



PRESS RELEASE

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SPORTS TOURISM IN WEST MICHIGAN INCREASED EXPONENTIALLY IN 2021 FROM 2020, GENERATING \$55.49 MILLION IN DIRECT VISITOR SPENDING

West Michigan Sports Commission also Saw Slight Increases from 2019 in Direct Spending and Events as Sports Tourism Metrics Return To Pre-Pandemic Levels

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich., Jan. 26, 2022 – If the [West Michigan Sports Commission](#) (WMSC) viewed the business of sports tourism in 2021 in terms of wins and losses, it would chalk up the year as a win for West Michigan.

Not surprisingly, the economic impact of sports tourism increased significantly in every metric over 2020 when the pandemic scratched many scheduled tournaments, but it also slightly surpassed some pre-pandemic figures of 2019. The WMSC generated \$55.49 million for the region in direct visitor spending in 2021 through 100 sporting events hosted in West Michigan – a 309 percent increase from 2020 (\$13.5 million) and a 1 percent increase from 2019 (\$54.9 million) in direct visitor spending. It also saw a 122 percent increase in events from 2020 (45) and a 1 percent increase from 2019 at 99.

“Last year was an important rebuilding year for youth and amateur sporting events in West Michigan, as we rebooked canceled tournaments and added others to the roster,” said Mike Guswiler, president of the West Michigan Sports Commission. “As expected, we fared far better than in 2020 when most large gatherings were canceled or modified to eliminate spectators – but we also returned to pre-pandemic levels of sports tourism in many areas. This proves the resiliency of sports tourism and how it is one of the first sectors of tourism to return to pre-pandemic levels.”

The WMSC was founded in 2007 as an economic generator to harness some of the \$45.1 billion* national youth and amateur sports industry for the region. One of its key tenets is generating overnight stays from event visitors, which drives spending in area hotels, restaurants and other businesses. Since its inception, the WMSC has booked 978 sporting events and tournaments that attracted more than 1.7 million athletes and visitors, generating over \$466 million in direct visitor spending.

2021 Highlights

The West Michigan Sports Commission tracked the following highlights in 2021:

- **100 sporting events attracted 184,360 athletes/visitors and \$55.49 million in estimated visitor spending** while filling 42,847 hotel room nights. Below is the change from 2020 and 2019:
 - Events increased 122 percent from 2020 (45) and 1 percent from 2019 (99).
 - Visitor spending increased 309 percent from 2020 (\$13 million) and 1 percent from 2019 (\$54.9 million).
 - Athletes/visitors increased 421 percent from 2020 (35,384) and decreased 20 percent from 2019 (230,382).
 - Hotel nights increased 229 percent from 2020 (13,042) and decreased 15 percent from 2019 (50,245).

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- **The Meijer Sports Complex generated \$5.6 million in direct visitor spending** from hosting 22 baseball/softball tournaments, 684 teams (of which 342 were travel teams), 8,892 athletes, 22,230 spectators and 5,973 hotel room nights. Below is the change from 2020 and 2019:
 - Visitor spending of \$5.6 million increased 134 percent from 2020 (\$2.4 million) and decreased 8 percent from 2019 (\$6.1 million) due to increased travel teams/families and related spending from 2020, though not back to the levels of 2019.
 - Number of tournaments increased 47 percent from 2020 (15) and equaled 2019 (22).
 - Travel teams increased 176 percent from 2020 (124) and decreased 24 percent from 2019 (448).
 - Spectators increased 102 percent from 2020 (11,013) and decreased 8 percent from 2019 (24,245).
 - Hotel room nights increased 145 percent from 2020 (2,433) and decreased 7 percent from 2019 (6,407).
- **Meijer State Games - Winter Games and Summer Games generated \$1.68 million in direct visitor spending** through 37 events attracting 6,149 athletes. Below is the change from 2020 and 2019:
 - Direct visitor spending increased 126 percent from 2020 (\$744,764) and decreased 17 percent from 2019 (\$2 million).
 - Events increased 12 percent versus 2020 (33) and decreased 40 percent from 2019 (62).
 - Number of athletes increased 38 percent from 2020 (4,471) and decreased 41 percent versus 2019 (10,441).
- **Meijer became the new naming rights partner of the WMSC's baseball/softball complex** – Last May, the WMSC and Meijer expanded its longtime partnership to promote youth and amateur sports with a new, 10-year partnership further uniting the two organizations, with Meijer as the new naming rights partner of the WMSC's flagship baseball/softball complex in Rockford – the [Meijer Sports Complex](#).
- **Major events from 2020 were rescheduled in 2021** – Last year saw the rescheduled [USA Masters Games](#) June 24-27 as well as the Champion Force Cheer Nationals July 8-11 from their original 2020 dates.

