

# **GAME ON!**

---

**THE IMPACT OF YOUTH SPORTS  
ON A REGIONAL ECONOMY**

---

**SEPTEMBER 18, 2012**



# Acknowledgements



This study was commissioned by the Traverse City Area Chamber of Commerce and Traverse Bay Area Youth Soccer (TBAYS).

The Chamber's mission is to serve its members and community by providing services that promote the economy and protect the environment, making this region a better place to live, work, play and raise a family.

TBAYS is a volunteer organization providing quality soccer programs and facilities for all youth and all levels, promoting positive physical, mental and emotional development.

The authors gratefully acknowledge the contributions of the thousands of parents and volunteer coaches who participated in this study – sharing their experiences, their perspectives and their vision. Without their involvement, this landmark study would not have been possible.

## Study Authors

Sherwood B. Smith, President, Avenue ISR Ann Tisdale,  
Research Associate, Avenue ISR

Avenue ISR is a business strategy and research consulting firm serving an international client base from Traverse City, Michigan. Avenue ISR has conducted consulting engagements for multi-national corporations as well as regional businesses, governments and NGOs.

## Project Advisors

Doug Luciani, President , Traverse City Area Chamber  
of Commerce and Traverse Bay Economic Development  
Corporation

Jennifer Jorgensen, Executive Director, Traverse Bay Area  
Youth Soccer

Ed Chima, Co-Director, Cherry Bomb Lacrosse Tournament

## Community Contributors

Rob Bacigalupi, Deputy Director, Downtown Development Authority  
Bryan Crough, Executive Director/Community Development Director, Downtown Development Authority  
Sherry Davis, Sales Assistant, Traverse City Convention & Visitors Bureau  
Jason Jones, Director, Grand Traverse County Parks and Recreation Department  
Brad Van Dommelen, President, Traverse City Convention & Visitors Bureau

## Best Practice Contributors

Dennis Blackmore, Director of Tournaments, Virginia Beach FC  
Patricia Lamberti, Executive Director, Petoskey Youth Soccer  
Dan Monahan, Tournament Director, Mead CUSA Cup  
Jeff Wellborn, President, CABOSA/Shreveport United Soccer Club  
J. Michael Dizer, Director of Programs, Midland Soccer Club  
Steve Oleson, COO, National Sports Center

## Data Support

Mike Norton, Media Relations, Traverse City Convention & Visitors Bureau

# Table of Contents

Executive Summary	4
Study Overview	
The Changing Face of Youth Sports	6
Project Goals	7
Research Methods	7
<hr/>	
The Impact of Youth Athletic Tournaments	
Family Groups & Attendance	9
Direct Economic Impact	11
Gateway Experiences	13
Attracting Talent	15
Expanding Regional Amenities	16
Regional Strategies for Impact	
Improve the Tournament Experience	18
Improve the Regional Experience	19
Welcome and Engage Tournament Attendees	20
Introduce More Tournaments	21
Enhance Regional Athletic Facilities	22
<hr/>	
Conclusion	24
References	25
Appendix	26

The world of youth sports is changing. Gone are the days when young people predominantly organized themselves into pick-up games and backyard contests.

Youth sports these days are typified by independent organizations, competitive regional leagues, travel teams and tournament play. Nearly 70 percent of children (age 6-17) in the U.S. are playing at least one team sport.

The explosion of travel teams in youth team sports has been accompanied by a proliferation of youth tournaments, often involving multiple games or matches over 2-3 days and large numbers of teams from a wide geographic area. On a national level, these tournaments have been found to have significant economic impact.

Avenue ISR studied the impact of two youth tournaments – The Cherry Capital Cup soccer tournament and The Cherry Bomb lacrosse tournament – on the regional economy of the Traverse City area.

