

ANNUAL REPORT

Where Champions Come to Play



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FROM THE PRESIDENT

The growth of sports tourism across Alabama continued in 2024, making it a banner year for the industry across our state.

The continued investment in our communities has generated an impressive number of opportunities to engage our citizens on a deeper level than ever before - making an economic impact, but also improving the quality of life.

One of the biggest advancements in 2024 was the number of NCAA championship events coming to our state in multiple cities. To have the national spotlight spread across our state is a testament to our entire Sports Alabama team.

A special thank you to our Board of Directors for their support of our mission to make Alabama a premier sports destination.

Joel Lamp
President, Sports Alabama



ECONOMIC VALUE

Sports Make an Impact Across the State

There is nothing quite like sports tourism.

Sometimes it looks like 500 kids coming to a city for a soccer tournament, with parents and grandparents in tow taking pictures and videos all weekend to record the memories they make.

Sometimes it looks like a group of weekend warriors taking to the field to relive their glory days in the quest for a trophy.

Sometimes it looks like two college teams wrapping up a week-long competition on national television with a conference championship and a spot in a NCAA championship on the line in front of large crowd.

Across Alabama, sports makes a major impact on tourism and 2024 was a banner year.

The 12 member destinations of Sports Alabama produced 824 events and more than \$600 million in economic impact in their communities. That impact goes beyond heads in beds – it fills restaurants, increases the local tax collections, and improves the quality of life for the citizens.

Destination	Events	Economic Impact	Hotel Nights
Alabama's Beaches	123	\$ 80,400,000	123,641
Auburn/Opelika	91	\$ 35,960,775	22,349
Birmingham	150	\$ 249,982,453	261,989
Decatur/Morgan	44	\$ 7,413,558	4,100
Dothan	57	\$ 20,134,876	59,246
Foley	91	\$ 47,000,000	31,615
Huntsville	68	\$ 51,303,193	76,237
Marshall	12	\$ 5,469,429	9,750
Mobile	77	\$ 54,152,104	54,920
Montgomery	42	\$ 42,945,604	16,708
The Shoals	29	\$ 9,600,000	15,700
Tuscaloosa	40	\$ 10,059,292	10,196
	824	\$ 614,421,284	686,451

2024 was also a year of growth for Sports Alabama – adding three new destinations and creating the affiliate member category which built an opportunity for three more members to join the organization.

That growth is set to continue in 2025, thanks to the efforts of the Sports Alabama members, but challenges remain. Investment at the state level in the future to help incentivize events to choose Alabama will be a necessity to compete with the states that have made sports tourism a priority. With limited support at the state level, we've made tremendous strides – with dedicated support, the possibilities are limitless.



SPORTS ALABAMA BY THE NUMBERS

824

Events

\$614,421,284

Economic Impact



NCAA Falls on Alabama

After a two-year bidding process, Alabama destinations were awarded 10 NCAA championship events from 2025 to 2028.

The NCAA chose over 240 host sites for preliminary and final rounds of predetermined championships across Divisions I, II and III, primarily for the 2026-27 and 2027-28 seasons. This cycle marked a shift from a four-year to a two-year site selection process.

The NCAA received more than 1,200 bids from member schools, conferences, cities and sports commissions across 47 states and Washington, D.C., all competing to host predetermined rounds for 87 of the NCAA's 90 championships. The respective NCAA sports committees selected the sites, with final approval from the divisional competition oversight and championships committees.

Auburn

2025 Men's Golf –
Division I Regionals
2028 Women's
Gymnastics - Regionals

Birmingham

2027 Indoor Track &
Field – Division II Finals
2028 Men's Basketball –
1st & 2nd rounds

Gulf Shores

2027, 2028 Beach
Volleyball - Finals

Huntsville

2026 Cross Country –
Division II Regionals
2027 Cross Country –
Division I Regionals
2027 Cross Country –
Division II Finals
2027 Soccer (M/W) –
Division II Finals

“The enthusiasm and interest from around the country to host NCAA championships continues to be a testament to the quality of our events,” said Lynda Tealer, NCAA senior vice president of championships. “For this cycle we incorporated more data into the process to help our sport and oversight committees through the evaluation and selection of sites as we had so many quality venues and locations looking to host during these two seasons. We will continue to evaluate and gather feedback on going from the traditional four-year cycle to awarding championship bids for two years to determine the right cadence for the bid process in the future.”