The Road Ahead

Looking at 2022, Guswiler and his team are focused on increasing the number of traveling athletes and visitors and their related hotel income, plus bidding on new events for 2022 and beyond.

“This will be another rebuilding year as we continue to build back our ratio of travel teams at the Meijer Sports Complex, increase the number of events and participating athletes with our signature Meijer State Games program, and win more new business bids that bring visiting athletes and fans,” said Guswiler. “In the meantime, we are excited to host some prestigious national events this year, including the NCAA Division II Outdoor Track and Field National Championship returning to GVSU and the 2022 Junior Gold Bowling Championships, bringing 5,000 athletes to the area for three weeks. I am very optimistic about the future of sports tourism in West Michigan.”

Signature events on the 2022 calendar so far include:

- West Michigan Futsal Cup (Feb. 4-6)
- Meijer State Games – Winter Games (Feb. 18-20 – Grand Rapids; 25-27 – Marquette)
- MHSAA Competitive Cheer Finals (March 4-5)
- MHSAA Boys Swimming & Diving D3 Finals (March 11-12)
- 2022 Griff's Sled Hockey Classic (March 18-20)
- Third Coast Fencing Cup (March 19)
- USA Rhythmic Gymnastics 2022 Elite Qualifier (May 20-22)
- NCAA Division II Outdoor Track and Field National Championship (May 26)

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- MJVBA AAU Volleyball Tournament (June 3-5)
- Meijer LPGA Classic (June 16-19)
- 2022 Junior Gold Championships - youth U12-U20 (July 11-23) – *first time for Grand Rapids to host*
- Beer City Open - APP Pickleball Tour (July 20-24)
- Meijer Sports Complex baseball/softball events (including 9 by Game Day USA):
 - Game Day USA Pre-Season Championship (April 22)
 - USSSA/BATL for the West AA (April 29-May 1)
 - Game Day USA Super Regional (May 6-8)
 - BPA Husky Blowout Bash (May 13-15)
 - USSSA/BATL Military Families United Classic (May 20-22)
 - Game Day USA Stars N' Strikes Showdown (May 27-29)
 - Game Day USA Rumble in the Rapids (June 3-5)
 - Game Day USA Silver Series Championship #1 (June 10-12) and #2 (July 1-3)
 - Game Day USA State Championship (June 17-19)
 - Game Day USA Meijer State Games of Michigan (June 23-26)
 - USSSA/BATL for the State Open (July 7-10)
 - Game Day USA National Championship (July 14-17)
 - Blue Chip Softball Summer Slam (July 14-17)
 - USSSA/BATL End of Summer Bash (July 21-24)
 - USA Softball of Michigan State Championship Men's Class E (July 30-31)
 - ISSA Border Battle (Aug. 5-7)
 - Game Day USA All Star Tournament (Aug. 19-21)

**From [Sports Tourism: State of the Industry Report \(2019\)](#) p. 4 - SportsETA*

About the West Michigan Sports Commission

The non-profit [West Michigan Sports Commission](#) (WMSC) identifies, secures and hosts youth and amateur sporting events to positively impact the economy and quality of life in the region. Since its inception in 2007, the WMSC has booked 978 events attracting more than 1.7 million athletes and visitors, generating over \$466 million in direct visitor spending. Visit [westmisports.com](#), [Facebook.com/WestMichiganSportsCommission](#) and @westmisports on Twitter and Instagram for more information.

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