---

The research team found that the tournaments generate a considerable amount of direct and indirect economic activity for the region. These are some of the specific economic activities:

1. The two tournaments combine to bring 15,900 people - youth athletes and their families - to the Traverse City area
2. These visitors are more economically attractive than typical tourists with median average income nearly twice that of a typical Michigan tourist
3. Overall, the two tournaments contribute \$3.4 million in direct spending within the region

4. Tournament participants take up more than 2,000 hotel rooms per night and frequent nearly 100 restaurants and dozens of retail stores
  5. In addition, tournaments serve as gateway experiences for many first time visitors, inspiring large numbers to make plans for subsequent trips and vacations to the region
  6. The tournaments may be effective ways to attract “talent” to the region, as the parents of young athletes on travel teams appear to bring a mix of abilities and professional experiences that are highly attractive to growing economies; a significant number of these people were motivated to contemplate a move to the Traverse City region based on their experiences of the youth tournaments
  7. By supporting extensive playing fields and subsidizing Traverse Bay Area Youth Soccer programming, the tournaments expand the number of recreational opportunities available to area youth
- 

In order to maximize the economic benefits of these tournaments, regional decision makers need to take the following steps:

1. Resolve issues of accommodations and traffic flow. Some visitors have to drive multiple hours on a day of competition. Traffic flow is so congested at the Keystone Complex that it is difficult for participants to leave.
2. Continue to improve other aspects of the tournament experience.
3. Take steps to make out of town visitors feel more welcome.
4. Make a concerted effort to engage visitors with information and ideas about the region.
5. Expand the number and size of youth tournaments.

6. Build out facilities for youth and adult athletics, including expanded indoor facilities for year-round use.

Using youth tournaments as a regional development mechanism can be a relatively easy means of meeting a variety of economic goals, with dividends that will pay for years and decades to come. To not fully take advantage of this opportunity would mean dropping the ball.

### The Changing Face of Youth Sports

*“Parents will spend about \$7 billion this year on just the traveling involved with youth sports.”*

Don Schumacher – National Association of Sports Commissions

Although young people have played games and sports for millennia, the face of youth athletics in the United States has changed in recent years.

Currently, team sports within the United States are at an all time peak. According to the Sporting Goods Manufacturers Association (SGMA) nearly 70 percent of children (age 6-17) in the U.S. are playing team sports and three out of four teenagers are now playing at least one team sport. Whereas in the past young people might organize themselves into games of “sandlot” baseball and other informal gatherings, youth sports are increasingly organized, with adults – parents, coaches, league organizers, referees and tournament operators – organizing both practices and competition.

The “travel team” stratum of youth sports in particular has exploded in the last twenty years. Travel teams grew out of recreational league play, as players, parents and coaches sought more and better venues in which to compete. The teams mushroomed in popularity as new leagues were formed to promote their play, tournaments proliferated to match the best against the best and large indoor facilities multiplied in suburban areas permitting year-round training and competition. (Fullinwider, 2006)

The emphasis on travel for competition has translated into significant economic impact on a national scale. “Kids’ games that used to be played close to home have evolved into giant tournaments where even mediocre teams travel hundreds or thousands of miles to compete. Parents will spend about \$7 billion this year on just the traveling involved with youth



*“Youth and amateur sports tournaments are fairly low-investment opportunities that small communities can explore with large returns for the resources that are already present.”*

Chen and Hsu - The Journal of Global Business Management

sports,’ said Don Schumacher, executive director of the National Association of Sports Commissions.” (Huettel)

Many advocates agree that regional economies benefit from hosting youth tournaments. In an article for The Journal of Global Business Management, Chen and Hsu (2008) write that “Youth and amateur sports tournaments are fairly low-investment opportunities that small communities can explore, with large returns for the resources that are already present.” In fact, attendees at a recent meeting of the National Association of Sports Commissions quoted returns on investment as high as 50-1. (Kelly, 2007)

All over the United States, tourism and government officials, as well as business leaders, are starting to see that youth sports events deserve to be recognized as legitimate engines of economic activity, often with relatively modest up-front investments.

How do local communities benefit specifically, both in the short term and the long term? And how should communities best take advantage of the opportunities presented by youth tournaments? These are the over-arching questions that triggered this study.

## Project Goals

This study used an in-depth investigation of two youth sports tournaments held in Traverse City, Michigan, as a means of gaining a thorough understanding of the ways in which tournaments such as these impact local communities. The study also focused on ways in which communities can best take advantage of the opportunities presented by similar tournaments.

