian Tennis Courts](#)

ASU has six hard courts that are suitable for Sun Belt competition and practice.

[Kennedy Trails at State Farm](#)

There was an earlier mention of the amount of training and competition in cross country. This excellent series of trails (a total of four miles) permit optimum conditions for training and competition.

In addition to ASU meets, it has become a world-class training facility.

Each year it hosts the Covered Bridge Open, a multiple team event.

There are excellent opportunities to host regional and even national events.

[ASU State Farm Recreation Complex](#)

This intramural complex includes the Town of Boone Greenway and Kennedy Trails. The site includes a lighted “great lawn” suitable for several sports. It is possible to use the site for youth soccer. The grass area, which is lighted, can be marked for different sizes of fields.



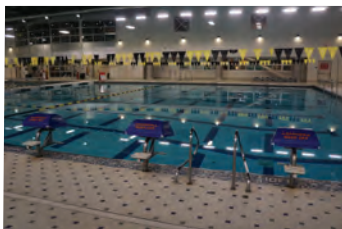
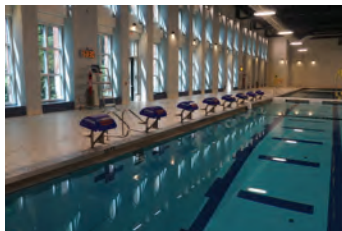
[Sofield Family Indoor Practice Facility](#)

This center serves indoor training needs for all 20 ASU teams, including football, baseball and softball.

It is located at the football stadium, and easy to reach from the residence halls.

[ASU Aquatic Center](#)

DSA did encounter a situation where a facility is not available for outside events. This center is suitable for competition, particularly at 25 yards.



The pool planned for the new community recreation center will be able to host smaller competitions, but the area would benefit from an occasional major swimming event.

DSA understands students and faculty come first, because this is common policy. It is also understood students pay for its use.

Nonetheless campus pools throughout the country make exceptions for excellent outside event opportunities.

Economic Impact of Mountaineer Athletics

A study was conducted over the 2015-2016 school year to determine the direct and induced impacts of spending. It was conducted by the Center for Economic Research & Policy Analysis at ASU.

The study computed the direct spending at \$37.3 million, after adjusting for various “leakages” out of the local economy (not every dollar spent stays in the community).

Importantly, the study also concluded that this spending contributed \$3.6 million in additional taxes paid. Taxes paid provide funds for additional community services that could not be provided without the income. So, residents directly benefit from Mountaineer athletics.

The estimated economic impact of this spending was \$54 million plus \$3.6 million in taxes.

Watauga County Schools

The county has one high school and 8 K-8 schools. Each of the K-8 schools has a gymnasium. Watauga County High School has a main gymnasium and an auxiliary gym suitable for games, practice or warm-ups before a game in the main gym.



The facilities of interest are the two turf fields at the high school, the running track, the baseball and softball fields and the two gyms.

It is unusual to find two turf fields at one high school. And, these fields are within a mile of those at the Ted Mackorell Soccer Complex. With four turf fields so close to each other, an event could use all four. And, if the games are 6v6, each field could accommodate as many as six fields, or up to twenty-four at one time. Older players could compete on four or two fields within each full-size field.



The eight lane running track hosts events and is suitable for regional competitions.

The baseball and softball fields are in good condition. Hosting tournaments would require using fields in multiple locations. This is not ideal, and will be an issue for many events looking for most or all fields on one site.



The turf fields and running track are excellent facilities.

The school system has policies regarding outside use of facilities. If the event is a for-profit competition, it would fall to the bottom of the list. A not-for-profit event would need to be approved and scheduled according to these policies. The school system will negotiate with and work with groups to use facilities as appropriate and approved.

There is an interest in considering events that are good for the community and school system.

Watauga County Parks and Recreation

The department maintains its facilities.

The recent approval of a new county indoor community recreation center is good news to the community and could become useful for outside events.

Current plans include two to four gymnasium floors and a swimming pool. The gymnasiums will be tournament friendly, and could accommodate two to four basketball games or four to eight volleyball games.

Because Watauga County is a destination, DSA believes these courts will attract small events, with an emphasis on the school year when hotel rooms might be more available.

The county has made do with an under-sized pool. It is a salt water pool that is maintained in excellent condition, but its use is limited to very small events and open swimming. The Watauga County Swim Complex lap pool is not deep enough to allow for starting blocks. The facility was built as an outdoor pool in the 1970's and subsequently enclosed. Maintenance has always been difficult and expensive. It will be replaced by the new indoor community recreation center.



A new 25-yard pool with multiple lanes, starting blocks and some seating would make possible larger high school or club events.

This facility will also become a community asset beyond sports. With meeting rooms, indoor walking track, and workout area as well as gathering spaces, residents of all ages will be able to enjoy the building, particularly during the school and work weeks.

Fields and Parks

The department developed a Comprehensive Systemwide Plan for the period 2010-2019. This plan made clear present assets and future needs. Community input was sought, and the plan for a new community recreation center was developed as one result.

Currently, Optimist Fields has two fields, one for players 11-12 and the other for those 13-15 years-old. Industrial Fields has a machine pitch field for 7-and 8 years old, another field for the 9-10 age group and two 300' softball fields that can be used for both slow and fast pitch. There is one additional softball field, which is primarily used for the Fast Pitch Softball Program.

These fields have been used for other age groups. Portable mounds and moveable bases permit a variety of ages to play.

These fields are in reasonable to good condition. They are used for practices and games and some small tournaments. Without a significant number of new fields built in one location, or without grouping sufficient fields in multiple locations, Watauga County will not be a host for more than a few small events a year.



Skiing

The area is fortunate to have three full service ski resorts. Appalachian Ski Mountain, Beech Mountain Resort and Sugar Mountain Resort are very popular winter destinations. They also offer activities off season. Plus, they can host meetings and events.

The importance of these facilities to the economy and quality of life cannot be overstated.

Broyhill Equestrian Preserve

The Blowing Rock Charity Horse Show, started in 1923, has been held at the Preserve since 1928. The show is the longest continuous running event of its kind. It features the Saddlebred Division for a week in early June and the Hunter/Jumper Division for two weeks in late July-early August.

Equestrian events attract large numbers of visitors who enjoy the show and all the attractions the county offers.

There is much more to the Preserve than the show. The 25 miles of Cone Carriage Roads can be accessed by those stabling on site.

The Preserve includes 17 barns with 450 stables and a 260' by 135' oval arena with grandstands and private boxes. There is also a show ring and a schooling ring.

The stables are available for rent except during the Show. This means the Preserve is generating visitors throughout the year.

This is an exceptional Preserve and the Show draws thousands of visitors to Watauga County every year. The importance to the local economy cannot be overstated.

Rocky Knob Park

Although it was not visited, this recently refurbished facility has become an excellent site for mountain biking and hiking. Please refer to *Appendix III – Rocky Knob Park* for complete information.

In addition to eight miles of trails the park has a pump track, parking, bathroom facilities, picnic pavilion and playground. It represents a combination of efforts from several local organizations, \$2 million and more than four thousand man-hours.



Conclusions (Sites)

It should be clear that Watauga County has some exceptional facilities and events. The facilities are primarily on the ASU campus and will be available in limited cases. The Aquatic Center, Holmes Center and Varsity Gymnasium are the sites that are most adaptable to sport tourism.

The other exceptional sites are the soccer fields at Ted Mackorell Soccer Complex and Watauga County High School and ASU's field hockey complex.

The baseball and softball fields are not all in the same locale. Watauga High School has one baseball field that is not adaptable to younger ages. The softball field is adaptable to youth baseball and machine pitch if needed.

Appalachian State has a turf baseball field that is not adaptable. ASU, too, has a softball field that can be adapted to youth baseball and machine pitch.

Watauga County Parks and Recreation has the 7 fields mentioned, but they require temporary fencing for tournaments if tickets are sold and do not have permanent concessions.

Currently, Watauga County does not have any traditional four field cloverleaf with centralized concessions, restroom facilities, etc.

Only Varsity Gym can provide multiple courts/mats in one building.

Outdoor events are the most productive and popular with visitors and residents. They are the cycling, running, biking, mountain biking and trail events. Watauga County is blessed with exceptional outdoor events. Whatever happens, existing events should be supported and encouraged.

STRENGTHS WEAKNESSES OPPORTUNITIES AND THREATS

The county faces its own unique combinations. DSA has learned every destination has their own strengths. Generally, weaknesses are signs to avoid certain kinds of events. Strategic planning will produce emphasis on what does or could work and simply ignores that which cannot happen.

Strengths

Location and climate are key factors. Location works for and somewhat against the county, but DSA feels the positives of the visit outweigh the inability to arrive by air. Climate was cited again and again in the interviews, with everyone agreeing escape from the lowlands in summer and skiing in the winter were two very positive attributes.

The ski industry is vitally important in the winter. Ample cold weather means good business. The three ski mountains in and near the county are major advantages. The snow making machines need cold weather to operate properly.

Appalachian State University is a major plus. The student, faculty and staff population of well over 20,000 (with 3500 faculty and staff year around) creates a major positive impact. ASU's programs, majors and graduate schools add up to a tremendous resource. And, athletics contributes more than \$40 million in direct visitor spending and taxes plus the induced effect of this influx of revenue.

ASU's recent move to the Sun Belt Conference will create more opportunities to host events of significance including, but certainly not limited to, sports.

As far as sport tourism goes, there are a significant number of annual, locally produced events. These include the "Blood, Sweat and Gears" events, the Highland Games, Boone Roundball Classic and the Blowing Rock Charity Horse Show, among many others.

These events need volunteers, and they have been forthcoming in support.

Rocky Knob Park is a unique advantage: with five different trails it has attracted national media attention. The trails and park provide an advantage over other destinations.


There are plenty of things for visitors to see and do. This enhances the visitor experience and encourages repeat visits.

DSA also noted a commitment to investigate new opportunities and a determination to do whatever makes sense for the county and its residents.

Weaknesses

To develop more sport tourism, it will be necessary to address the barriers that prevent outside use of certain facilities. The biggest issues are limited access to the turf fields at the Ted Mackorell Soccer Complex and no access to the indoor pool at ASU. Soccer is the largest travel sport. To get a much bigger share of that market, the "Ted Mack" fields need to be combined with those at the high school.

The new community recreation center will have a pool. It will be suitable for high school conference championships (if it has some permanent seating) but it will not be able to host larger events that



may be recruited based upon climate and the compelling nature of a visit. DSA has seen countless situations where forward planning can result in occasional events at a very busy pool.