Alabama's Beaches

- Opening in early 2025 is the Alabama Gulf Coast Sports Center located at the Gulf Shores Sportsplex, featuring a 28,000-sqft flexible event space, training facility, a coffee shop/café, retail space and lighted beach volleyball courts. The indoor flexible space can be converted into 12 pickleball courts, 4 basketball courts, 4 volleyball courts or used for various tournaments, such as martial arts, gymnastics and dance.
- Won several future collegiate championship bids:
 - NCAA Beach Volleyball National Championship, 2027-2031
 - NAIA Men's Soccer National Championship, 2025-2027
 - AVCA Small College Beach Volleyball National Championships, 2025-2026

BY THE NUMBERS

123
Events

\$80,400,000
Economic Impact

123,641
Hotel Room Nights

Michelle Russ
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& Events



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Auburn/Opelika

- USA Cycling MTB Marathon Nationals generated significant economic impact while giving back to the community. Not only did it boost the economy, but \$15,000 in ticket revenue was donated to the Central Alabama Mountain Pedalers (CAMP) to enhance the Chewacla trail system.
- The NSANE High School Bass Fishing Tournament is setting the standard for youth angling in Alabama. Hosted in Auburn-Opelika, it not only promotes the state's natural resources but also fosters the next generation of competitive anglers.
- Ongoing investments in sports facilities show a commitment to growth. The Lake Wilmore Facility, set to open with 18 covered pickleball courts, and the Opelika Aquatic Facility expansion, will attract new tournaments and events, strengthening Alabama's position as a sports tourism leader while enhancing community engagement and recreation opportunities.

BY THE NUMBERS

91
Events

\$35,960,775
Economic Impact

22,349
Hotel Room Nights

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Sports Dev. Director



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Birmingham

- MLB at Rickwood Field was the site of a special regular season contest between the St. Louis Cardinals and San Francisco Giants on June 20, 2024. It was a “Tribute to the Negro Leagues” and sold out in 40 minutes. The game was attended by baseball fans from across the country and special events including the game were televised throughout the day on Fox with an estimated 2.5M viewers.
- The Hoover Met has served as host of the SEC Baseball Tournament every year since 1998. Attendance records were set in each of the last two years, with a total attendance of 180,004 in 2024 and 15M+ in economic impact. Officials signed agreements extending the event at Hoover Metropolitan Stadium through at least 2028, with two additional one-year options for the SEC through 2030.
- The Birmingham Bowl, which the city has hosted since 2006, hasn’t hosted an SEC team since 2021. However, this year’s game featured an SEC team, Vanderbilt, in an historic season where it bested both Alabama and Auburn vs ACC opponent Georgia Tech on December 27. The game welcomed 34K fans and generated \$9.2M in economic impact.

BY THE NUMBERS

150
Events

\$249,982,453
Economic Impact

261,989
Hotel Room Nights

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Blount County

- The Blount County Multipurpose Agribusiness Center is the vision of our county commission, educators, local businesses and civic-minded individuals who saw a need for an advanced agricultural facility located at the heart of the county with a goal to provide hands on agricultural experience through classroom and experiential instruction, a location for impactful & relevant educational resources via Alabama Extension, as well as a modern community event space.
- At HomeTown Sports, our mission is to create an advanced and innovative athletics destination for travel sports organizations to thrive and excel in their athletic pursuits while maintaining that "hometown" feel.

BY THE NUMBERS

Inaugural Year as a
Member

In Process of Building
Three New Sports
Tourism Venues

Leslie Clines
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Cullman

Known for being the home of Smith Lake and a bass fishing destination, Cullman is expanding its sports tourism program.

- This year saw three major bass fishing tournament on the lake, including a Major League Fishing Toyota Series event that produced more than \$1.2 million in economic impact.
- With the city growth, Cullman is continuing to expand its sports tourism program with the OmniPlex. Once complete, the facility will be home to eight basketball courts or 16 volleyball courts and an additional eight meeting spaces.

BY THE NUMBERS

Inaugural Year as a
Member

In Process of Building
OmniPlex Sports
Venue

Harmony Heard
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Cullman Co. Tourism



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Harmony Heard

Decatur/Morgan Co.

- Hosted the HBCUAC Cross Country Championship in their inaugural season of competition that saw eight men's and women's teams compete at Oakville Indian Mounds.
- Hosted a Bassmaster Elite, for the first time since 2016, which had 110 anglers compete and garnered 2.4 million viewers for their Live Coverage becoming the most watched Elite Series Tournament on Fox Sports to date.
- Hosted the ASABFA State Championship that brought 75 middle school and 215 high school teams to compete on Wheeler Lake.