Specific goals of this study are as follows:

1. Demonstrate the overall economic impact (in dollar terms) of two key athletic tournaments
2. Identify spending within particular sectors (e.g. lodging, restaurants, groceries, gifts) to show how these sectors benefit
3. Where possible, measure participants' likely future behaviors with respect to the region
4. Identify best practices from a variety of tournaments from around the United States on how best to host and leverage youth athletic tournaments

## Research Methods

The two tournaments examined in detail by the project team are the Cherry Capital Cup soccer tournament and the Cherry Bomb lacrosse tournament. The Cherry Capital Cup is a decade-old tournament that began in 2003. In 2012, the tournament hosted 198 girls and boys teams with players ranging in age between 8 and 18. The two-day tournament is organized by Traverse Bay Area Youth Soccer (a 501(c)3 nonprofit) and is hosted at the Keystone Recreational Complex, a property of the Grand Traverse County Parks and Recreation Commission. The Cherry Bomb tournament was launched in 2009. In 2012, the tournament hosted 125 boys teams with players ranging in age from 8 to 18. The three-day tournament

is organized by Cherry Bomb Lacrosse LLC and is also hosted at the Keystone Complex.

Many findings cited in this report are based on responses to parent surveys sent out in the 1-2 weeks after each of the two tournaments concluded. A total of 696 parents participated in the two surveys, an estimated response rate of 10.8 percent.

These research findings were supplemented using both a general literature search and in-depth interviews conducted with tournament organizers (both of the two featured tournaments and other tournaments throughout the U.S.), community leaders and industry experts.

# The Impact of Youth Athletic Tournaments

## Family Groups & Attendance

The typical tournament athlete brings an additional 2.14 people with them

An understanding of tournament economic impact begins with an exploration of who travels to attend the tournament.

Because these are youth athletic tournaments, each athlete is typically accompanied by at least a parent. In fact, 66 percent of family groups have two parents, 50 percent have one or more siblings (not participating in the tournaments), 16 percent have one or more grandparents and 14 percent have other relatives or adults who accompany them. All in, the typical tournament athlete brings an additional 2.14 people with them. Table 1 shows that these two tournaments alone attracted 17,400 men, women and children.

**Table 1 – Tournament Attendance**

### **Cherry Capital Cup and Cherry Bomb Tournaments**

<b>Combined</b>	<b>#</b>
<u>Total Number of Teams</u>	<u>319</u>
<u>Average Number of Athletes Per Team</u>	<u>17.4</u>
<u>Total Number of Competing Athletes</u>	<u>5,551</u>
<u>Average Number of People Accompanying Each Athlete</u>	<u>2.14</u>
<u>Total Number of Attendees (rounded to nearest hundredth)</u>	<u>17,400</u>

Note: For For a detailed analysis of tournament attendance see Appendix

80% of attendees travel outside of Northwest Lower Michigan to attend the two tournaments.

These tournaments cater to “travel” teams, and indeed the majority of participants and families do travel from outside of the Traverse City area to attend. Table 2 shows that more than 80 percent of attendees travel from outside of Northwest Lower Michigan to attend the two tournaments.

**Table 2 – Geographic Distribution of Participants**

	<b>Overall</b>
<u>Traverse City</u>	<u>8.8%</u>
<u>Northwest Lower Michigan – North of the Grand Rapids area,</u>	
<u>West of I-75</u>	<u>9.8%</u>
<u>Upper Peninsula</u>	<u>3.9%</u>
<u>Other area of Michigan</u>	<u>49.9%</u>
<u>Other State</u>	<u>20.4%</u>

Although the majority of teams travel from within the state of Michigan, some teams do travel from as far away as Texas to participate in these tournaments. The following figure shows the geographic area from which these two tournaments draw with a single “pin” representing a team or club (some clubs bring multiple teams of different ages and ability levels to a given tournament).

With 91.2 percent of all attendees traveling from outside of the Traverse City area and 81.4 percent traveling from outside the region of Northwest Lower Michigan, this would mean that these two tournaments bring 15,900 people to the Traverse City area, all but 1,700 of whom are from outside of Northwest Lower Michigan.

