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Record number of national sporting events will take place in Kingsport this spring, summer

Author: PAT KENNEY

KINGSPORT - It will be a record-breaking summer for athletic events in Kingsport.

The Kingsport Convention and Visitors Bureau announced Monday that a record six national sporting events will be held in the Model City.

The fun begins right away.

This weekend, the AAU Wrestling Elementary Duals National Championship will once again be held in Kingsport. Action starts Saturday and concludes Sunday at the Buck Van Huss Dome at Doby's-Bennett.

A record 23 teams will compete in this year's tournament.

"This is a win-win-win situation for our community," said Dennis Spurgeon, the general manager of Hertz Rent A Car, the title sponsor of the event for the eighth year. "More than 1,000 athletes and parents will be staying in our hotels and motels, eating in our restaurants and shopping in our stores."

Also on this year's calendar are the NAIA Region XII Baseball Championship, at Hunter Wright Stadium on May 9-13, and the AAU Girls Basketball 12-Under National Championship on June 30-July 8.

The AAU Baseball 15-Under National Championship takes place July 14-21 followed by the USSSA Baseball 14-Under 60'/90' World Series on July 22-28.

The summer finale will be the AAU Golf Junior Nationals at Cattails at MeadowView on July 20-Aug. 1.

"The beauty of all of these events is that the proceeds go back into the athletic programs of our local schools," Spurgeon added. "Since we started this program in 1989, we have contributed more than \$700,000 to our area high schools."

"In these economic times with budgets being so tight this is a wonderful thing. By the end of the summer that number should be more than a million dollars."

First Tennessee Bank is entering its 17th year as title sponsor of the AAU national basketball championships.

"It's basketball time again in Tennessee," said Larry Estepp, regional president for First Tennessee Bank. "This is where it all begins. We'll see athletes playing here in the Tri-Cities who will eventually be a part of March Madness."

The local economic impact is just as important as the money for local high schools. With the six events, local officials project more than 10,000 visitors to the region this spring and summer.

"With that many people coming into town, we calculate an economic impact of roughly \$7,125,238," said Frank Lett, the KCVB's director of sports. "Overall, since 1989, our local economy has benefited from these tournaments to the tune of \$50 million."

The three baseball tournaments this summer alone should bring in more than 5,000 visitors with an economic impact of roughly \$3,250,000.

"It will be a summer of baseball," said Shannon Skelton, marketing coordinator of Hardee's, the baseball tournaments' title sponsor. "We know everyone will enjoy the quality of the competition."

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KCVB's efforts have big impact on local economy

Last year, tourism in Tennessee provided employment for 177,000 people statewide and accounted for \$10.8 billion in aggregate economic impact. In Sullivan County, the state estimates that tourism generates more than \$190 million and accounts for more than 2,300 employees with a payroll exceeding \$44 million.

That makes tourism the second-largest employer in the county and ranks the area sixth overall in the state.

In Kingsport, much of that tourist activity can be directly traced to the quietly effective work of the Kingsport Convention and Visitors Bureau. Most city residents may barely notice it, but through KCVB's efforts, Kingsport has become the focus for literally hundreds of events each year that bring millions of dollars into the community.

Over the past 16 years, the KCVB - a partnership between the city and Kingsport Area Chamber of Commerce - has become a premier, not-for-profit, amateur sports marketing group, and the greater Kingsport area is much the better for it.

Earlier this week, KCVB announced a record six national sporting events to be held in Kingsport this year.

The AAU Wrestling Elementary Duals National Championship is today and Sunday at Buck Van Huss Dome at Dobyms-Bennett High School. A record 23 teams are to compete.

Calling it a win-win situation for our community, Dennis Spurgeon, general manager of Hertz Rent A Car, the title sponsor of the event for the eighth year, notes that more than 1,000 athletes and parents will be staying in Kingsport hotels and motels this weekend, eating in area restaurants and shopping in local stores.

The beauty of events like these, Spurgeon says, is that the proceeds are plowed back into the athletic programs of local schools.

Since the first AAU tournament in 1989, approximately \$700,000 has been directed to local schools - a number that should grow to more than \$1 million by summer's end.

With school funds always tight, that money has made a real difference in the vitality of many school athletic programs.

In regional terms, AAU events have added an impressive \$50 million to the local economy over that period.

In addition to this weekend's national wrestling contests, also on the calendar are the NAIA Region XII Baseball Championship, at Hunter Wright Stadium May 9-13, and the AAU Girls Basketball 12-Under National Championship June 30-July 8.

The AAU Baseball 15-Under National Championship takes place July 14-21 followed by the USSSA Baseball 14-Under 60'/90' World Series on July 22-28.

The summer finale will be the AAU Golf Junior Nationals at Cattails at MeadowView July 20-Aug. 1.

Hats off to Kingsport Convention and Visitors Bureau and the commitment of local AAU business sponsors. Their unflagging commitment is an indispensable ingredient that has made this worthy program so successful for so long.

Date Published: November 9, 2005

Schools to share \$50,000 for hosting amateur tournaments

Author: RICK WAGNER

KINGSPORT - Ten local school athletic programs and two other athletic groups will share in more than \$50,000 for helping host sports tournaments this year.

That brings the total to almost \$700,000 the amateur tournaments have brought to local athletic programs in the past decade and a half.

But the impact on the region over the past 16 years totals an estimated \$50 million, including \$6.48 million this year, not counting the value to area sports fans of being able to see rising athletic stars compete in basketball, baseball and other sports.

The Kingsport Convention and Visitors Bureau Wednesday announced that the proceeds for area sports program from 2005 tournaments total \$50,427.56.

