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# 5 Great Cities for Sports-Themed Meetings

## Cheer for the home team -- and for your team -- in these fan-friendly meeting destinations

by Matt Alderton | February 01, 2018

These days, the country feels painfully divided. There's at least one thing, however, about which Americans are passionately united: sports. In fact, 70 percent of American adults — 168 million people — claim to follow sports, and spend an average of 7.7 hours every week doing so, according to sports intelligence company SportBusiness Group. For meeting professionals who successfully harness it, that kind of enthusiasm can easily turn a ho-hum meeting into a memorable and engaging experience. Before they can determine how to incorporate sports into their events, however, planners must decide where. Tier-one cities like New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, and Boston are obvious choices, but they're not the only destinations where meetings marry well with athletics. Here are five second-tier cities that also deserve a look:

### Cleveland, OH

Although Cleveland's teams aren't exactly known for winning — Major League Baseball's (MLB) Cleveland Indians and the National Football League's (NFL) Cleveland Browns haven't won championships since 1948 and 1964, respectively — the city's passionate and optimistic fans mean sports-themed meetings here can still score big.

Along with the Indians and the Browns, the city roots for the National Basketball Association's (NBA) Cleveland Cavaliers and the American Hockey League's (AHL) Cleveland Monsters. That means there are several sports venues capable of hosting meetings and events, including the Browns' FirstEnergy Stadium, the Indians' Progressive Field (pictured), and the Cavaliers' Quicken Loans Arena. While none is shiny and new — all three were built in the 1990s — the city's convention venues are: The Huntington Convention Center of Cleveland and the Global Center for Health Innovation opened in 2013 and 2014, respectively, and together offer nearly 400,000 square feet of meeting space. Plus, connected to both is the new Hilton Cleveland Downtown, which opened in 2016 with 600 rooms and 46,000 square feet of meeting space.

### Indianapolis, IN

Indianapolis isn't just home to several professional sports teams — including the NFL's Indianapolis Colts, the NBA's Indiana Pacers, and the United Soccer League's (USL) Indy Eleven — but also several major sports championships, including one Super Bowl and several Final Fours. Oh, and it's also home base for a little race called the Indianapolis 500. That means Indy is not only ready and willing to host large meetings and events, but also well rehearsed at doing so.

A sports city all year long, Indianapolis is the sort of place where you can easily make a big impression on meeting attendees who love sports — even on a small budget. Along with the Indianapolis Convention Center, which opened in 1972 but completed a major expansion in 2011, there are several sports venues that can accommodate groups, including: Bankers Life Fieldhouse, where the Pacers play; Victory Field, where the Indianapolis Indians minor league baseball team plays; the Grand Park sports campus, a 400-acre youth and amateur sports destination with 26 baseball diamonds, 31 multipurpose fields, two large indoor sports facilities, and more than 10 miles of paved trails; the Indy 500's Indianapolis Motor Speedway; and the Colts' Lucas Oil Stadium, which opened in 2008 and can host everything from small meetings to large exhibitions. Planners also will appreciate Marriott IndyPlace, home to five Marriott hotels that collectively boast 2,276 guest rooms and 154,000 square feet of meeting space.

### Kansas City, MO

With only three pro sports teams in town — the NFL's Kansas City Chiefs, MLB's Kansas City Royals, and Major League Soccer's (MLS) Sporting Kansas City — Kansas City certainly isn't America's biggest sports city. It is, however, one of its most passionate. Because Kansas Citians aren't just devoted to the Chiefs and Royals — like fans in all the best sports towns are, they're obsessed with them — games in Kansas City are some of the most energetic and fun in all of pro sports.

Groups can experience the fandom themselves at the Chiefs' Arrowhead Stadium, the Royals' Kauffman Stadium, or Sporting KC's Children's Mercy Park. Or, they can gather at Allen Fieldhouse in nearby Lawrence, KS, which is home to the University of Kansas' Kansas Jayhawks men's and women's basketball teams and is widely considered one of the country's best college basketball venues. Finally, there's the Sprint Center, which was opened in 2007 with hopes of attracting a professional hockey or basketball team. Although those dreams haven't yet been realized, the arena has hosted several Big 12 basketball tournaments and is an ideal backdrop for sports-themed meetings and events. Groups seeking a more conventional venue can stroll just a few blocks west — through the city's new downtown entertainment destination, the Power & Light District — to the Kansas City Convention Center, which opened in 1976, was expanded in 1994, and welcomed a new grand ballroom in 2007.

### Charlotte, NC

North Carolina is famous for its Southern hospitality and its delectable barbecue. The "Tar Heel State" could just as easily be known for its fandom, however, as North Carolina sports fans can be just as passionate as they are hospitable. In addition to two home-grown professional sports teams — the NFL's Carolina Panthers and the NBA's Charlotte Hornets — the city is teeming with fans of both pro and college sports throughout North Carolina, including the National Hockey League's (NHL) Carolina Hurricanes, who play in Raleigh; Duke University's Blue Devils college basketball team, who play in Durham; and the University of North Carolina's Tar Heels college basketball team, who play in Chapel Hill. Plus, Charlotte is ground central for another kind of sport entirely: NASCAR racing.

In fact, Charlotte is home to the NASCAR Hall of Fame, which can host groups of up to 2,400 people for racing-themed private events. That's not the only sports-themed venue in town, however. Groups also can convene at NASCAR home Charlotte Motor Speedway; at the Panthers' Bank of America Stadium, which completed a $47 million renovation in 2013; or the Hornets' Spectrum Center, which opened in 2005, recently completed numerous improvements, and is expected to receive additional renovations in the near future. Of course, groups also have the Charlotte Convention Center, which connects to the NASCAR Hall of Fame and was expanded with a brand-new new ballroom when that opened in 2010.

### Milwaukee, WI

If Milwaukee is known for one thing, it's beer. And nothing goes better with a cold beer than a good game. Fortunately, Milwaukee has plenty of them to watch thanks to two professional sports teams that are based there — MLB's Milwaukee Brewers and the NBA's Milwaukee Bucks — and several others whose culture permeates the city even though the teams don't play there: namely, the NFL's Green Bay Packers and the University of Wisconsin's Wisconsin Badgers, both of which enjoy cult-like followings in Milwaukee and the rest of "the Badger State."

The Brewers play at Miller Park and the Bucks at BMO Harris Bradley Center — both of which have space for private meetings and events — although the latter will soon move to a new home base: the Wisconsin Entertainment and Sports Center and entertainment district. Set to open later this year, the 714,000-square-foot arena will hold more than 17,000 people and is located just a block and a half from the city's convention campus, which includes the Wisconsin Center, the Miller High Life Theatre, and the UW-Milwaukee Panther Arena, each of which is set up to accommodate meeting and convention groups. Eventually, the venue will anchor a 30-acre downtown neighborhood with bars, restaurants, and shopping to keep said groups entertained when they're not otherwise engaged at games or in meetings.

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