Median income of typical Michigan visitor is \$67,000.

Median income of Traverse City youth tournament visitors is \$124,000.

Number of people brought to the Traverse City Area over the course of two weekends = **15,900**

The attendees of the two youth athletic tournaments are very economically attractive relative to other types of tourists. These visitors are affluent, well-educated professionals. In fact, the median income of tournament visitors is significantly higher than that of the typical Michigan tourist visiting the region. (\*Source: D.K. Shifflet & Associates Ltd., 2012 Michigan Visitor Profile)

More than one third of these parents have earned a graduate degree. They are doctors, educators, scientists, finance managers, engineers and accountants.

## **Direct Economic Impact**

Youth athletes and their families do more than merely attend the tournaments. They stay in hotels, eat in restaurants,

83% of all families attending the two tournaments pay for some form of accommodations

purchase gas and groceries, shop for souvenirs and pay for entertainment. The involvement of grandparents and younger siblings ensures that there is an appetite for a variety of different visitor experiences.

As Table 3 shows, 83 percent of all families attending the two tournaments pay for some form of accommodations by staying in hotels/motels, campgrounds, rental properties and bed & breakfasts.

**Table 3 - Accomodations**

	<b>Overall</b>
<u>Hotel/motel</u>	71.4%
<u>At home, we live in the area</u>	10.0%
<u>With a friend or family member who lives in the area</u>	7.3%
<u>Campground</u>	5.2%
<u>Rental property</u>	2.8%
<u>Bed and Breakfast</u>	0.6%
<u>Other</u>	2.8%

Those families staying in hotels, motels and bed and breakfasts typically occupy multiple rooms, 1.7 on average. Altogether, families attending the Cherry Capital Cup occupy more than 2,000 hotel, motel and bed and breakfast rooms per night. Families attending the Cherry Bomb occupy more than 2,500 rooms.

Number of hotel, motel and B&B rooms occupied during youth tournaments = **2,000-2,500**

Given that the entire membership of the Traverse City Convention & Visitors Bureau consists of just under 5,000 rooms (distributed over Grand Traverse, Leelanau and Antrim Counties), when the tournaments are under way their attendees account for a huge percentage of the available hotel rooms within the region.

One of the biggest areas of direct spending during these tournaments is for accommodations.

These youth tournaments last for two to three days so that teams can have multiple games and compete in championships. This ensures that players and their families stay in the region for multiple nights. The average stay for a family attending the Cherry Capital Cup and staying in a hotel, motel or bed and breakfast is 1.9 nights; for the Cherry Bomb the figure is 2.4 nights.

These multiple day, multiple room stays ensure that one of the biggest areas of direct spending is for accommodations. The average family visiting from outside the Traverse City Area spends \$439 on accommodations while in the region.

Beyond accommodations, the economic impact of these tournaments is spread across several business segments. Table 4 shows that the majority of attending families purchase restaurant meals, gasoline, groceries and other retail products. A large number of respondents also report visiting downtown Traverse City, area parks and other regional towns. As one Cherry Capital Cup visitor from Michigan's Upper Peninsula writes *"We love Traverse City...I am so excited that our soccer team in Marquette finally goes below the bridge/TC for a tournament versus going to Wisconsin/Minnesota. We love the food, the city, the shopping, the water (ok, we have water too) and the beaches, the Sleeping Bear Dunes and Lake Michigan shore, the beauty/scenery..."* (Cherry Capital Cup – Upper Peninsula)



**Table 4 – Activities and Spending**

<b>Activity</b>	<b>Overall</b>
<u>Ate at one or more restaurants</u>	<u>85.6%</u>
<u>Purchased gasoline</u>	<u>79.5%</u>
<u>Purchased groceries</u>	<u>53.0%</u>
<u>Visited downtown</u>	<u>53.0%</u>
<u>Shopped at one or more retail stores</u>	<u>50.1%</u>
<u>Visited a park, trail or beach</u>	<u>39.7%</u>
<u>Visited one or more other towns in the area</u>	<u>22.6%</u>
<u>Paid for entertainment, e.g. movies, miniature golf, bowling, etc.</u>	<u>17.0%</u>
<u>Visited one or more shopping malls</u>	<u>14.8%</u>
<u>Visited medical facilities</u>	<u>1.0%</u>

Detailed respondent comments indicate that the families of youth athletes patronize nearly 100 different restaurants and bars during their stay in Traverse City, along with dozens of retail stores and entertainment venues.