There is a lack of sports facilities off campus. The resident population has been making do with the situation, and the new community recreation center is a way to address this issue. Nonetheless, there are only five or six diamonds available.

With all the courts and most of the fields on a campus, scheduling can be an issue.

Room rates and availabilities may become issues. The summer and winter seasons command higher rates than might be the case elsewhere. One example may be helpful: ASU will host the Sun Belt Cross Country Championship in 2018. They have already discovered some teams will be staying in Banner Elk, Hickory and beyond to find better room rates and/or meeting space for the teams. If the room nights cannot be captured, the rest of each visitor's spending will go elsewhere.

The lack of a full-service hotel in Boone is a weakness for many events.

Resort areas tend to charge what the traffic will bear at any time of year. Watauga's success in tourism could inhibit some sport tourism events due to a lack of rooms at acceptable rates.

Hoteliers report the need for much better communication between local event producers and the hotel community. Some events have been planned and announced without checking room availability. This leads to issues that cause significant difficulties.

Some people reported a lack of coordination/communication between the towns and county. There are opportunities here.

Opportunities


ASU will have opportunities to host future conference championships and perhaps an NCAA Championship. Obtaining these events will require a partnership with the community: bid fees, perhaps guarantees and certainly volunteers will be needed. Cities that host conference and national championships have learned events are opportunities to combine resources to insure success.

The new community recreation center will have at least two basketball and four volleyball courts and a competition pool for small events. The courts can be combined with those at the high school and at the K-8 schools to host tournaments. Access to at least six basketball courts will permit events with 50 or more teams.

DSA heard much about the possibilities of building more rectangular fields on property across the river from the Ted Mackorell Soccer Complex. These new fields would increase the capacity of local youth soccer programs and allow new sports like rugby 7's and lacrosse to flourish. A combination of climate and new fields could produce excellent results, particularly in soccer and lacrosse.

Rocky Knob park could host more events. All that is needed is the time and effort to take advantage of this resource.

If each of the county's diamonds were reworked to allow fast pitch in addition to slow pitch and youth baseball, fast pitch tournaments could be recruited. Girl's fast pitch continues to grow in popularity.



The county is ideally located for an emphasis on activities and competitions enjoyed by seniors. Pickleball, shuffleboard and bridge competitions can be scheduled to fill soft occupancy periods.

Varsity Gym is perfect for the mat sports (wrestling and the martial arts) and gymnastics. The Holmes Center is adaptable to use of its floor space. And, allowing an occasional swimming competition at ASU would be helpful to future efforts.

Finally, The Boone Roundball Classic is able to host up to 150 teams by combining courts in all the schools, Greenway Baptist Church, Old Cove Creek, Ashe County High School, Ashe County and Westwood Elementary School. This can work for a locally produced event. Each site is known to the event managers. Outside events may have issues with this many locations, but the capability is there.

Threats

A lack of cold weather will always be an issue for winter sports. If snow cannot be made and maintained, a new sport tourism effort will have little effect.

There is a threat to the Blowing Rock Charity Horse Show. The very large and impressive equestrian complex in Tryon, only two and a half hours away, could represent cause for concern. The long history of success in Blowing Rock should be an important reason for optimism, but the Tryon complex could cause competitors to choose between continuing to come to Blowing Rock or switching to the new facility.

Doing nothing is an issue. Watauga County does have potential for more sport tourism, and this study is a step toward decisions on how best to compete with the many other attractive and well-equipped destinations in the Carolinas, Virginia, and elsewhere in the southeast.

Continued lack of communication between hotels and events, cities and organizations will impede progress. DSA feels these issues were mentioned enough that they need attention. Sport tourism relies on cooperation between everyone involved. Successful communities are those that make certain everyone is on board.

DSA suggests a workshop where details of the new marketing effort are provided to the hospitality community. The hotels and restaurants must understand just how events will be identified and vetted before bidding. For each event considered, all hotels should be given the opportunity to provide rooms to the block. Each of the cities in Watauga County's competitive set do a good job of this, with Kingsport and Johnson City, TN as excellent examples.

Room rates are a concern. There is a limit to the number of rooms in the market. The hotels want to maximize revenues in times when demand is high. These peak times could be just when a new event would like to come. The only solutions are to be strategic in any new marketing and sales efforts.

ASU may be able to book rooms for some of these events.

The relative lack of sports facilities and access issues will act to keep the potential for success limited in the near term.

ORGANIZATIONAL ISSUES/SUGGESTIONS

Sport tourism has always been a part of the hospitality industry. Cities and counties that have both a sports commission and visitor's bureau have found collaboration produces the best results. And, where there is no sports commission, the visitor's bureau or chamber of commerce takes the lead in all bids and proposals.

Usually, the decision between establishing a new sport tourism effort with a sports commission or a visitor's bureau comes down to the number of local corporate headquarters. The home office historically will support a privately funded sports commission while branch offices cannot.

The decision also starts with a "crawl, walk, run" approach," which argues against a sports commission.

Since Watauga County cannot count on significant funds from a local corporate community, and because crawling is the best way to begin, DSA suggests starting with your tourist bureaus. Only that kind of organization knows best how to sell the destination.

CVBs have learned that it can be helpful to create a department (even if staffed part-time) that is called "Watauga County Sports" or the "Watauga County Sports Authority (or Commission)." Doing so communicates a more than passing interest in sport tourism.

This department should have an advisory board consisting of the CVB board(s) or a separate board consisting of community leaders that include the hospitality industry and venue operators. The advisory board would do just that, "advise." The CVB board would have control of the finances.

DSA has been involved with the National Association of Sports Commissions since its inception. Membership in the NASC includes a mentor, selected from a destination with similar characteristics. A new member of the NASC should also connect with the voluntary association of sport cities in North Carolina. The exchange of ideas at both levels will insure a solid and appropriate beginning to the new effort to increase economic development through sports.

ASU and Watauga County Schools are essential partners. ASU has the experience necessary to select target events wisely. The local soccer, softball, basketball and volleyball communities should also be consulted, as well.


Funding

Sport tourism does require a marketing plan which aims at smaller events in sports that fit your capabilities. These sports include basketball and volleyball, soccer, fast pitch softball, lacrosse, wrestling, each of the martial arts, gymnastics, and road cycling and running events including cross country.

DSA suggests that a staff person be assigned on a half-time basis. Excellent opportunities will be offered to ASU students. They can serve as interns on a paid or for credit basis. Two interns part-time to start would work well.

DSA further thinks sufficient resources need to be set aside to allow for travel to at least two industry shows. These would be the NASC Sports Event Symposium each spring and the TEAMS Conference every fall. Both offer opportunities for one-on-one appointments with event owners plus a wealth of industry education.

At least \$100,000 should be budgeted. This would cover part of a salary, interns, travel expenses,



membership in the NASC, conference expenses and hotel stays and still have some funds set aside in an opportunity fund to pay bid fees on events of special interest. Such events might include a Sun Belt Championship or an AAU or USSSA basketball, volleyball or cross-country event.

Impacts

Early in the report, an example was provided of what could happen with just one 50 team tournament, based on two-night stays. The event was projected to produce about \$262,500 in direct spending, plus taxes.

If just four such events took happened, they could deliver an additional \$1 million in estimated visitor spending. To accomplish this, courts and/or fields would need to be combined on two or more sites.

The new community recreation center can play a significant role, and adding more fields near the Ted Mackorell Soccer Complex would also play a major role in the county's future efforts in sport tourism.

Managing Expectations

Regional championships should be targeted. Most do not require bid fees, and since the objective is to develop overnight stays, teams from Cincinnati will be as productive for the local economy as those from Oregon.

DSA suggests three years for the initial efforts. Results are not likely immediately. The fastest way to get more room nights is to work with locally produced events on ways to increase the number of competitors in their events. This should be priority number one.

A second priority is to reach out to all venues and local organizations plus area hoteliers. Concerns and questions can be handled in one-on-one meetings rather than in larger forums.


Sport tourism is about managing priorities. Do not expect immediate results, expect local events to welcome some assistance...perhaps in booking the rooms for them or assembling packets to send out before competitors leave home.

Anything done to remind visitors of the activities available to them increases the chance for multiple night stays.

As Watauga County works toward ways in which it can expand its presence in sport tourism, nearby destinations have been pursuing events for many years. Prominent among them are Asheville and Kingsport, TN. Both have long resumes. Kingsport is regarded by DSA as one of the best in the country.

Winston-Salem, Greensboro and Charlotte are factors, as well. A bit further away are Raleigh, Durham and Cary. All have exceptional sports facilities and plenty of hotel rooms, usually at affordable prices.

It will be of the highest importance to use the personal relationships at ASU, the parks department, local event producers and your resorts to compete against these more experienced and larger rivals. An advantage is the climate and small-town atmosphere...where smaller can be better for many events.



If a competitive analysis is conducted, it might be done after the first two-three years. Initial efforts should be focused on increasing the size of existing events, attracting Sun Belt Championships, and smaller soccer and lacrosse events.

Effort should be made to work out ways in which the ASU pool can be used by outside events. Varsity Gym will be the number one asset that ASU can provide.

As to sports, youth baseball and softball, cross country, soccer and lacrosse, all the mat sports (using Varsity Gym), running and cycling, and basketball and volleyball should receive priority.

Once the county has selected its marketing organization it will be imperative to join the National Association of Sports Commissions (NASC). The NASC has a new member mentoring program that will pair Watauga County with another, similar destination. This shortens the learning curve.

DSA Sports LLC will also remain available for consultation when needed at no charge.

CONCLUSIONS

Watauga County already reaps the benefits of locally produced events. Between ASU and the many other running, cycling and equestrian events a solid background has been established in what to do. This expertise could be expanded to additional events, assuming establishment of a formalized marketing and sales effort.

The county could create a sport tourism effort with the combined resources of the tourist bureaus and ASU. The report recommends a gradual expansion of efforts depending on results. Initial focus can be on assisting existing events to increase the number of overnight competitors. DSA uncovered enough evidence to suggest that a more focused county-wide effort with increased cooperation between event managers, the hotel community and tourist bureaus could be successful, particularly by combining existing venues and added additional fields as demand grows.

Climate is a major asset: summers are cooler and the winter provides snow to keep the ski resorts busy.

There is plenty to see and do: sports events are often used as mini-vacations, with teams looking for things to do while in the area. This can lead to an extended stay.

