

Editorial: West Michigan Sports Commission can boost economy by attracting events and visitors

by The Grand Rapids Press Editorial Board

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WHY IT MATTERS

Sports tourism is a multi-billion dollar industry. West Michigan can benefit economically by using its resources to tap into that growing market.

The West Michigan Sports Commission (WMSC) piled up some impressive stats during its recently completed rookie season. This area's newly-minted Sports Commission waded into the burgeoning sports tourism industry and not only kept its head above water, but managed to reel in a big fish or two.

It helped attract or coordinate sporting events that generated dollars by filling hotels, motels, restaurants and other venues. It also created buzz about the facilities and services available for groups looking to bring a sporting event to the area. Those results show that the public and private seed money that established the organization was well spent. That financial support should continue, even as economic conditions remain difficult.

The Kent County Board of Commissioners pledged to provide \$200,000 a year for five years to jump-start the group. The first year results provide no reason to rethink that decision. The Grand Rapids/Kent County Convention & Visitors' Bureau, the Grand Rapids-Kent County Convention Arena Authority and private donors provided seed money as well.

Although the first year was envisioned primarily as an organizational period, it became much more. The Sports Commission established itself as the go-to group to package hotels, travel, venues, hospitality and other needs for those interested in bringing an events to the area. The commission could become part of a new economic promise for West Michigan by tapping the growing phenomenon of participatory sports events. It's a market that has become a cash cow for some cities.

A glimpse of what's possible came in mid-April when four youth sports events in the area on the same weekend attracted 4,600 athletes and spectators and generated \$1 million in revenue for local businesses. The National Golden Gloves boxing tournament, which was held here in May, generated revenue and national publicity. The Sports Commission was instrumental in getting boxing champ Floyd Mayweather Jr., to foot the bill for that event.

The commission is headed by Mike Guswiler, who beat out about 40 other candidates who applied for the executive director's job.

The economic impact of hosting sporting events in the area could be huge. West Michigan is entering the game late. Hundreds of cities nationwide have had sports commissions or authorities for years. But better late than never.

West Michigan has an abundance of colleges and universities with outstanding sports facilities, as well as structures such as the Van Andel Arena, Fifth Third Ballpark, Holland Aquatic Center, L.C. Walker Arena, the DeltaPlex and resources like the Grand River, Reeds Lake and area beaches that can host sports events. The Sports Commission should make use of all of them as it tries to grab a piece of the sports tourism pie. E-mail a letter to the editor for publication online and in print: pulse@grpress.com

Sports Commission partnerships could generate \$12M in tourism

By: Deborah Johnson Wood

The [West Michigan Sports Commission](#) spent 2007 building partnerships with local sports associations. Those partnerships, which now involves at least 17 different events, could generate 20,000 tourists and \$12 million for West Michigan in the next three years.

"We want to focus on the opportunities out there, like fencing, rugby, gymnastics, and hockey," says Mike Guswiler, sports commission executive director, "Our relationship with the Amateur Athletic Union will bring the 2008 AAU Softball Central Region Championship and a national beach volleyball national qualifier to the region."



[U.S. Airborne Gymnastics](#) is one of the commission's new partners. The commission is helping with the annual U.S. Airborne Gymnastics Invitational at Cornerstone University on March 1 and 2. The event attracts 350 competitors and their families from Michigan, Ohio, Illinois and Canada, and could inject some \$185,000 into Grand Rapids hotels, restaurants, shops, and attractions. Winners will move to national competitions as Olympic hopefuls.

"We can raise awareness of any event and what it brings to West Michigan," Guswiler says. "We help put proposals together highlighting the benefits of the area, we identify the needs of the tournament organizers, locate facilities, get sponsors and volunteers, and other services. And it all gets to the underlying reason of why we exist and that's to draw economic benefit to the community."

Other partnerships the commission established involve a variety of events, including the [Great Lakes Lacrosse Classic](#), the [Grand Haven Beach Vault](#), the [Men's and Women's Collegiate LAU Rugby Championships](#) and the [National Golden Gloves Tournament of Champions](#). The latter event, alone, will bring some \$1 million to the region.