Average spending per non-local family attending the tournaments is as follows:

<u>Accommodations</u>	<u>\$439</u>
<u>Restaurant meals</u>	<u>\$185</u>
<u>Groceries</u>	<u>\$62</u>
<u>Concessions or other food</u>	<u>\$41</u>
<u>Fuel</u>	<u>\$89</u>
<u>Other (sporting goods, souvenirs, entertainment, etc.)</u>	<u>\$169</u>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$985</b>

With more than 3,400 families brought to the Traverse City area for these two tournaments, total direct spending in the region is \$3.4 million.

Note: In terms of total economic impact, this number is quite conservative. Typically, events use multipliers of 1.3 or more to reflect the indirect results of visitor spending. Because there is some debate as to which multiplier is appropriate for events of this type, the research team has chosen to present direct spending figures only.

Total direct spending by non-locals during two youth sports tournaments = \$3.4 million

While most families did stay only for the duration of the tournaments, there were some family groups that spent several days in the region either before or after these tournaments going to beaches, shopping, attending local cultural events and festivals and enjoying various recreational activities. This amounted to no more than 4.5 percent of the total, but could be an important area of growth.

Other communities have seen similar results with youth and amateur sport tournaments as families use these as anchor experiences for longer vacations. According to Steve Huettel of the Tampa Bay Times, tourism officials even coined a name for it: the playcation.

## Gateway Experiences

Many players and their families traveling from Texas, Minnesota, Wisconsin, as well as Michigan cities outside of northwest lower Michigan visited the Traverse City Area for the first time as a result of the two youth tournaments. Of those who attended these tournaments for the first time, 28 percent had never been to this area before.

56% of visitors participated in the tournament for the first time

Of those, 28% are also first time visitors to Traverse City

The following comments from a visitor from Wisconsin show that a youth tournament can serve as a gateway experience that sets up future economic activity.

“As a first time visitor I found it to be a beautiful area that I would love to bring the whole family to...there is stuff for everyone.” (Cherry Bomb Lacrosse attendee)

Table 5 shows that of those attendees who have visited the area in the past, 59 percent indicate that they have returned to the area for an overnight visit/vacation because of their experiences of the tournaments they attended. Nearly three-quarters (74.2 percent) indicate that they recommended the area to friends and family because of their tournament experiences. 14 percent say that they have considered relocating to the area permanently.

**Table 5 – Specific Actions Taken by Past Attendees of Tournaments**

<b>Action Taken</b>	<b>%</b>
<u>Recommended the area to friends or family</u>	<u>74.2%</u>
<u>Returned for an overnight visit/vacation</u>	<u>58.6%</u>
<u>Considered purchasing a second home or cottage in the area</u>	<u>18.5%</u>

While any experience or event that draws visitors to this region might serve as a similar experience for visitors, several characteristics of these youth tournaments make them particularly attractive points of introduction:

- High proportion of out of town visitors and relatively high proportion of first time visitors
- Appealing demographic with higher median income than the typical Michigan tourist
- Available leisure time to explore the region when games are not being played.

The following visitor comments detail the ability of youth tournaments to lay the groundwork for subsequent visits and activity.

“We attended last year for the first time and had a blast. We brought 3 more teams with us this year. I think next year we will have more teams wanting to join us!” (Macomb, Michigan – Return Visitor - Cherry Capital Cup)

“The area was beautiful. We had fun on the beaches and want to spend more time here next year. There were things for everyone to enjoy...the experience was great and we can't wait to come back. We will be smarter with our time so we can enjoy the area before the tournament starts.” (Ohio – First time visitor – Cherry Bomb Lacrosse)

“Traverse City is a beautiful city. I am actually trying to plan next year to vacation for a week over the tournament.” (Lansing Michigan – First Time Visitor - Cherry Bomb Lacrosse)

“Beautiful part of the country. Clinch Park was very accessible and beautiful scenery. We visited wineries on Mission Peninsula. Our company hires summer interns and we always recommend they visit the area as part of their summer experience” (Midland, MI – Cherry Capital Cup)

Communities and regions that want to attract young, intelligent workers need to find ways to first expose those individuals to their regions.

