

Investing in Amateur Sports Tournament Hosting Facilities

Frequently asked questions

By: Paul Nicolosi, Partner [Nicolosi | Galluzzo, LLP](#)

Why is Knowing the Goal Important?

There are typically two primary goals for a community when they are making an investment sports facilities. The first is to provide their constituents with sufficient high quality state of the art facilities and the second is to drive tourism and economic development. Any meaningfully large facility will, to some degree, result in both better facilities for constituents and economic development and most communities will want to maximize both outcomes. Making sure, however, that all stakeholders understand the importance of both and which of the two is the priority will allow the answer / rational behind hundreds of small decisions more clear.

What Makes Facilities Stand Out?

First, it's important to understand that local, regional and national amateur sports tournament operators select their venues based on *both* the facility's overall attributes and the host community's ability to give the teams and their families the best overall destination experience. One without the other causes failure so when you want to stand out you need to make sure that there is a clear plan for taking care of the teams when they come into the community so that your community gets a reputation as being a great fun place to go.

Next, as your community moves from idea to action, it is important to know which what sports have the greatest demand from locals and tournament operators. You may be surprised that the number of different sports – other than the obvious like soccer, softball and volleyball – are played and you will want to make sure that your facilities can quickly and easily meet the needs of them all. It's also important for you to understand what other facilities tournament operators will compare you too and make sure whatever you build meets or exceeds your competition. Generally, this will include lighted fields so games can be played into the night (which is a must if rain prevents day play); artificial and natural turf fields in sufficient numbers to accommodate multiple simultaneous play. From an economic development and sports tourism impact, the facility must be designed to serve as many unique sports as possible, and allow different sports to be simultaneously played within different parts of the overall complex, and be designed to quickly and easily switch between sports.

Finally, it's important that sports complexes have convenient access to affordable family oriented hotels, restaurants and family activities.

How Much Should a Community Expect to Invest?

Cost is grounded in the community's goal which is why knowing the goal allows the community to carefully focus the planners, architects, builders and other stakeholders. Most unnecessary cost come in during the design phase and can be controlled through a single point of contact like an owner's agent whose main job is to keep everyone focused on the key attributes of the facility.

While not all sports complexes are alike, they are all made of either indoor, outdoor or a combination of both types of environments and their core construction cost generally remain consistent from one part of the country to another. With this, here is an example of some cost on projects we are currently involved.

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Indoor Facility – Artificial Turf. A local government client is completing a 100,000-square foot facility for approximately \$14 million. The facility has 70-foot-high ceilings that accommodate football, baseball and an international-sized soccer field with seating for several hundred spectators. The multi-purpose artificial turf field can also be divided with curtains that allow multiple tournament courts for sports such as lacrosse and soccer which allows for simultaneous play even if inclement weather impacts the use of the outdoor fields.

Indoor Facility – Hard Court. A 108,000-square foot hard court indoor facility is being completed for \$26 million. This facility has been designed to separately host hard court sports such as basketball, cheerleading, wrestling and volleyball. This facility was carefully designed to achieve high impact economic development benefits to the area immediately around the facility. It contains 8 basketball courts convertible to 16 volleyball courts. Additionally, the facility's mezzanine provides food services.

Outdoor Fields. A current 100-acre site which we are helping a client community complete adds 5 artificial turf multi-purpose lighted fields, a champion artificial turf soccer field, renovations to an indoor facility, additional parking, and a new concession and restroom building to its 23 existing natural turf fields at a cost of approximately \$16 million.

How do Communities Share in the Investment to build Sport Complexes?

First, it's important to understand that the capital investment in these types of facilities can only be justified because of local use and economic development impacts of sports. With this, it's important to understand what other jurisdictions in the region will most benefit from the sports complex so that the funding sources can be shared per this benefit. Where many facilities fail is when they attempt to have only one of the several local bodies benefiting from the sports complex bear all the risk and cost. An approach to address this that we have seen regions take is to have one of the communities lead the initiative to build the complex and identifying to the other communities in the region how they benefit and why it is fair for them to share in the investment. This is a bit of an art but when applied has nearly 100% success at fairly spreading the cost.

Who typically is in-charge of Booking the Events and Manage the Facilities?

To assure the greatest experience to users and the maximum utilization (economic / sports tourism impact), any community considering the investment in an amateur sports tournament hosting facility must simultaneously cultivate the governance, management and maintenance of the facilities. In some cases, communities, will outsource all or a piece of these activities; in others, they will work with their regional CVB's and park district. However, if it is ultimately decided to undertake this activity, it is important to know the pros and cons of each approach, and how it will be accomplished.