Source: Mike Guswiler, West Michigan Sports Commission

West Michigan Sports Commission off to a running start

Source: [Grand Rapids Business Journal](#)

Sports tourism could infuse the West Michigan economy with millions of dollars over the next ten years, as well as bring top-notch sports entertainment to the region. If the sold-out first annual meeting at Grand Rapids' new JW Marriott is any indication, supporters are ready to rally.

According to excerpts from the story:

The West Michigan Sports Commission is leading off with a grand slam — or maybe it's tipping off with a slam dunk, in respect to the organization's guest.

The group's first annual meeting, a luncheon to be held in the new JW Marriott Hotel's International Ballroom on Sept. 26, is sold out. Roughly 900 have bought tickets to the event that features MSU head basketball coach, Tom Izzo, as the commission's opening speaker. Read the complete story [here](#).

Sports commission proves beyond worthy

by David Mayo | The Grand Rapids Press 9/24/08



GRAND RAPIDS -- The best measure of the West Michigan Sports Commission's first year was not University of Michigan men's basketball coach John Beilein's supportive speech as prominent official Ted Hillary smiled from a back-row table, although that was one of the better naturally adversarial relationships suspended for the sports commission's second annual fundraising luncheon Tuesday.

No, the real measure of its first year was a May weekend when more than 10,000 athletes -- more than half of them involved in a youth volleyball tournament played on more than 80 courts throughout the area -- converged for three major events, including high school state championships in track and field and girls tennis.

It was when four other youth sports -- basketball, baseball, soccer and lacrosse -- generated more than \$1 million in revenue for local businesses on an April weekend. It was when a local amateur boxing organization committed to host the first national event on the sports commission's watch, the National Golden Gloves, and WMSC helped grease communications with Floyd Mayweather to pay the entire tab.

A year after its creation, the West Michigan Sports Commission, in answer to a question I posed earlier this year, is proving it not only is a good idea, but it has good ideas. The viability of a tax-subsidized sports organization primarily responsible for recruiting non-spectator events with high participation levels to fill hotels, motels and restaurants can be a difficult sell when fiscal collapse looms all around.

Filling an envelope with a few bucks for a sports commission whose future relies largely on private donations may not be the highest priority when merely filling a gas tank taps enough resources. Nevertheless, the WMSC has, in short order, established itself as the go-to liaison for any large-scale participatory sports event seeking a home here, as well as for local sports bodies interested in pursuing such events but uncertain how to package hotels, transportation, venues, meeting rooms, hospitality and other organizational needs.

The first year was supposed to be largely organizational, and many of the events WMSC helped promote were secured by local parties before its creation. The sports commission's main value was bridging details. That value has expanded, such that the sports commission now is viewed as a starting point for pursuing those same large-scale participatory events. Participatory sports remain the organization's primary function, although spectator sports increasingly are filtering into its plans.

Cornerstone University wants the NAIA men's national tournament, an absolute feast for basketball junkies, and outstanding convention-style sports business. Grand Rapids would be an excellent host, and the sports commission can play a key liaison role in securing such college tournaments.

The Michigan High School Athletic Association has been engaged for several potential state tournaments. Many of the proposals have been tabled, but girls basketball and the new Calvin College facility might produce a viable partnership. The sports commission also is pursuing national-level competition in sports conducted under the United States Olympic Committee umbrella. An immediate target is a major USA Fencing competition, WMSC executive director Mike Guswiler said.

Beyond that, the WMSC has a statewide multi-sport festival in blueprint stage that, if it materializes, could become its signature annual event. Events manager Eric Englebarts, was scheduled to attend a National Congress of State Games meeting today, where the sports commission hopes to gain status as sanctioned sponsoring authority for conducting a Michigan sports festival, perhaps as early as 2010.

The sports commission has grown from concept into the local sports marketplace's leading promoter, all in a scant year. It was a success by any measure.

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Mayweather Promotions, West Michigan Sports Commission team up to help Golden Gloves

Posted by [David Mayo | The Grand Rapids Press](#) April 01, 2008 17:00PM

Categories: [Sports](#)

GRAND RAPIDS -- Michigan Golden Gloves will receive a check from the West Michigan Sports Commission for \$140,000 this week, a meaningful symbol of Floyd Mayweather's generosity, and the first major fund-raising coup of the sports commission's infancy.