The current limit on facilities will be improved by the new community recreation center and pool, gaining access to and combining the turf fields at Ted Mackorell and Watauga High School (particularly for youth soccer events for younger players), focusing on mat sports at Varsity Gym, assisting ASU in bids for Sun Belt Championships and negotiating more favorable room rates, improving county diamonds and making them all fast-pitch friendly, and working toward additional turf fields across from the existing turf fields.

It will take time to show significant results. This is where managing expectations comes in: most events have a year or more lead time. So, while launching a targeted sales effort, attention should be given to building existing events and encouraging new locally produced and owned events.



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Small-scale event sport tourism: A case study in sustainable tourism[☆]

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ABSTRACT

Scholars have suggested that small-scale sports events may be a sustainable form of tourism development for communities (e.g., Higham, 1999). The purpose of this study was to examine six small-scale sports events and the work of a local sports commission in the context of the three pillars of sustainability: economic, social, and environmental. Small-scale sports events are largely competitor or parent-as-spectator based, often annual, and attract little media attention. The six events were: a marathon, Senior Games, archery, soccer, softball, and swimming. The participants or spectators of the six events were surveyed onsite or online over an 18-month period and additional data from the sports commission, where relevant, were included. Sample sizes ranged from $n = 68$ to $n = 447$. The results suggest that a small-scale sports event portfolio consistent with a community's infrastructure and human and cultural capital may be a viable form of sustainable tourism development.

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1. Introduction

In recent years, there has been growing critique regarding the sustainability of positive legacies from hosting mega sports events such as the Olympic Games and the FIFA World Cup (Smith, 2009). Concerns have been raised about the financial burdens (Lee & Taylor, 2006), the utility of the facilities after the event (Hiller, 2006), the environmental impacts (Chernushenko, 1996), and negative social legacies such as resident displacement (Hall & Hodges, 1996). Even the legacy of increased tourism in the post event years has been questioned (Brown, 2006). All of these raise issues about the efficacy of developing national sport tourism initiatives around large-scale sports events, a policy Swart (1998) has questioned in relation to South Africa. As the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) begin a renewed focus on sport tourism and have introduced the concept of sustainability into the discussion (UNWTO International Summit on Tourism, Sport and Mega-events, February 2010), it is time to examine sustainable development through sport tourism. In his call for a more critical analysis of the impacts of mega sporting events such as the Olympic Games, Higham (1999) proposed that communities wishing to develop sport tourism should focus on regular season sports or hosting smaller scale sports events. He suggested, “the tourism and economic development opportunities presented by sporting occasions of a more modest scale are generally positive” (p. 87). He also introduced the idea that small-scale sport tourism may “comply with the principles of sustainable tourism more so than sporting mega events” (p. 87). To illustrate this suggestion Higham pointed out that small-scale sport tourism tends to generate a reliable flow of visitors, use existing infrastructure, be an appropriate size for the community, and to require very little in the way of public funding.

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In the US, sports commissions have played an integral role in establishing small-scale sport tourism as a viable sector of an existing tourism industry, or providing a reason to visit a community if no prior tourism sector exists. Sports commissions may work at the state, county or city levels; they may be part of a convention and visitors bureau or may comprise a stand-alone non-profit agency. The National Association of Sports Commissions (NASC) was formed in 1992 with 13 members. Currently, there are almost 500 member organizations in the US, Canada, and Puerto Rico (www.sportscommissions.org). This is a testament to the interest in hosting small-scale sport tourism among communities in North America. However, very little empirical research exists that has focused on the tourism-related benefits and other impacts that small-scale event sport tourism can have for a community, or the idea that small-scale sport tourism is a form of sustainable development. Don Schumacher, current Executive Director of the NASC in a presentation to parks and recreation directors about the potential for economic development through small-scale sport tourism said, “A participant-based, or grass-roots event can produce hundreds of thousands of dollars in visitor spending,” the national average being about \$300,000 (USD) (Schumacher, 2007). He also noted that some of the trends within these events include: “The younger the athlete, the more people travel with them;” “More people travel with girls/female athletes;” and “63% of the events held are for 12–17 year olds.” Thus, economically, establishing a small-scale event portfolio for a community, especially one that encompasses youth sport seems to make sense. However, Schumacher, also emphasized that “the development of new facilities should be tied to unmet local needs, not tournaments/visitors,” a comment that is compatible with principles of sustainable community development in that new infrastructure should only be built with a view to long-term use by the community. Thus, the purpose of this study was to examine the three pillars of sustainability (economic, social, and environmental) in relation to small-scale event sport tourism in the context of six small-scale sports events and the workings of a local sports commission over an 18-month period.

2. Conceptual framework

2.1. Sustainability

The terms sustainability, sustainable development, and sustainable tourism are often used interchangeably, however, Liu (2003) suggested that there are differences in the meanings associated with them. She proposed that sustainability is “state focused” in that it describes the condition of something over the long-term (p. 460), whereas sustainable development is process oriented and involves the management of something for the short and long-term. Indeed, the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED, 1987) in the Brundtland Report defined sustainable development as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability for future generations to meet their own needs” (p. 43). Liu described sustainable tourism as encompassing all forms of tourism that are “compatible with and contribute to sustainable development” (p. 460). The UNWTO (1993) is more explicit and stipulates “sustainable tourism development meets the needs of present tourists and host regions while protecting and enhancing opportunities for the future.”

The focus on tourists as a key part of sustainable tourism is an important point as the pervasive understandings of sustainable tourism tend to be environmentally and host population focused. Indeed, Cater (1993) added tourist satisfaction as a key dimension in developing sustainable tourism. Liu (2003) developed this idea further and she argued that tourism demand must be part of any sustainable tourism development plan as destinations cannot assume tourists will continue to visit, and that visitation numbers will grow. Tourist preferences and motivations change and increasingly tourism is subject to external forces such as natural disasters, terrorism, and economic recession, among others. Thus, while natural and cultural resources are important parts of the tourism product, it is important to understand that sustainable tourism development needs to encompass a broader vision. This vision should acknowledge that tourism development is dynamic and “requires simultaneously meeting the needs of the tourists, the tourist businesses, the host community and the needs for environmental protection” (Liu, 2003, p. 467). With this holistic approach the goals of sustainable tourism would be enhanced quality of life, satisfied tourists, a profitable tourism industry, and environmental protection.

Part of this broader conception of sustainability is the idea that sustainable development encompasses three dimensions, economic, social and environmental, or what is commonly called the triple bottom line, an accounting term coined by Elkington (1997). Originally the concept was used in corporate accountability, or what is now more commonly referred to as corporate social responsibility. Today it is an approach to sustainability that recognizes the interdependence of the three domains and has been adopted by the United Nations World Tourism Organization for sustainable tourism initiatives (UNWTO, 2004). As part of the 2007 Davos Declaration the need for urgent action in regards to climate change was raised and a quadruple bottom line with a fourth pillar of climate responsiveness was proposed (UNWTO, 2007). In continued collaboration with the United Nations Environmental Programme and other agencies, a call was made to integrate the mitigation of climate change into the “mainstream environmental activities” of these agencies (Simpson, Gösling, Scott, Hall, & Gladin, 2008). Other scholars have proposed an alternative fourth pillar, that of the institutional dimensions of policy and political governance (e.g., Cottrell, Vaske, Shen, & Ritter, 2007). Thus, while definitions of sustainability continue to be debated, this study works with the most widely accepted approach to sustainable tourism that of the triple bottom line of social, environmental, and economic (UNWTO, 2004), while acknowledging the need to address climate responsiveness as part of the environmental pillar.

Since the early 1990s, ecotourism has been touted as the archetypal form of sustainable tourism. However, misappropriations of the term ecotourism, misunderstandings of the principles of ecotourism, and a growing concern that all forms of tourism need to be sustainable (Liu, 2003) open the debate to the idea that other forms of tourism might be appropriate for sustainable tourism development including small-scale sport tourism. Indeed, O'Brien and Chalip (2008) suggest that the triple bottom line should underpin sport event leveraging strategies in an attempt to move the focus beyond economic development. This is consistent with UNWTO (2004) recommendations that a balance among the three pillars of sustainability must be established for sustainable tourism to be achieved within a community.

2.2. Small-scale sports events

Gratton, Dobson, and Shibli (2000) proposed a typology of sports events that can be used to provide a clearer understanding of the term small-scale sports event. Working within the UK context they identified four types of major sporting events: Type A encompasses mega events (e.g., Olympic Games and the FIFA World Cup); Type B includes the major spectator sports events held annually (e.g., Wimbledon or the Super Bowl); Type C events are irregular major sporting competitions drawing competitors and spectators (e.g., international level swimming event); and Type D major competitor driven events as part of the annual sporting calendar (e.g., National Collegiate Athletic Association championships excluding football and basketball in the US). For small-scale event sport tourism development however, another sport event category might be more appropriate. Thus, we concur with Wilson (2006) that small-scale event sport tourism constitutes a Type E and includes minor events where competitors may outnumber the spectators, they are often held annually, with little national media interest and limited economic activity compared to the large-scale events. Sporting events of this type held in smaller to medium sized communities tend to provide proportionately more economic benefits than if they were held in a larger city (Veltri, Miller, & Harris, 2009).

2.3. Economics

Evidence from studies stretching back almost 30 years suggests that hosting small-scale sport tourism events tends to provide economic value to the community with most expenditures coming from accommodation and food (Daniels & Norman, 2003; Horne, 2000; Veltri et al., 2009; Walo, Bull, & Breen, 1996). A consistent finding among all of these studies is that the economic benefits outweigh the costs. This is primarily due to the fact that the events use existing facilities, bring people to the community who would not have otherwise visited at that point in time (or ever), provide income for the hotels and restaurants, and benefit other businesses such as petrol stations and retail outlets. In terms of being a sustainable force economically, the key would be to develop an events portfolio for the community hosting events on a regular basis, thereby ensuring a consistent flow of tourists and expenditures (O'Brien & Chalip, 2008).