Many area businesses will see an additional economic boost before year's end as a result of these two youth tournaments. 42.2 percent of respondents indicate they are very or extremely likely to return this calendar year (2012) for a vacation or other visit.

## Attracting Talent

In his book, The Rise of the Creative Class, Richard Florida's teachings have helped to shift the perception that people move to where employers are to a new understanding that companies form where there are intelligent and diverse groups of people. (McGovern) "The Creative Centers are not thriving for such traditional economic reasons as access to natural resources or transportation routes. Nor are they thriving because their local governments have given away the store through tax breaks and other incentives to lure business. They are succeeding largely because creative people want to live there. The companies then follow the people—or in many cases are started by them." (Florida, p. 215)

Communities and regions that want to attract young, intelligent workers need to find ways to first expose those individuals to their regions. One of those ways is through youth sports tournaments and other types of sports tourism.

"I love Traverse City, always have ...my husband and I always said we would retire there if we could." (Sault St. Marie, Michigan)

As already noted, the parents of children involved in travel sports constitute the type of talent that can help build a regional economy. Of 582 survey respondents who listed a profession, 28 are engineers, 22 are IT professionals, 21 are CPAs or other accountants, 17 are business owners, 17 are

Registered Nurses (and 13 more are other types of skilled nurses) and 12 are MDs. Among these numbers are an energy economist, a telemetry technician, a mainframe systems analyst and hundreds of other skilled professionals, managers and entrepreneurs.

These two youth tournaments do serve as an important point of introduction for the region as well as a reminder to those who have already formed a positive impression of the region. As one respondent notes, “We LOVE the Traverse City area, we have several friends that live in the area, my business has several customers in the area and we visit quite often. We are looking to possibly move to the area in the next 5-10 years.” (Holland, MI – Cherry Capital Cup)

In fact, 14 percent of those who have visited the area during the tournaments are considering relocating to the area permanently based on the experiences they had.

## Expanding Regional Amenities

In addition to bringing direct tourism dollars, serving as gateway experiences to promote the region and build long term tourism revenue, and attracting talent, youth tournaments allow for more recreation activities for those who live in the region.

Investments in fields, courts and other infrastructure provide places for area youth to play year round. Children from the Traverse City region who participate in youth tournaments are able to experience a level of competitive play that would otherwise be unavailable. In the case of Traverse Bay Area Youth Soccer, the Cherry Capital Cup and one other tournament held in the fall both provide revenue that allows the organization to subsidize programming and scholarships for more than 1,000 area youths.

Many of the benefits of youth sports tournaments extend to children and adults in their own communities. In one small town in Louisiana, the number of children participating in soccer and other field sports has doubled in as little as two years. As Jeff Wellborn, President of the Caddo-Bossier Soccer Association notes, *“Our city and its citizens really support these tournaments. They see them as a quality of life benefit. Not only does it bring more people to the area but it also provides those in the community opportunities to engage in soccer and other sports on those fields.”*

*It all starts with a well run tournament...my advice to other communities...have all your tournament ducks in a row.*

Micheal Dizer – Midland,  
Michigan Soccer Club

How should decision makers within a region best leverage the potential of youth sports tournaments? The following best practices were accumulated from survey responses, best practice interviews with tournament organizers and community leaders in other regions and a general literature search.

---

### **1. Improve the Tournament Experience**

Overall satisfaction with the two Traverse City tournaments among visitors is relatively high at 7.9 (on a 0 to 10 scale). Whether positive or negative, the core tournament experience appeared to be the key determinant of whether or not participants will return to the region.