Wayman Britt, the sports commission's vice chairman, spent weeks negotiating the deal with Leonard Ellerbe, Mayweather's adviser.

The money is expected to cover the entire operating budget for the May 5-10 National Golden Gloves Tournament of Champions at DeVos Place.

"We wanted to make sure the sports commission was at the table, supporting this effort," Britt said Tuesday. "This is one of our larger events, and there are going to be hiccups. But we can't afford to have an event like this, a National Golden Gloves event, go bad."

Mayweather Promotions' check to the sports commission, presented by Ellerbe at a Tuesday press conference, guaranteed that won't happen.

"Floyd has truly been blessed to be in this great position to help many, many, many people," Ellerbe said. "And it's a direct result of all the efforts, and support throughout the community, from the people who have been behind him since day one, whether it was his grandmother, his father, who taught him everything that he knew as a kid, or all the people who helped along the way. Everyone has played a vital role in doing that."

The sports commission received the check, but solicited the money under an agreement with Golden Gloves that any funds it raised will be "directly deposited/transferred" to Michigan Golden Gloves Association, the non-profit responsible for operating the national tournament, to pay National Golden Gloves costs.

Mike Guswiler, executive director of the sports commission, said the \$140,000 would be turned over to Michigan Golden Gloves as soon as today, in accordance with that agreement, which The Press obtained Tuesday through the Freedom of Information Act.

Guswiler said the sports commission's work on behalf of Michigan Golden Gloves "opens up the book of why we exist."

The sports commission was not created when Michigan Golden Gloves secured the national tournament two years ago, but came on board to help in fund-raising and organizational capacities, which proved instrumental in securing the windfall from Mayweather Promotions, and immediate financial security for 77-year-old Michigan Golden Gloves.

"We truly do want this event to be the hallmark of what the West Michigan Sports Commission gets involved with," Britt said. "Our board is truly committed to athletics and youth in our community."

Dave Packer, Michigan Golden Gloves' executive director, credited the sports commission's efforts and said Mayweather's generosity has "set the future for numerous young people throughout West Michigan, and throughout the state as a whole, so that they can live their dream, possibly as becoming an amateur boxer, but succeeding in life overall."

Ellerbe said he studied Michigan Golden Gloves' budget for the national tournament line by line, and said he was "very surprised" that the tournament could be conducted for the estimate of \$141,875, and that those costs "clearly were not inflated."

Ellerbe said Mayweather was home in Las Vegas, recuperating from "a few bumps and bruises" incurred Sunday at WrestleMania.

WEST MICHIGAN SPORTS COMMISSION'S 2ND ANNUAL LUNCHEON

EXPECTED TO SELL OUT QUICKLY

Luncheon to Feature U of M Men's Head Basketball Coach, John Beilein

Grand Rapids, Michigan, March 17, 2008 – The West Michigan Sports Commission (WMSC) is hosting its 2nd Annual Luncheon on September 23, 2008 in the JW Marriott's International Ballroom starting at 12:00 PM. The luncheon will feature University of Michigan Men's Head Basketball Coach John Beilein. Luncheon tables are available now and are selling quickly.

The WMSC 1st Annual Luncheon, held last year, featured Michigan State University Men's Head Basketball Coach Tom Izzo. "Last year's luncheon sold out extremely fast, prior to any public notice and we unfortunately had to turn people away. Based on strong support and presence of U of M alumni in our area and the natural school rivalry that exists, we expect to meet or beat the standard set by the alumni of MSU last year" stated Mike Guswiler, WMSC Executive Director

The WMSC Annual Luncheon serves as a fundraiser and report back to our key stakeholders, on its success in attracting a variety of amateur and youth sports to benefit our community economically and profiling it as a great place to play. Table price to the Annual Luncheon is \$500 for a table of eight. To purchase tables contact Natalie Rose at 616-233-3562 or by email at nrose@WestMichiganSportsCommission.com.