2.4. Social impacts

Fredline (2005) addressed the issue of sustainability in event sport tourism with a particular focus on the social impacts as part of the triple bottom line. Indeed, in the small-scale event sport tourism literature, authors frequently cite the social benefits of hosting the events as contributing to quality of life (Walo et al., 1996) and increased community spirit and pride (Horne, 2000; Veltri et al., 2009; Ziakas, 2010). These studies also point to the involvement of the community in the events as volunteers (Daniels & Norman, 2003; Horne, 2000; Walo et al., 1996; Wilson, 2006; Ziakas, 2010). Walo et al. noted that the use of volunteers and the use of existing facilities are two crucial factors in maximizing the social, physical, and economic benefits associated with hosting small-scale events. While Fredline (2005) categorized tourism impacts as a distinct but related domain, in our study, we followed the recommendations of the UNWTO (1993) and scholars such as Cater (1993) and Liu (2003) who suggested that the tourist should be part of a broader conceptualization of sustainability. In this sense, tourist perceptions, motivations, and satisfactions should be considered as part of the social pillar of sustainability. Another element of demand mentioned by Liu is the effects of external forces on demand such as terrorism, natural disasters, and the economy. Fyall and Jago (2009) suggested that to understand sustainability in relation to sport tourism, we need to understand the impacts of sport and tourism in terms of the triple bottom line, and to pay attention to the influence of the external environment on sport and tourism.

2.5. Environment

The study of the environmental impacts associated with event sport tourism is the most underdeveloped aspect in the existing literature. At the small-scale sport tourism level, the existing literature documents the use of existing facilities in communities as being the foundation of the viability of events as an economic development strategy (Daniels & Norman, 2003; Veltri et al., 2009; Walo et al., 1996; Wilson, 2006). One concern being raised in tourism more generally, and in the literature in relation to mega events, is carbon foot print. Collins, Jones, and Munday (2009) concluded that while management for ecological sustainability will become increasingly part of event organization, currently it is hard to find adequate measures of their success. Ostensibly, small-scale events may have a lower carbon footprint as the majority of participants tend to be drawn from the local (non-tourists) and regional visitors (within a four hour drive).

2.6. Purpose of the study

This study examined the three pillars of sustainability, economic, social, and environmental within the context of small-scale sports events using a combination of the following data types:

Economic indicators. These were accessed by the following research questions: (1) On average how many days/nights did event participants and spectators stay? (2) How many hotel room nights did each event generate? (3) What were the expenditure patterns for the day and overnight participants and spectators for each event? (4) What was the overall direct spending impact associated with each event?

Social indicators. These were accessed by the following research questions: (1) What other activities did the event participants and spectators take part in? (2) What were the primary motivations for attending the event? (3) Overall, what were the satisfaction levels of the participants and spectators with the event? (4) In what ways were local residents involved?

Environmental indicators. These were accessed by the following research questions: (1) What types of facilities were used? (2) In what ways is the sports commission involved in the promotion of environmental quality within the community?

3. Methods

3.1. Study site

Gainesville, Florida is a university town with a population of 108,655 (US Census, 2010) and 5500 hotel rooms. During the academic year (August to May) university events, particularly football in the fall, tend to dominate the events calendar for the town. As part of the wider event portfolio for the city, the Gainesville Sports Commission (GSC) organizes an average of 35 events per year attracting 54,000 adult and youth visitors to the city, contributing about \$20 million in direct spending, and 36,000 hotel room nights (GSC, 2010). The mission of the GSC is to “promote tourism through sport” with the goal of providing economic development for the community.

3.2. The six events

The six events studied were: a marathon/half marathon, Senior Games, archery, youth soccer, youth softball, and youth swimming held between February 2007 and December 2008 and were all organized by the GSC. The first three events were for participants over 18 years old (adult). The marathon was in its second year, having been reinstated the year before (the last marathon was held in 1983) and attracted 932 participants. The Senior Games is a multisport event for participants aged 50 and over. In 2007, 292 athletes took part. The archery tournament is part of the Archery Shooters Association Pro/Am tournament and had been hosted 13 times by the GSC. The tournament attracted more than 1000 archers of all levels primarily from the southeastern US.

The last three events are youth sports events. The soccer tournament in its third year was for girls under 9–18 years of age. The softball tournament was part of the state level Babe Ruth series for girls aged between 6 and 18 years and was being hosted for the first time. The swimming event is an annual meet and attracts participants aged between 6 and 22 years from all over the state.

3.3. Data collection for the six events

The participants (if over age 18) or spectators (youth event) of the six sports were surveyed during, or just after each event. Intercept surveys at the event was the primary method, although online surveys were used for two events.

For the onsite intercept surveys, trained graduate student interviewers attended the events over multiple days. The Florida state definition for a tourist is an individual who crosses the county line in pursuit of recreation. The study results represent sport tourists, both day-trippers and overnight visitors that were either active event (athletes) or passive event (spectators) sport tourists. Only one participant per travel party completed a questionnaire. Thus, while the sub-sample sizes are relatively small, the responses typically represent a travel party of 2 or 3, particularly for the youth events. Response rates for the onsite surveys ranged from 83.5% (softball) to 91.4% (archery).

For the marathon and the Senior Games, the majority of the participants registered for the event online and so on-line surveys were used. The online and mail surveys ($n = 106$ Senior Games participants without e-mail addresses) were developed in accordance with Dillman's (2000) tailored design method. E-mails or letters introducing the study, requesting participation and the URL for the online questionnaire were sent to the participants. Two follow-up e-mails or post cards were sent one and two weeks after the initial mailing. For the marathon participants the response rate was only 22.9% and may have reflected relying on a third party provider to send out the e-mail request. For the Senior Games the overall response rate across both survey methods was 62.2%.

3.3.1. Other data sources

Information collected by the GSC about each event was used as supplementary data. The sports commission receives hotel night data from most commercial accommodation providers. They also collect expenditure data using a short

questionnaire and use the NASC formula to calculate direct spending impact (Doshi, Schumacher, & Snyder, 2001). This formula utilizes current spending estimates by youth and adult visitors provided by the Florida Sports Foundation (www.flasports.com). The six event surveys conducted by university researchers provided data on wider range of concepts than that regularly obtained by the GSC. The GSC data acted as a triangulation method for the primary survey data.

3.4. Instruments for the six events

Fixed choice self-administered questionnaires were used across all of the events. All of the questionnaires asked similar information and were typically divided into sections containing items measuring purpose of trip (Is the event the primary purpose of your trip to Gainesville? 1 = yes, 2 = no); residency (Are you a resident of Alachua County? 1 = yes, 2 = no); length of stay (How many days and nights in total are you staying in Gainesville including your event participation days and nights? Open-ended response); accommodation type (If staying in Gainesville, what type of accommodation are you using? 1 = Here for the day only, 2 = Hotel/motel, 3 = Bed and Breakfast, 4 = Home of relative/friend, 5 = RV/Camping, 5 = Other); primary motives (The following is a list of reasons you may have for attending the event. The eight motives included socializing, and enjoyment); other activities taken part in during the visit (list of 12 activities including shopping, visit family/friends, eating out); prior visits to the community (Over the past five years, how many times have your taken a trip to Alachua County to attend a sports event?); event evaluation (e.g., Overall event organization 1 = Extremely dissatisfied and 7 = Extremely satisfied); and demographics. Most of the items were measured at the nominal or ordinal levels. These types of questions are commonly used in surveys of sports events (e.g., Daniels & Norman, 2003; Veltri et al., 2009) and more widely in the tourism literature on events and festivals (Getz, 1991) as such questionnaire items provide information about the activities, motives, and other tourism related behaviors of visitors. Another common purpose of such surveys pertains to visitor expenditures (Daniels & Norman, 2003; Gratton et al., 2000). In this study, expenditure data were broken into categories (e.g., accommodation, food and beverage and souvenirs). Participants were asked to estimate the money they and their travel party had spent in the host community over the course of their visit. At the start of 2008, the effects of an impending economic recession were being felt on the tourism industry. Thus, two contingency style questions were included on the archery, softball, and swimming questionnaires to assess the effects of rising petrol prices on decisions to attend the event. These items relate to the call by Fyall and Jago (2009) to understand the effects of external factors such as economic recession on the sustainability of sport tourism.

3.5. Data analysis for the six events

The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics: frequencies, percentages, means, medians, and standard deviations. Consistency in question structure and wording across the event questionnaires was applied to rectify compatibility issues where possible.

3.6. Participant characteristics for the six events

The focus of this study was on the active or passive event sport tourists who took part in the events. The sample sizes are as follows: marathon ($n = 68$), Senior Games ($n = 240$), archery ($n = 233$), soccer ($n = 447$), softball ($n = 158$), and swimming ($n = 212$). The majority of the passive event sport tourists (spectators) for the youth events were female, while the majority active event sport tourists in the adult sports competitions were male, except for the marathon where 50.7% of the respondents were female and 49.3% were male. The average age was fairly similar (about 42 years) across all events except for the Senior Games where the mean age was 69 years ($SD = 8.81$ years) which reflects the age 50 prerequisite for taking part in that event. For the adult sports events, the participants were athletes taking part in the event. For the youth events the majority of the spectators were parents (soccer 83.3%; softball 80.4%; swimming 90.4%), followed by other relatives (soccer 4.2%; softball 17.6%; swimming 5.7%). Across all events, most participants indicated average annual incomes of \$40,000 (USD) and above with the majority of the soccer (72.7%) and swimming spectators (55.6%) indicating annual household incomes of \$80,000 (USD) or more. Income was not measured for the marathon participants. In terms of education, with the exception of the Senior Games, where education level was not requested, the majority of participants were college educated. Across all events, the majority of participants and spectators were white.

4. Results

4.1. Economic indicators

The number of nights and days spent at the destination varied with the duration of the event (Table 1). The mean number of days ranged from 1.30 to 3.58 and the mean number of nights ranged from 1.27 to 3.33. The Senior Games attracted the highest number of day-trippers (74.6%), whereas, for the other adult sports event, archery, almost all of the participants stayed overnight (94.2%). For the youth events, softball spectators had the highest prevalence of day trips at 28.2%, whereas, 78.5% of the soccer spectators, and 82.9% of the swimming spectators reported staying overnight.

Table 1
Patterns of time spent in the community and type of accommodation used.