This year, Dobyys-Bennett High and Robinson and Sevier middle schools, as well as the Kingsport Parks and Recreation Department and the Kingsport Mets, will receive part of the money.

Also, Sullivan North, South and Central high schools, as well as Tri-Cities Christian High in Blountville, Daniel Boone High in Gray, and Tennessee and Virginia high schools in Bristol will share in the money.

"They look forward to getting the money," said Neville Charlton, chairman of the KCVB.

Presenting sponsors are First Tennessee Bank, Hertz and Hardee's of the Tri-Cities.

First Tennessee Regional President Larry Estepp said he knows firsthand the impact on schools, since his daughter's athletic team won't have to spend time doing fund raising this year because of the money from the KCVB.

"And it gets a whole lot of people involved in the community," Estepp said.

Dennis Spurgeon, manager of the local Hertz franchise at Tri-Cities Regional Airport, said the tournaments boost the economy from the obvious hotel, motel, restaurant and fast-food impact down to laundromats that see a boost in business in the washing of team uniforms.

"It multiplies in places you just don't realize," Spurgeon said.

"Our customers get to see some of the best up-and-coming athletes from around the nation," said Jim Lutyens, vice president of operations and facilities for Hardee's of the Tri-Cities. "Our local youth get a chance to compete against these top athletes."

So far, the five scheduled 2006 amateur events set for Kingsport are the AAU Wrestling Elementary National Duals Team Championship; the NAIA Baseball Region XII Championship; the AAU Junior Golf Championship; AAU Girls' Basketball 12 and Under National Championship; and the AAU Baseball 15 and Under National Championship.

In addition, Kingsport and other localities are still vying for the USSSA Baseball Invitational Tournament, and Kingsport through 2009 is the alternate site for the AAU Cross Country National Championship, said Jenny Seguin, KCVB executive director.

Proceeds from AAU events in excess of \$50,000

Nov. 9, 2005
By Ron Bliss
TricitiesSports.com

KINGSPORT -- "How about wow!"

That was the reaction of First Tennessee Bank Regional President Larry Estep on Wednesday about the total amount of money given back to area schools and other organizations who shared in proceeds from sporting events sponsored by the Kingsport Convention and Visitors Bureau (KCVB) at a press conference at the Chamber.

The amount was \$50,427.56 -- not a record, but still one of the best returns from a year's AAU events since Kingsport regained sponsorship of national events here in the late 1980s.

The proceeds were divided between Dobyns-Bennett High School, John Sevier and Robinson Middle Schools, Sullivan South, Sullivan North, Sullivan Central, Tricities Christian, Daniel Boone and Virginia High and Tennessee High.

The Kingsport Parks and Recreation Department and the Kingsport Mets also received proceeds from the five national and regional athletic events held in Kingsport during the year under the auspices of the KCVB.

The events were the AAU Wrestling Elementary National Duals Team Championship, presented by Hertz Rent-A-Car; the NAIA Region XII Baseball Championships, presented by Hardee's Restaurants; the USSSA Baseball National Invitational, presented by Hardee's; the AAU Boys Basketball 15-under/9th Grade National Championships, presented by First Tennessee Bank; and the USSSA Baseball 14-under 60/90 AAA World Series, presented by Hardee's.

Estep said he would personally benefit because his daughter plays basketball for Dobyns-Bennett.

"By getting this money, that means we're not going to have to fund-raise," said Estep, "and that benefits the Estep family. I, for one, can say 'It works!'"

Not only did the schools benefit from the events; the community did, too.

The economic impact of the 2005 events totaled \$6,480,974. In the last 16 years, events such as those held this year have added more than \$50 million to the regional economy.

"It helps the schools," said Jim Lutyens, vice president of operations and facilities for Hardee's of the Tri-Cities, "but it also benefits local athletes and our customers. Our customers get to see some of the best up-and-coming athletes from around the nation. They get to see the 'Stars of Tomorrow.' Our local youth get a chance to compete against these top athletes, providing them with the opportunity to further enhance their skills."

"As a rental car agency, Hertz receives a direct economic impact from these events because they bring visitors to the region," said Dennis Spurgeon, the Tri-Cities manager for Hertz. "These visitors rent cars and also stay in our hotels and motels, eat in our restaurants and spend money in our retail establishments. Having them in Kingsport and the Tri-Cities provides a tremendous boost to our economy and it is important we continue to support these efforts."

Spurgeon said even the laudromats gain.

"A mother on one of the teams told me I'm sure the laudromats love having up come to town," said Spurgeon. "Then she showed me all the uniforms that had to take the laudromat and clean and I could see what she meant. But then I think a lot of people prosper from these events."

There will be additional events in 2006 with five events already scheduled and a sixth probable.

The five for certain are the wrestling championship, which is returning; the NAIA regional, which will be back; the AAU Junior Golf National Championships; The AAU Girls Basketball 12 and Under National Championships and the AAU Baseball 15 and Under National Championships.

Also expected again in the USSSA AAA World Series, but it has not yet been formally awarded.

The KCVB also was recently awarded the 2007 AAU Girls' Basketball 15 and Under National Championships and given a three-year agreement on the AAU Junior Golf Championships. Kingsport has also been named an alternate site for the AAU Cross Country National Championships through 2010.

A breakdown of the 2005 events shows the 15-under/9th Grade Boys Basketball Championships had the biggest impact -- \$3,854,520. The appearance of famed rap artist Master P and his son Little Romeo, who has his own show on Nickelodeon helped assured a record turnout for a local AAU event.

The other events and their impact were as follow:

USSSA Baseball World Series: \$1,585,733.

AAU Wrestling: \$505,906.

USSSA Baseball NIT: \$397,497.

NAIA Baseball: \$137,317.