



"They have done so well," says Mary Helen Sprecher, managing editor of the trade journal *Sports Destination Management*. "We're talking numbers that mean an awful lot to an area like this."

You may have heard of the "Barcelona Effect," the idea that mega-sporting events like the Olympics or World Cup can confer untold benefits on the host city — the founding principle of the \$600 billion global sports tourism market — but there is a less-ballyhooed and more far-reaching dynamic underway right now, one that might be called the Dayton Effect.

Don Schumacher, executive director of the National Association of Sports Commissions, estimates there are "tens of thousands" of small, amateur sports events held across the U.S., many of which are having a transformative effect on the host communities. In areas where traditional industries are in decline, archery and curling competitions are not only providing an economic lifeline, but are spurring infrastructure development that would have previously been unthinkable.

Schumacher says direct visitor spend on amateur sports events reached \$9.6 billion last year, discounting college or high school tournaments. In 2014, according to one report, almost 35 million people stayed at least one night in the towns hosting amateur competitions. Some 60 percent of these visitors said they would return to the town, and 74 percent said they would recommend it to others. But the knock-on effect goes further than this.

"Visitors will say, 'Oh, they have a great water park, a great museum, let's stay an extra night or two,' and they bring their disposable income," says Sprecher. "This allows these places to build a miniature golf course, or a new mall." And these developments, in turn, attract more visitors. "It feeds on itself."

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Sprecher's magazine compiles an annual survey of towns that have fared especially well with small-scale sports tourism. Topping the most recent list was Columbia, South Carolina, whose Forrest Wood Cup fishing tournament resulted in \$25.7 million in economic impact. The USSSA Fastpitch Eastern World Series netted almost \$20 million for Salisbury-Ocean City, Maryland; the U.S. Youth Soccer Region III Soccer Championships brought more than \$10 million to Greenville, South Carolina; and the city of Tulsa, Oklahoma, reaped \$6 million from the USA BMX Grand Nationals.

For towns hosting major competitions, the rewards can be even greater: the 2014 U.S. Open Championship golf tournament brought \$169 million in economic impact to Pinehurst, North Carolina, whose population stands at around 13,000. On a smaller scale, Naples, Florida, hosted its first Minto U.S. Open Pickleball Championships this year, earning \$2.5 million in economic impact. That may not sound like much, but it far exceeded the \$500,000 projected by the organizers, and it seems likely that next year's event will do even better.

Steve Ross, an associate professor of sport management at Concordia University, St. Paul, believes it's a mistake to get too hung up on the bottom line. "The biggest winners," he says, "are the community members. Not so much in terms of economic benefits, but more in community pride. This is a term we call 'psychic benefits,' and relates to the sense of pride that comes with hosting these events."

But it's not only the U.S. that is catching on to the potential of the Dayton Effect. This month, Geneva hosts a Sports Tourism Conference, which will cover places as diverse as Northern Ireland and Japan. Nigel Fletcher, chief executive of conference organizer Sports Development Marketing, says the trend right now is a shift in focus away from big-ticket one-offs like the Olympics. "We are seeing more cities looking at small ongoing events," he says. "And some have been very savvy in how they gone about it."

This may be true, but all the savvy in the world cannot prevent, say, a deluge spoiling your big press day, as almost happened in Sibiu earlier this year. Even so, says Rally Challenge co-organizer Berti Panaiot, the event itself went better than anyone could have hoped for. The race drew about 20,000 spectators, 30 percent up from the previous year, with up to a fifth of these being international visitors. "City Hall was very happy," Panaiot says. "And for sure they will support us next year." 