	Adult sports events			Youth sports events		
	Marathon (n = 68)	Senior Games (n = 240)	Archery (n = 233)	Soccer (n = 447)	Softball (n = 158)	Swimming (n = 212)
Trip type (%)						
Day trip	19 (27.9)	178 (74.6)	14 (5.8)	96(21.5)	44 (28.2)	36 (17.1)
Overnight	47 (72.1)	62 (25.4)	227 (94.2)	351(78.5)	112 (72.8)	175 (82.9)
# days & nights <i>M (SD)</i>						
Days	– ^a	1.30 (0.58)	2.42 (0.85)	2.74 (0.98)	3.58 (0.93)	2.73 (0.27)
Nights	–	1.27 (0.14)	2.48 (0.90)	2.03 (0.98)	3.33 (1.26)	2.41 (0.06)
Accommodation (%)						
Hotel/motel	20 (40.8)	21 (77.8)	206 (90.7)	372 (80.0)	107 (95.5)	162 (92.6)
B&B	0 (0.0)	–	3 (1.3)	5 (1.1)	0 (0.0)	2 (1.1)
Friend/family home	26 (53.1)	2 (7.4)	12 (5.3)	11 (2.4)	3 (2.7)	7 (4.0)
RV/camping	1 (2.0)	3 (11.1)	6 (2.6)	3 (0.6)	2 (1.8)	4 (2.3)
Others	2 (4.1)	1 (3.7)	0 (0.0)	4 (0.9) (7.6)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
Room nights ^b	414	63	3415	4545	3500	3007

^a Measured with a multiple choice question (0 night: $n = 6$; 1 night: $n = 16$; 2 nights: $n = 9$; 3 nights or more: $n = 20$).

^b Data provided by hotels to GSC.

Table 2
Expenditures of day-trippers and overnight visitors.

Day trippers	Adult sports events (\$)			Youth sports events (\$)		
	Marathon (n = 19)	Senior Games (n = 171)	Archery (n = 14)	Soccer (n = 96)	Softball (n = 43)	Swimming (n = 33)
Total expenditure (US\$)	95.64	169.76	123.13	206.45	199.95	147.63
Daily expenditure (US\$)	95.64 ^a	169.76 ^a	123.13 ^a	206.45 ^a	199.95 ^b	147.63 ^b
Overnight visitors	Adult sports events (\$)			Youth sports events (\$)		
	Marathon (n = 45)	Senior Games (n = 62)	Archery (n = 221)	Soccer (n = 351)	Softball (n = 109)	Swimming (n = 164)
Total expenditure	316.57	275.66	560.43	649.87	828.94	586.64
Daily expenditure	158.29 ^c	137.83 ^c	186.81 ^d	216.62 ^e	207.23 ^f	195.55 ^d

Note: The sample size (n) of each event is not the same with that of non-residents due to missing data. Daily expenditure was calculated by dividing total expenditure by the median value of stay days (1 day).

^a The median value of travel party size was 2 persons.

^b The median value of travel party size was 3 persons.

^c The median value of stay days and travel party size was 2 days and 2 persons respectively.

^d The median value of stay days and travel party size was 3 days and 3 persons respectively.

^e The median value of stay days and travel party size was 3 days and 2 persons respectively.

^f The median value of stay days and travel party size was 4 days and 4 persons respectively.

The majority of participants and spectators stayed in hotels generating 14,980 total hotel room nights across the six events. The number of hotel room nights ranged from 63 for the Senior Games to 4545 for soccer. Only 40.8% of the marathon participants reported staying in a hotel. This event had the highest portion of participants across the six events staying with friends and family (53.1%). The percentage of respondents staying in a hotel/motel ranged from 40.8% (marathon) to 95.5% (softball).

The median daily expenditure across events ranged from \$95.64 to \$206.45 (USD) for day-trippers and from \$137.83 to \$216.62 (USD) for overnighters (Table 2). The average travel party size ranged from 2 to 4 people. In terms of total expenditure across the event for those who spent the night in the community, the softball spectators reported the highest at \$828.94, followed by soccer at \$649.87 (USD). For the adult sports events, the archery participants reported the highest total expenditures at \$560.43 (USD).

For three events, archery, softball, and swimming, participants were asked about the influence of the rising price of petrol on their travel plans to attend the respective tournaments. Just over half of the archery participants (50.6%) reported that the price of petrol had influenced their travel decisions with comments such as choosing to participate in less events ($n = 35$) and carpooling to save money ($n = 12$) mentioned. Petrol prices peaked to record high prices in Florida on July 15th, 2008 just after the softball event at \$4.05 (USD) per gallon (www.gasbuddy.com). Just under 72% of spectators reported that petrol prices had not influenced their travel plans for attending the tournament. Of those who had changed their plans, spending less money on other activities ($n = 9$) and carpooling ($n = 7$) were cited. The most frequent sentiment was that they would be willing to travel irrespective of petrol prices so that they could support their daughters ($n = 58$). Among the swimming

Table 3
Participant motivations.

	Adult sports events			Youth sports events		
	Marathon ^a (n = 68)	Senior Games (n = 240)	Archery (n = 233)	Soccer ^a (n = 447)	Softball (n = 158)	Swimming (n = 212)
Competition	–	104 (63.0) ^b	218 (91.2)	–	135 (85.4)	165 (77.8)
Enjoyment	–	18 (11.0)	156 (65.3)	–	85 (53.8)	32 (15.1)
Socializing	–	5 (3.0)	108 (45.2)	–	37 (23.4)	25 (11.8)
Support my child	–	–	–	–	48 (30.4)	155 (73.1)
Challenge	–	–	137 (57.3)	–	43 (27.2)	39 (18.3)
Relaxation	–	1 (1.0)	78 (32.2)	–	18 (11.4)	6 (2.8)
Exercise	–	16 (9.7)	53 (22.2)	–	10 (6.3)	16 (7.5)
Novelty	–	–	19 (7.9)	–	7 (4.4)	7 (3.3)
Other	–	18 (10.9)	15 (6.3)	–	0 (0.0)	3 (1.4)

Note: Measured with a multiple response question.

^a The questionnaire did not include the motivations items.

^b The numbers in parentheses are %.

spectators, 78.1% indicated petrol costs had not influenced their plans to attend the swim meet (by this time petrol prices had decreased to \$1.79 December 3rd, 2008). While some spectators reported they had attended more local swim meets ($n = 16$) and had car pooled ($n = 4$), again the most commonly reported sentiment was that as long as their children were competing, they would not be influenced by petrol prices ($n = 36$). The overall direct spending impact ranged from \$28,040 (Senior Games) to \$2,302,298 (soccer) with a total of \$6,105,210 (USD) for all 6 events. The youth events of swimming (\$1,115,048) (USD) and softball (\$1,061,848) (USD) had high overall direct spending impacts for the community as did archery (\$1,204,488) (USD).

4.2. Social indicators

Across all events the top activity was eating out ranging from 51.2% (Senior Games) to 90.9% (swimming). Among the adult sports events, shopping was the next frequently cited activity (21% Senior Games; 37.1% archery). Among the youth events, shopping was also the second most ranked activity (56.4% soccer; 52.3% softball; 50.9% swimming), followed by attending a sports event at the university (19.1% softball; 14.2% swimming). For the soccer participants, a special event was organized by the university soccer team, and 53.2% reported attending this. The softball spectators also reported visiting friends and family (17.1%), as did 10.8% of those attending the swimming event.

When asked about the primary purpose of their trip, between 94.3% (softball) and 98.8% (Senior Games) indicated that the event was their primary trip purpose. When asked about their motivations, the primary motivation for attending or participating in the event was the competition (Table 3). Over 90% of the archery participants cited the competition, followed by enjoyment. For the softball and swimming events the motive “to support my child” was included and 73.1% of the swimming spectators cited this. Among the adult sports participants, 45.2% of the archers reported socializing as a motive.

Most of the event participants and spectators had visited the community before from a low of 29.4% for the marathon to a high of 83.9% for the Senior Games (Table 4). Among the soccer spectators proportionately there were also many first time visitors of whom only 39.1% indicated they had visited the host community previously. When asked about intent to return to the community for vacation, the means ranged from $M = 6.31$ (swimming) to $M = 5.83$ (soccer).

Table 4
Previous visits, event satisfaction and revisit intentions of participants.

	Adult sports events			Youth sports events		
	Marathon (n = 68)	Senior Games (n = 240)	Archery (n = 233)	Soccer (n = 447)	Softball (n = 158)	Swimming (n = 212)
Previous visit (%)						
Yes	13 (19.1)	138 (83.9)	190 (79.5)	177 (39.1)	131(83.2)	137(79.7)
No	55 (80.9)	27 (16.1)	49 (20.5)	276 (60.9)	27(16.8)	75(20.3)
Satisfaction ^a M (SD)						
Event administration	– ^c	5.71 (1.41)	– ^c	5.78 (1.15)	5.29 (1.10)	5.93 (1.15)
Event organization	–	5.66 (1.60)	–	5.94 (1.02)	5.21 (1.13)	5.77 (1.00)
Facilities quality	–	5.70 (1.52)	–	5.66 (1.26)	5.06 (1.36)	5.78 (0.96)
Satisfaction ^a M (SD)	5.82 (0.84)	5.81 (1.41)	5.39 (1.01)	5.95 (1.01)	5.33 (1.04)	5.88 (0.97)
Revisit intention ^b M (SD)	– ^d	6.28 (1.24)	6.23 (0.81)	5.83 (1.49)	5.99 (1.19)	6.31 (1.13)

^a Overall satisfaction was measured by using a 7 point scale (1 = Extremely dissatisfied to 7 = Extremely satisfied).

^b Measured using a 7 point scale (1 = Extremely unlikely to 7 = Extremely likely).

^c Event satisfaction items not included.

^d Measured with a yes–no question (yes = 87.3%, no = 16.7%).

Regarding satisfaction levels with the event, the responses revealed high satisfaction levels with all 6 events ranging from $M = 5.33$ (softball) to $M = 5.95$ (soccer). In terms of overall satisfaction, means ranged from $M = 3.9$ (archery) to $M = 5.82$ (marathon). All events were rated high for organization ($M = 5.21$, softball to 5.94 soccer) and quality of the facilities ($M = 5.06$ softball to $M = 5.78$ swimming). All of the events used volunteers from the local community for a total of 275 people across all events. The marathon used $n = 100$ volunteers, the Senior Games $n = 20$, Archery $n = 20$, soccer $n = 100$, softball $n = 15$, and swimming $n = 20$.

4.3. Environmental indicators

All events used existing facilities and city infrastructure. The marathon used the city streets early on a Sunday morning. The Senior Games is a multisport event and used sports facilities all over the city such as gymnasias for basketball, local parks and recreation swimming pools and tennis courts, and for cycling the Gainesville Raceway (a professional motor sports venue). The archery tournament used the grounds surrounding the Gainesville Raceway. The soccer event used venues spread across neighboring towns and the university. The softball tournament used a private sports park as its venue, and the swimming event used the university Olympic size regulation pool. When asked about recycling policies at these venues the Executive Director said “Most of the rented facilities have recycling.” The GSC relies on the recycling practices and policies in operation at the various venues rather than implementing their own recycling program at each event.