BY THE NUMBERS

44
Events

\$7,413,558
Economic Impact

4,100
Hotel Room Nights

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Sports Alabama Treasurer
Dir. -Sports Development



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Dothan

- Received the Event or Program Impact of the Year award at the 2024 Sports ETA Symposium for the NFL Flag Super Regional Tournament in December 2023. As the last open borders opportunity for teams to qualify for the final championship games, it attracted participants from across the country, including New York, Texas, and California.
- Hosted the USTA Level 1 Boys 14 National Clay Courts Championships for the third straight year.
- Did you know? The Rivals Combine and Camp Series, which is typically held in major metro areas, also takes place in Dothan, AL. This combine allows high school athletes to test their skills in key areas such as the 40-yard dash, shuttle run, 3-cone drill, vertical jump, and broad jump.

BY THE NUMBERS

57
Events

\$20,134,876
Economic Impact

59,246
Hotel Room Nights

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Foley

- The 3v3 Live Soccer National Championships attracted over 250 teams from across the U.S., generating over 1,400 room nights for Foley and over 6,400 room nights for the surrounding area.
- Hosted three Sun Belt Conference Championships – Women's Soccer, Volleyball, and Men's and Women's Cross Country – bringing in 2,600+ visitors.
- ASA, in partnership with the FST team and Graham Creek Nature Preserve, once again successfully hosted the Hoyt/Easton Pro/Am.
- USA Gymnastics Region 8 Championships, hosted by Bama Bounders returned, bringing in over 1,150 athletes and drew a crowd of over 4,700 spectators.

BY THE NUMBERS

91
Events

\$47,000,000
Economic Impact

31,615
Hotel Room Nights

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Chief Marketing & Sales
Officer



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Huntsville

- Hosted the USA Table Tennis National Championships – the first time a national governing body hosted its national championship in Huntsville.
- Welcomed the Conference USA Men’s & Women’s Basketball Championships – with four games televised nationally on CBS Sports Network.
- The NJCAA Division II Men’s & Women’s Soccer Championships at the Spencer Sports Complex and Joe Davis Stadium, producing more than 2,000 room nights over the course of the week.
- Running the NCAA Division II Cross Country South Regional for the first time – extending the streak to four straight years with a NCAA postseason cross country race.
- Hosted the Association of Chief Executives of Sport annual meeting, introducing the city to a number of C-suite leaders across the spectrum of sports.

BY THE NUMBERS

68
Events

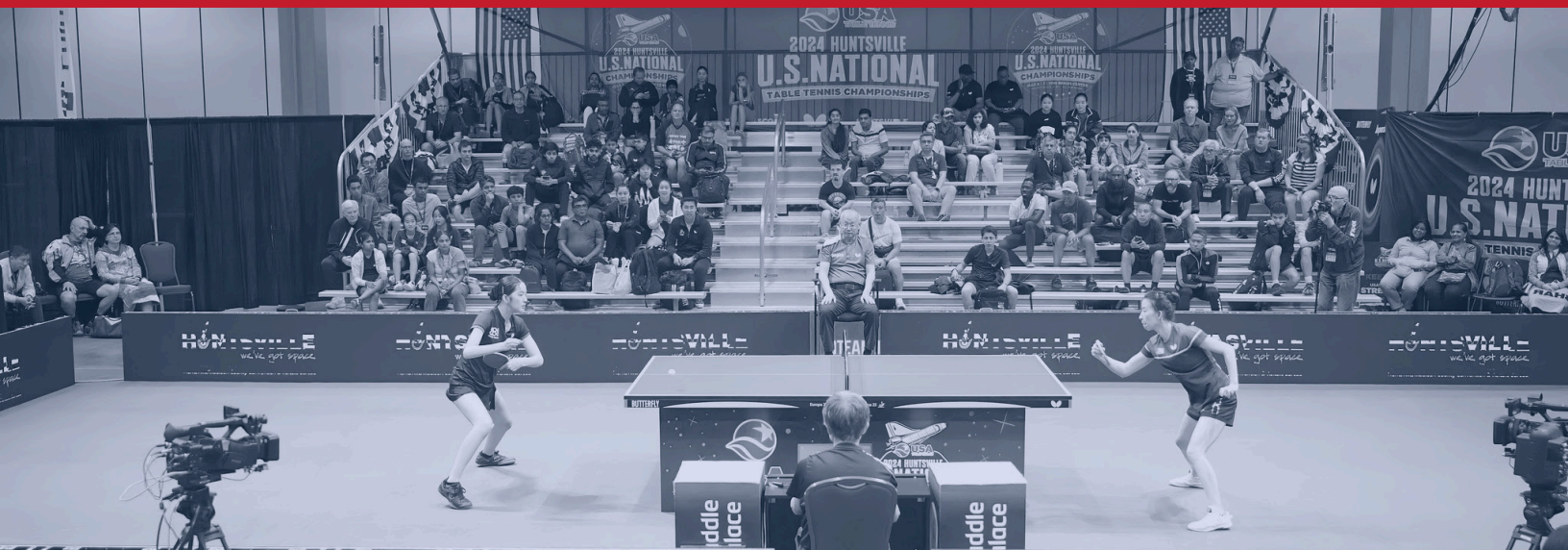
\$51,303,193
Economic Impact

76,237
Hotel Room Nights

Joel Lamp
President- Sports Alabama
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Lake Martin

- Host of the last Bassmaster Open of 2024 season bringing in a total of 186 anglers from all over the country.
- Lake Martin Ultra Run: A 100-mile, 50-mile and 27-mile run that has been voted the best North American Ultra.
- All-American Youth Sports softball tournament brought youth teams of the Central Alabama region for a multi-day tournament.