In terms of the promotion of environmental quality, during the time period of the study the Executive Director of the GSC together with a former elected city official spearheaded the Wild Spaces and Public Places sales tax initiative. The goal was to raise funding for improvements for parks and recreation facilities and to provide funds to purchase ecologically valuable land in the county. By December 31st, 2010, \$32.1 million (USD) had been raised (Curry, 2011). Over 82% is allotted for public projects and various city parks and recreation facilities have already received funding for improvements, and 17.6% is targeted for wild spaces projects and has been used to acquire environmentally sensitive land (Alachua County, 2010).

5. Discussion

This study examined the proposition that small-scale event sport tourism and the workings of a local sports commission constitute a form of sustainable tourism development for the host community. In reviewing the data collected from six events over an 18-month period, in addition to information provided directly by the sports commission, the three pillars of sustainable development and tourism were examined.

For sustainable tourism, the economic pillar refers to the impact of tourism on the financial wellbeing of the local community, often indicated by jobs and injections of money from outside (Henderson, 2007). While the sports commission provides few full-time jobs, the economic benefit from their work comes in the form of attracting active and passive event sport tourists to the community. Expenditures by the participants on hotels, restaurants, and other goods and services constitute direct economic impact for the community (Veltri et al., 2009). Although as Daniels and Norman (2003) point out, the structure of an event can also influence participant length of stay. For example, among the adult events, the archery participants averaged two nights compared to the marathon and Senior Games participants where many of them were day-trippers. Some of the difference in these patterns can be attributed to the nature of the event in that the archery tournament was a regional event and drew participants from a wider geographical area, and the length of the event encouraged overnight stays. In contrast, the marathon was only in its second year and was a one-day event. The Senior Games was one of several opportunities offered at the state level for athletes to qualify for the state level games to be held later that year, and tended to draw from a smaller geographical area. The GSC had experimented with ways to increase the length of stay of the Senior Games participants by introducing other attractions into the event experience. Despite the use of an event augmentation strategy designed to capitalize on the synergy between economic and social leveraging (Chalip, 2006), almost two thirds of participants were day-trippers and did not arrive until the day of the event. In subsequent years, the marathon has also been increased to a two-day event with other running competitions on the day before the actual marathon to encourage wider participant base, and possibly longer stays in the community (Gibson, Chang, Kang, & Jun, 2009). Moreover, as the marathon becomes established on the annual running calendar and builds a reputation as a good event, it may draw participants from further afield necessitating overnight stays.

Veltri et al. (2009) suggested that small-scale sport tourist events have the potential to provide more economic benefit for smaller communities than larger events as they have an overwhelmingly positive impact with very little strain on the local community resources. In this study, all of the events generated substantial overall direct spending amounts from the expenditures of the event participants. The soccer and softball events generated the highest expenditures among all of the events. This provides support for Daniel and Norman's (2003) finding that youth sports tend to generate more positive economic impact among small-scale sports events. Moreover, each of these events was for girls and also supports Schumacher's (2007) observations that girls' sports events tend to be associated with higher expenditure patterns. Among the adult events, the archery tournament generated the highest expenditures likely due to the length of stay in town as discussed above.

There is some evidence of Fyall and Jago's (2009) call to examine external factors that may affect sport tourism and the economic benefits that accrue from hosting these events. Indeed as Liu (2003) cautioned, the sustainability of tourism can be negatively impacted by various external factors such as an economic recession. Half way through the study period the effects

of an economic recession and inflation were becoming evident and so event participants were asked about the impact of rising fuel prices on their decisions to attend this, and other events. Among the youth sports events, the overwhelming response was that the parent's responsibility for the happiness and well-being of their child was more important than rising prices. Thus, if they could, the participants indicated they would continue to support their child's sports participation by cutting back on other expenditures. In contrast, among the archers there was some concern that they would not be able to continue their participation. Indeed, there was already evidence that some archers had reduced travel associated with their sport. In terms of consistency of tourist flows (Higham, 1999) as a measure of sustainability, it may be that in times of economic uncertainty communities focus more on youth sports in their event portfolio as parents may be more likely to continue to fund their child's travel to take part in various tournaments.

Overall, in terms of the economic dimension of sustainability it appears that the work of the GSC and their focus on small-scale sport tourism provide positive economic benefit for the community in terms of hotel room nights and expenditures on other goods and services at times when there are few other tourists in the community (Daniels & Norman, 2003; Veltri et al., 2009). Even when over or underestimation is taken into consideration, the cost-benefit (Mules & Faulkner, 1996) of hosting these events for the community is still positive on the economic dimension. The supplemental data from the GSC also helped to triangulate the data from the event surveys.

The social dimension of sustainable tourism often focuses on the positive and negative effects on the local people. However, using a more holistic definition of the term social, analyses of the social dimension encompass both the local people and the tourist experiences (Cater, 1993; Liu, 2003; UNWTO, 1993). In terms of the sport tourists, the vast majority indicated that the primary reason for their visit was to take part in the event and as such further supports the contention that small-scale sport tourism is a way of managing tourist flows in a community (Horne, 2000). In turn, this type of tourism can be used to offset seasonal downturns (Higham & Hinch, 2002), thereby, contributing to the sustainability of a tourist industry (Liu, 2003). However, part of tourist demand and social sustainability is the understanding of the relationship between tourist motivation, the ability of a destination to meet those motives, and the overall satisfaction of tourists with their visit (Beioley, 1995; Cater, 1993). The primary motivation reported by both spectators and athletes across the six events was competition, followed by enjoyment. Among the youth events, parents cited "supporting my child," and among the archery participants, in particular, socializing was mentioned.

Tourist satisfaction is related to the congruency between motives and the extent to which a tourist experience satisfies those motives (Gnoth, 1997; Yoon & Uysal, 2005). Indeed, Beioley (1995) identified tourist satisfaction with a destination as one of four characteristics contributing to sustainable tourism. Across the six events, participants reported high satisfaction with both the event and the community as an event tourism destination. Event satisfaction was related to such facets as the quality of the sports facilities, officiating, and execution of the event. In terms of the destination itself, most of the event participants rated the community highly. Intent to take part in the event again (revisit) and to recommend the event and the destination to others is related to tourist satisfaction (Bigné, Sánchez, & Sánchez, 2001). These measures of loyalty are particularly important to the work of a local sports commission like the GSC as their portfolio includes two-thirds of events that take place on an annual basis. Therefore, tourist satisfaction is of paramount importance as it indicates the likelihood that the sports commission will have a consistent flow of participants, which is ultimately linked to the sustainability of small-scale event tourism for the community.

In terms of general exposure to the community outside of the events, most participants reported eating out and shopping as their most frequent activities. This finding is consistent with most other studies on small-scale sport tourism (Daniels & Norman, 2003; Veltri et al., 2009; Wilson, 2006). Unless organizers provide food as part of the event, all tourists need to eat, and so a supply of restaurants that cater to the tastes and price requirements of the event participants will also be part of the success of a small-scale sport tourism initiative and its overall sustainability. Shopping and participation in other activities are likely to be related to the structure of the event. Events with tighter schedules and little free time for event participants tend not to facilitate participation in other available activities (Daniels & Norman, 2003). Moreover, understanding the motivation and interest in other activities as an event sport tourist is also important in spreading the benefits generated from an event and facilitating contact between tourists and the locals.

A consistent finding among sport tourism researchers is that sport tourists are interested in little else other than the sport and it is hard to entice sport tourists to take part in other community activities, including shopping when they are in town for an event (e.g., Gibson, Willming, & Holdnak, 2003). Ways to encourage participation in other activities may be to organize compatible activities with the event and to build downtime into an event so that there is time for sightseeing or shopping (Daniels & Norman, 2003). The GSC uses various strategies to organize compatible activities. For example, at the soccer event the Gainesville Soccer Alliance (GSA) a partner of the GSC includes an exhibition soccer game by the local university team for the event participants. Over half of the event participants surveyed reported that they attended this event. Such events not only add to the satisfaction of the event participants but also are frequently enjoyed by the locals and may contribute to the quality of their lives by providing entertainment and a general sense of pride from sharing their community with visitors (Ziakas, 2010). While pride and quality of life were not directly measured in this study which is a limitation, similar studies do report an enhanced sense of pride and quality of life as a result of hosting small-scale sport tourism events (Horne, 2000; Veltri et al., 2009; Walo et al., 1996; Ziakas, 2010), and thus, contribute to the social sustainability of tourism in a community (Liu, 2003).

This study examined the participation of volunteers in the execution of the events as a social indicator of sustainability. In the case of the GSC, many of the volunteers were students at the local university who were seeking hands-on experience in

event management and execution. Thus, their participation had the added benefit of contributing to the students' education and helping to bridge the divide between the university and the local residents. Horne (2000) and Ziakas (2010) noted, having a regular portfolio of events results in building a skilled group of volunteers within a community able to help with future events. For the GSC, many of the students volunteer repeatedly over the course of their college career and are a valuable resource in facilitating the sustainability of the GSC's event portfolio.

The environmental pillar of sustainable tourism relates to ecological change brought about by tourist activity and development of infrastructure. It can incorporate such dimensions as carrying capacity, overcrowding, recycling, resource use, and infrastructure development. One of the biggest ecological changes associated with mega sporting events is the development of new infrastructure and the influx of people during the events (Chernushenko, 1996). Small-scale sport tourism usually works with existing facilities, as there is likely to be little funding to build new ones, and also within the carrying capacity for the community in terms of hotel space, sports facility capacity, and transportation limits. All of the events in this study used existing facilities ranging from municipal parks and recreation facilities, private sporting facilities, and those of the university. The GSC did mention that its recycling policy for each of its events was tied to the practices implemented at each individual facility and as such might be something they consider standardizing in the future. However, in terms of facility use, all of the events were tied to existing facilities. The bid process for an event also reinforces this relationship as each bid document included information about the quality of the facilities (competition standards for each sport), carrying capacity for each facility, and hotel rooms available. This process ensures that the events hosted are appropriate in size and capacity for the community (Higham, 1999). Moreover, as Chalip (2004) suggested, if events hosted by a community are compatible with the overall image of a community they tend to be more successful and ultimately self sustaining.