BY THE NUMBERS

First Year as a
Member
of Sports Alabama



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Sports Tourism & Events



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Marshall County

- Guntersville Lake HydroFest generated a direct economic impact of \$2 million over the weekend, with 12,000 attendees enjoying the two-day event.
- The UAH Charger Chillout at Sand Mountain Park highlighted NCAA Division II teams from across the Southeast, showcasing high-level competition.
- Big Bass Tour was the largest fishing tournament of the year, bringing 868 anglers to Lake Guntersville from 26 different states.

BY THE NUMBERS

12
Events

\$5,469,429
Economic Impact

9,750
Room Nights

Chloe Arnold
Secretary- Sports Alabama
Event Coordinator



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Mobile

- Hosted the Publix Battleship 12K Race, which generated more than \$1 million in economic impact with more than 2,400 runners producing 1,966 room nights.
- Continued the tradition of the USA Volleyball Gulf Coast Region Championships for the 10th straight year, hosting 211 teams with more than 2,300 visitors.
- Welcomed the Primetime Gulf Coast National AAU Basketball Tournament for the second time, producing more than \$2.2 million in economic impact thanks to a record 168 teams from six different states.

BY THE NUMBERS

77
Events

\$54,152,104
Economic Impact



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Montgomery

- Newly opened Montgomery Whitewater hosted one of the two 2024 Olympic Trials for Kayak and Canoe bringing in competitors from all over the world in an effort to qualify for the 2024 Paris Olympics.
- Host of three televised football events including the FCS Kickoff Classic, the Red Tails Classic, and the IS4S Salute to Veterans Bowl (formerly the Camellia Bowl) which brought in competitors and fans from five different states.
- Riverwalk Stadium was the host to the 2024 Sunbelt Conference Baseball Championship. Southern Miss earned an NCAA Regional Berth by winning the 10-team tournament.

BY THE NUMBERS

42
Events

\$42,945,604
Economic Impact

16,708
Hotel Room Nights

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Sports & State Assoc.



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The Shoals

- Visit the Shoals hosted the Babe Ruth and Cal Ripken World Series at the Florence Sportsplex in 2024 and also secured a multi-year contract with the organization.
- Continued partnership with the AHSAA for the North Regional Softball tournament and extended the contract for three more years.
- Welcomed the Boat US National Championship back to Pickwick Lake, where we were able to welcome 400 college anglers from across the county.

BY THE NUMBERS

29
Events

\$9,600,000
Economic Impact

15,700
Hotel Room Nights

Tyler Dolan
Senior Sales Manager



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Tuscaloosa

- DC Elite Productions Softball Tournament showcased top talent from across the region. Last year was the first year for Tuscaloosa to host the event.
- Alabama Adapted Athletics Wheelchair Basketball Tournaments had a fantastic turnout, from local fans to a packed Student Section. These events demonstrate the power of adaptive sports and inclusivity in athletics.
- Level Elite Volleyball Tournaments brought elite youth teams from across the Southeast to compete at the highest level.
- Bama Bounders Gymnastics Meets welcomed athletes from across the region for several events. From floor routines to balance beam performances, these meets highlight the dedication and skill of gymnasts at every level.

BY THE NUMBERS

40
Events

\$10,059,292
Economic Impact

10,196
Hotel Room Nights

Robins Bonner
Sr. Sports Sales Manager



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2025 Sports Alabama Goals

1

Increasing Profile

Telling the story of sports tourism across the state, increasing the profile includes organized marketing and creating unique opportunities to spread the word about Alabama.

2

Building Support

Great emphasis on educating our local, regional, and state leaders on the impact of sports tourism, creating greater visibility for the organization, and building stronger partnerships.

3

Engagement

With more regularly scheduled meetings, deliverable goals for committees and fostering a culture of teamwork, Sports Alabama can see a larger impact across key performance indicators.

2025-26 Officers



Joel Lamp
President



Anthony Terling
Vice President



Don Dukemineer
Treasurer/Past President



Chloe Arnold
Secretary