The GSC is also involved in environmental advocacy and policy for the local community. As Beioley (1995) noted as one of his four characteristics of sustainable tourism, businesses need not only guard against overuse of the local environment but also show respect for it. Advocating for parks and protection of fragile natural environments exhibits this respect and while provision of parks and recreation facilities can ultimately help the GSC by providing additional venues, land that is dedicated for park use or protected for its ecological value is also associated with environmental stewardship (Carr, 2002). Thus, while the GSC may be unique in this aspect of the environmental pillar of sustainable tourism, it provides a model for other sports commissions and tourism providers. As Beioley pointed out, the tourism industry as a whole should not be focused solely on their destination but be aware of the environment as a whole if tourism is to be sustainable. The GSC's advocacy for park land and the protection of ecologically sensitive places demonstrates such awareness.

The findings of this study also provide support for Wilson's (2006) contention that a Type E event should be added to Gratton et al.'s (2000) event typology. It may be that Type E events, (that is those minor events, often with more competitors than spectators, little national media coverage and limited economic activity), are the model for sustainable tourism development through sport tourism.

6. Conclusion

In advocating for small-scale event sport tourism as an alternative to the negatives associated with hosting large-scale events, Higham (1999) suggested that such events promote a consistent flow of visitors, use existing facilities, and are of a size that is compatible with the host community. The events studied in this paper and the work of the GSC as a whole match these requirements. Taking a lead from discussions in the wider tourism literature about sustainability (Liu, 2003), and the sport tourism literature in particular (Fredline, 2005; Fyall & Jago, 2009; O'Brien & Chalip, 2008), we suggest that small-scale sport tourism can be a form of sustainable tourism for a community. A small-scale sport tourism portfolio is compatible with and contributes to the economic, social, and environmental pillars of sustainable tourism. Such a sustainable tourism strategy may not be appropriate for all communities. However, for a community such as Gainesville with a passion for sports, an inventory of sports facilities, hotel capacity, volunteer pool, and an innovative sports commission, small-scale sport tourism appears to be an appropriate form of sustainable tourism for the community.

This is one of the first attempts at combining both a conceptual and empirical sustainability analysis in a small-scale event sport tourism context. Moreover, our approach meets Ziakas' (2010) call for more empirical research that focuses on the "the value of an event portfolio as a tool in development strategies" (p. 147). The data used in this study were not collected with the intent of comparing across events, and so, one of the limitations of this research is the incompatibility or lack of data for certain events. We feel that this did not hinder the overall purpose of this paper. However, we would recommend in future studies that a standardized instrument is used to facilitate comparison across events. By comparing the results from this study to those of Daniels and Norman (2003) it is interesting to see the similarities in event related behaviors, motivations, and expenditure patterns. Thus, while we would caution against the wide-scale generalizations of our findings, the similarities between the two studies suggest that the findings may be generalized to other communities with comparable small-scale events. The data are also descriptive and should be viewed as providing support for the wider conceptual proposition that small-scale events can be considered a viable form of sustainable tourism. For future research we suggest that studies of this type should incorporate more indicators of social and environmental impacts of small-scale events. Regarding the environmental aspects of small-scale event sport tourism, we know very little. Thus, future investigations with an environmental focus are certainly warranted. We also suggest that scholars focus on the interrelationships of events in a community's event portfolio (Ziakas, 2010) and strategies to cross leverage economic, social,

and environmental benefits (O'Brien & Chalip, 2008). Our study is a first step in proposing that small-scale event sport tourism might be viewed as a viable form of sustainable tourism development for many communities.

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APPENDIX



Tourist Towns



PARKS AND RECREATION DEPARTMENTS ACROSS THE COUNTRY ARE INVESTING IN SPORTS TOURISM.

BY EMILY ATTWOOD

PHOTO COURTESY OF COLUMBUS AREA VISITORS CENTER

In 2005, parks and recreation operations manager Joel Dunn approached the Carson City, Nev., convention and visitors bureau with a proposal to boost sports tourism in the city. "When we originally started the campaign, the intent was to bring in some additional tournaments so that we would reap the benefits of our concessions sales," Dunn says. "We knew that if we could bring in a few more thousand dollars from concessions each year, we could offset some of the operational costs of our programs for our residents."

It paid off. The bureau's grant of \$15,000, which covered costs such as event staffing and facility operations, allowed

Dunn to bring in 12,000 visitors from outside of a 100-mile radius and more than \$3.6 million in local spending. For the 2012-13 tournament season, the bureau has invested nearly \$71,000, and Dunn estimates that the campaign is on track to bring in \$18.5 million to Carson City's economy.

Dunn has spent the past seven years attracting and growing tournaments in Carson City, as well as building support among businesses and residents. The local hotel industry was on board relatively early. "About halfway through this campaign we had one of our major lodging properties say that if it were not for sports tourism, they would have had an eight percent occupancy rate and more than



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likely would have had to shut their doors," Dunn says.

From amateur youth tournaments to NCAA tournaments, communities are vying to land a piece of the largely recession-proof action. According to a 2012 report from the National Association of Sports Commissions, visitors spent more than \$7.6 billion on sports travel in 2011, a 6.5 percent increase over the previous year. Most of that is spent locally on food, lodging and retail, providing a significant economic boost that's good for everyone in the community, including the parks and recreation department. Once seen as an intrusion into resources intended to serve the local community, sports tournaments are now embraced by many parks and recreation departments.

"What we're seeing is a gradual confluence of mutual interest," says NASC executive director Don Schumacher. "Ten years ago, parks and recreation departments were

of parks and recreation Michael Golden of the sports tourism efforts in Chesterfield County, Va. "Our last fiscal year, we had a 46 percent increase in sports tourism over the fiscal year before, up to \$20 million. Our budget went up by between \$67,000 and \$70,000 to handle the increased volume."

Though the outcome speaks for itself, convincing residents that giving up use of a field or facility for a day or a weekend here or there will actually benefit not only them but the entire local economy requires a bit of work. "I've got youth and adult participants paying for our recreation programs, and they don't want to lose a Friday night coed softball game for the sake of a tournament," says Dunn.

"It's really a culture change," Golden says. "The local sports organizations think, 'I've got my fields, that's all I care about.' But if they want to participate in some of these events, if they want nicer

What typically will happen is, **once you reach that higher plateau of quality, you don't drop back.** And then, quite frankly, it becomes a matter of pride.

very defensive when someone from a sports commission or convention and visitors bureau approached them about a tournament. But as departments have been under budgetary pressures, they have realized that if they can demonstrate that their facilities are valuable as a resource to attract visitors and spending, then they can be seen as part of the economic development engine in the community, instead of an expense line in the budget."

"The figure we use is \$208 per day per visitor — that is what gets spent in the local community," says director

facilities, we've got to pay the bills somehow."

The shift requires focusing not on what a recreation department or its users must give up, but what they stand to gain. The city of Columbus, Ind., got into the tournament hosting business in 2004 with the United States Specialty Sports Association Girls' Fastpitch World Series and a few smaller events. "It was ideal for parks and recreation," says director of sports tourism Jim Dietz. "For the most part, a lot of their facilities were sitting vacant on weekends. They had a lot of leagues during the week, but

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nothing on weekends. It was perfect to take an existing facility, without spending additional money, and bring in a tournament."

A little extra money can make a big difference for a parks and recreation department, though not necessarily in ways that are noticed by users — Dunn says that although his department's budget has been cut 13 percent over the past five years, it has been able to maintain its staff and programming thanks to the added revenue. More noticeable to users are the improvements in facilities that come along with sports tourism. "Whenever you hold a tournament, especially a rather significant regional or national tournament, you upgrade the quality of your field and your facilities," says Dietz. "You might fertilize the grass a little bit more or irrigate more. What typically will happen is, once you reach that higher plateau of quality, you don't drop back. And then, quite frankly, it becomes a matter of pride for your parks and recreation department."

This year, the city of Columbus has 80 scheduled sports events. To keep up with demand, the city has upgraded its facilities and added a new irrigation system to bear the added use. "We have some 35 soccer fields, depending on the configuration," Dietz says. "It was a combination of the revenue from the tournaments and some money that was given through the city to enhance it. It was given because of the potential money we could get from hosting soccer tournaments, but we also use that facility for rugby and will use it down the road for field hockey and lacrosse."

Sprucing up existing facilities is just the beginning,

It was perfect to take an existing facility, without spending additional money, **and bring in a tournament.**

says Schumacher. "One of the really big benefits is that everyone is able to show the value of these facilities, and then the question comes up, 'Do we need more sports facilities?' And then, 'If we somehow make them available, how many more tournaments could we host that would bring more visitors to town?' Cities can't possibly host tournaments all the time, which means fields are available to the public a lot of the time."

The added space means local organizations that utilize parks and recreation facilities don't have to compete with each other and can expand their programs, which in turn leads to more revenue for the recreation department to support and expand its own programs. Participation is further fueled by sports events themselves. Even when

they can't use the facilities, events provide an inexpensive form of entertainment for local residents, as well as expose youths to different sports and possibly motivate them to be more active.

Getting communities on board to use existing resources is one thing, but investing in a larger, regional sports park, which is becoming almost essential for sports tourism campaigns to remain competitive, is a harder sell. "The past couple years have been focused on community awareness and trying to find additional revenue to invest in a regional park for the city," says Dunn. "The one thing we're lacking in Carson City is that reinvestment in our own sports fields. In order to continue to expand, we're going to have to look at building a regional park."

In August, residents in Frankenmuth, Mich., headed to the polls to vote on whether a tax increase would fund the construction of a new recreation center. The design was not very different from other recreation centers: an indoor facility with a track, multiuse courts and meeting rooms, and 13 outdoor athletic fields, a playground, a splash park and concessions areas. Unlike other facilities, however, the Frankenmuth Recreation Center would be completely free for residents, relying solely on revenue from sports tournaments to fund its upkeep.

"This is an amenity that will keep kids in the gyms and on the fields instead of getting into trouble elsewhere," Chris Rittmueller, president of the Frankenmuth Youth Sports Association, told *The Saginaw News*. "It is a positive in terms of bringing people into Frankenmuth, hopefully bringing young families into Frankenmuth and giving our residents a place to stay active, free of charge for city residents."

The sports association spent six years developing a plan for the center, which included a cost analysis to determine the number of tournaments required to break even. But as good as the concept was in theory, investing in a self-sustaining recreation center required a greater leap of faith than the residents of Frankenmuth were willing to take, and voters turned down the proposal. Said Rittmueller in a statement, "I've had people I consider friends ask me questions about it, listen to me explain the way in which it will operate, and basically say, 'Well, that's what you say.'"

Convincing a community to pay higher taxes to fund a facility to be used by outside groups has a low success rate, but residents are more accepting of an increase on services primarily used by visitors, like restaurant or hotel taxes. In July, the City of Elizabethtown, Ky., opened one of the largest sports parks in the country, featuring 24 lighted fields. The \$29 million project was financed by a two percent increase in restaurant sales tax. "Yes, the residents are paying for it every time they eat out, but it's a tourist area," says Schumacher. "The largest percentage is actually being borne by people coming to Elizabethtown for sports purposes or going to Fort Knox for military purposes, whatever it is."

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Officials in Virginia's Chesterfield County have taken a slightly different approach to providing tournament facilities. While they have invested in their own resources, the county has also encouraged local nonprofit groups to build facilities. The county helped fund construction of 12 synthetic turf fields at the privately owned River City Sportsplex. In exchange, it holds a long-term lease that allows the parks and recreation department to use the fields during the week, increasing what it can do with its own programming. By pooling county and nonprofit resources, the two groups are able to host larger tournaments than either could individually. Even when county facilities are not being used for tournaments, everyone still benefits, Golden says. "My view is that as long as it's happening in the county and folks are coming and staying in our hotels and our kids can come and watch, it doesn't matter if it's private

or public facilities; it's good for us."

Having a state-of-the-art facility at your disposal doesn't guarantee success, however. Community support is needed not only to build a facility, but also to supply the other necessary elements of a successful tournament. About 30 miles away from Carson City, the City of Sparks opened its Golden Eagle Regional Park in 2008, featuring 1.4 million square feet of synthetic turf, the largest single installation in North America. "We did have some competition," says Dunn, "but with the location of the fields — it's about 35 or 40 minutes north of Reno/Sparks, and they just haven't seen businesses grow in that area, so there's no lodging — if you're playing out there, you're a minimum half-hour drive from where you're going to stay."

"What's really looked upon is the facility, the number of fields available, and whether they fit with



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PHOTO COURTESY OF CITY OF COLUMBUS

BY ALL MEANS

From tournaments to triathlons, myriad opportunities exist for communities to bring in outside visitors — and their spending.

the size of the tournament," says Ron Radigonda, executive director of the Amateur Softball Association/USA Softball of the association's bidding criteria. "We have 150 teams a year at some of our tournaments. In order to best accommodate that, you need 15 fields in close proximity that are all of suitable quality. Then, do they have the corresponding number of hotel rooms that can handle the number of visitors?"

The ASA awards bids for its 115 tournaments at its national convention every November and looks at a variety of factors that the bidding city or organization must have considered. The best bids cover all the bases, including marketing, facility use, hotel availability — areas over which no one city department or organization has complete expertise, nor the resources to take on.

"If you can get the convention and visitors bureau, the sports commission and the parks and recreation department together, it's going to be a successful event," says Radigonda. "The city is actually putting the bid in and going forward using the three prongs: the marketing aspect of the CVB; the relationship building of the sports commission; and the work of the park and recreation people to put the tournament on. That's a pretty empowering group that some cities have figured out and embraced."

There is one more element that is essential to the success of a sporting event — local sports organizations. For them, the benefits of sports tourism extend beyond improved facilities, providing more incentive for them to give up not only their facilities for a tournament, but their time, as well.

"Here's the normal scenario," explains Schumacher. "The parks and recreation department has leased fields to a club, and the club is responsible for all maintenance and must keep the facility in at least the condition it was in when the lease was signed. The club has to go out and figure out how to pay for all of

that maintenance. The beauty of the tournament is that a club can earn money, the department can rent the facility, the event takes place, the visitors come to town, and they leave money behind."

Clubs may work with a sports commission or the local CVB to bid for a tournament, but the development of local, grassroots tournaments is becoming more common. "They're essentially locally owned and controlled, and they grow every year," says Schumacher. Because they originate from within the community, they tend to sidestep objections over local versus tourist use of facilities. Moreover, there is no bidding process required for recurring events.

"It's a lot easier to keep an existing customer than recruit a new one," says Golden. "Our focus is on keeping and growing the events we have, helping our local groups and start small, rather than going out and bidding on a

tournament that might come one time and not again for 10 years."

Even if they're not involved in the initial bidding of a tournament, local leagues can still play an important role in organizing and hosting a tournament. "We depend not on the county but sports groups to bring volunteers to run these events," Golden says. "Our role is to provide nice facilities so that people will want to come back again. You put the tournament on; we'll help you with the facilities."

"It takes a small army to run a successful tournament," says Dunn, but it's worth it. "A lot of communities are missing the boat on this. If you have the resources, the fields, the rooms to bring these tournaments in, you really need to do it." @

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APPENDIX



ROCKY KNOB PARK

Rocky Knob Mountain Biking Park offers you and your family a nationally significant outdoor experience.

ROCKY KNOB MOUNTAIN BIKE PARK IS THE ULTIMATE PLACE TO RIDE!

THE PARK IS FREE AND OPEN DAWN TO DUSK. WINTER WEATHER MAY CAUSE THE TRAILS TO BE CLOSED PERIODICALLY BETWEEN DECEMBER 1 THROUGH APRIL 1.

ROCKY KNOB PARK BATHROOMS ARE CLOSED IN THE WINTER FROM DEC. 1 THROUGH MARCH 31.

OVERVIEW:

After \$2 million, four thousand hours of volunteer labor by Boone Area locals, and an ongoing roll-out of the park's eight miles of trails, this once rough jewel of a mountain bike park has really been polished.

The park has five trails-1.6-mile Rocky Branch Trail loop, the 1-mile Middle Earth Trail, nearly 4-mile Boat Rock Loop, the downhill PBJ Trail, Ol' Hoss-and four separate skills areas. All are quickly gaining converts, and gaining media attention too -- Boone and Rocky Knob were named "Ultimate Ride Hotspots" by Velo magazine.

The park also includes a "natural playground" that's become an instant favorite with parents and kids. Check out the Park's [Facebook page](https://www.facebook.com/RockyKnobPark) (<https://www.facebook.com/RockyKnobPark>).

Safety should be paramount for riders at Rocky Knob. Please pause at the start to thoroughly read the safety rules. Bikers should be on the lookout for hikers and walkers. All dogs must be on a leash. Helmets are required. Use caution to be aware of ice in cold weather.

FIND THE TRAILHEAD:

Heading east out of Boone toward Wilkesboro on US 421, Rocky Knob's entrance is on the right, two miles from the NC 194 junction in Boone. Coming from the east, pass the light at the crossing of Old US 421, and 1.4 miles later, make a safe U-turn back beyond the median and turn right into the park 0.2-mile later.

THE PARK:

Rocky Knob Park was built by the Watauga County in collaboration with the Watauga County Tourism Development Authority (WCTDA) and nonprofit Boone Area Cyclists, with professional trail contractors funded by more than a half million dollars in grant money.

Woody Keen, former president of Trail Dynamics, the contractor who built the first phase of Rocky Knob Park, said, "Years ago there weren't many mountain biking options in the Boone area. Boy has that changed!" Keen is a recent president of the Professional Trail Builders Association, the country's premier trail construction organization. "Rocky Knob is a world-class resource for the Boone area," he says.

Watauga TDA Executive Director Wright Tilley attended an early "soft-opening" of the park's first phase and walked the trail while his 6-year-old son Ward rode a bike. "Rocky Knob is pretty close to as good as trails can get," Tilley said. "My son's reaction was, 'Can we come here every day?'"

"It sends a very positive message," said Tilley, "when the Boone area can go from an outdoor recreation summit in 2010, to purchasing, designing, developing and opening a new mountain bike park in 2011. Rocky Knob shows that we're serious about enhancing outdoor recreation infrastructure for visitors and locals."

Facilities:

The park includes paved parking areas and bathroom facilities. A large picnic pavilion and playground with most playground equipment constructed from natural wood and ropes rounds out the fun for all ages. The picnic pavilion is available for rent by calling the Watauga County Parks & Recreation office at (828) 264-9511.

In addition to the mountain trails, the Sunset Skills Area pump track, on the right as you drive into the facility, provides a scenic area to warm up. Please drive slowly and look for cyclists.

THE TRAILS:

Mountain bikers and hikers can both use these trails, so be sure to abide by the recommended direction of travel for each so the two user groups have easy visual access and make safe passage. In a number of places, the main trail splits momentarily to provide technical features for more advanced riders.

For mountain bikers, the Rocky Branch Trail leaves the parking lot and heads left at the first major signed junction (hikers go right-and the opposite of bikers on some other trails). Bikers climb over undulating dips to parallel US 421, then switchback across rough-hewn log bridges on the rise to meet gurgling Rocky Branch. The trail crosses under a power line traverse, then heads back into the woods to eventually turn away from the stream. The long gradual climb again crosses under the power line traverse as it continues its rise to a rocky high point. A more downhill trend starts past rocky outcrops and eventually, a right-hand switchback returns to the main trail junction.

If you're hiking, you'll go left in that switchback on a flight of stone steps that lets bikers blast through the berm in the turn. The trail passes through beautiful fern- and flower-filled hardwood forests and major rhododendron groves. Though the trail climbs, the overall design is so sophisticated that there's up and down all the way, making for an overall undulating ride. The 1.6-mile trail is rated moderate/intermediate. The Jump Start Skills Area is located on this trail.

The 1-mile Middle Earth Trail, rated more difficult, leaves and re-enters the upper leg of the Rocky Branch Trail. Mountain bikers ride counterclockwise just before the first crossing of the power line on Rocky Branch and re-enter on the opposite side of the power line. This is rockier terrain with exciting riding. Hikers will go right at the second access point to go clockwise. Two skills areas are directly accessed from this trail, the easier Skinny Skills Area, and Stone Binge for intermediate to advanced features.

On the Middle Earth Trail, don't miss the PBJ Skills Trail that descends all the way back to the lower reaches of the Rocky Branch Trail with access back to the parking area. It's a rousing ride, named for its pumps, berms, and jumps. Many riders use this thrill ride to end their day back to the parking area, connecting to the Rocky Branch Trail's final big turn called Bring it Home Berm.

Boat Rock Loop is an advanced 3.6-mile trail on the upper slopes of Rocky Knob. It includes a "bail-out" if you just want do part of the distance. Bikers ride counterclockwise, entering the loop at the second junction with the Middle Earth Trail past the skills areas.

Ol' Hoss is the highest elevation trail at Rocky Knob, and rated very advanced. Go left, or clockwise, on Ol' Hoss from the Boat Rock Loop.

DIVE INTO OUR INTERACTIVE MAP!

Zoom in close on the map below (use the plus/minus signs and directional arrows at upper left), and click on the map symbols. You can literally dive down to see and read about all kinds of features in the great new park.

Rocky Knob Park