As Michael Dizer of the Midland, Michigan Soccer Club advises, *“It all starts with a well run tournament. Although visitors may have other experiences when they are out and about in our city, the main purpose of their visit is the tournament. If that’s not in order, then the entire experience is tainted. My advice to other communities trying to break into large scale youth athletic tournaments would be to have all your tournament ducks in a row. That means having an easy and hassle free registration process, well trained referees, games that start on time, fields in good condition, available food and other amenities, etc.”*



Parent comments show that the following attributes of a tournament are central to a positive tournament experience:

- Clear, easy to understand registration processes, check in processes and tournament communications
- Easy access to the fields and parking
- Excellent field conditions
- Well-trained volunteer and referee staff
- Well-spaced games that allow for travel and rest time
- An appropriate level of competitiveness for teams of a given ability level
- Availability of healthful concessions at all times of the day during the tournament
- Merchandise for sale throughout the tournament including t-shirts and sports equipment

Working to ensure that these details are addressed will create loyalty to a given tournament, encouraging given travel teams to return year after year.

A particular point of focus for tournaments held at the Keystone Recreation Complex should be traffic flow. Thousands of visitors pass through a single entrance and exit. Some visitors report waits of up to 40 minutes to leave the complex, a definite drawback if a priority is to have visitors frequent regional amenities and destinations.

---

## **2. Improve the Regional Experience**

Tournament participants want to be able to find accommodations that are pleasant and relatively close to the fields. When they go out to eat or shop, they want to have their needs met. In the case of the Traverse City tournaments, there is some room for improvement in both areas.

Finding a hotel/motel within a reasonable distance of playing fields is the chief complaint. 74 percent of out-of-town visitors

stayed in a hotel, motel or B&B during their visits. Of these, approximately 21 percent stayed outside of the Traverse City area in hotels as far away as Gaylord and Cadillac.

The following visitor comments show the level of frustration over local accommodations options, as well as the impact these frustrations will have on future decisions to visit the region.

*“We would not recommend our hotel. We were not able to find a hotel in Traverse City for a reasonable price. Driving the hour and half each way to go to a poor quality hotel was frustrating.”* (Madison, Wisconsin – Cherry Bomb Lacrosse)

*“Traverse City was a great destination for a lacrosse tournament. Unfortunately it is a long drive and there is a lack of hotels in Traverse City....”* (Illinois – Cherry Bomb Lacrosse)

To be sure, it is a challenge to accommodate thousands of athletes and their families during a summer weekend in a vacation destination. However, given the importance of these tournaments as local engines of economic growth, it appears critical for tournament directors and others within the hospitality community to work creatively to expand the number of available options.

It is critical for tournament directors and other within the hospitality community to work creatively to expand the number of available options (for accommodations)

These might include the following options:

- Identifying alternative lodgings:
  - College dormitories
  - Camps/Cabins
  - Local rental homes
- Recruiting “host families” for some athletes who are late to reserve accommodations
- Identifying hotels to recommend in areas adjacent to the Traverse City Convention and Visitors Bureau once the close-in rooms within the Traverse City CVB are taken

Beyond issues with accommodations, some tournament participants report visiting area restaurants that ran out of key menu items during the tournament weekend. Increased awareness and participation by the business community would help to mitigate this problem.

---

### **3. Welcome and Engage Tournament Attendees**

As has been shown, youth athletic tournaments like the Cherry Bomb Lacrosse and Cherry Capital Cup have the potential to introduce new visitors to a region, giving an opportunity to showcase the best of what a region has to offer to a group of visitors who may not have thought about visiting the region otherwise.

Some tournament visitors confused about or unaware of regional amenities and attractions

*“Didn’t have enough information to explore and team had our team had us an hour away in a hotel so there was not enough time to explore...”*  
(Cherry Bomb Lacrosse)

Many tournament visitors find their way on their own to parks, restaurants, downtown retailers and other area attractions. However, there were many others that wanted to participate in activities outside the tournament but had a difficult time finding their way for one reason or another. The following comments are illustrative.

*“Too difficult to get around the downtown area. There were signs pointing out different areas but if you are from out of town you don't know what the signs mean.”* (Michigan - Cherry Capital Cup)

*“Besides beaches, boat rides and parks, they didn't have a lot that interested us. We wanted to go to forest hiking, but couldn't find info on them.”* (Madison, Wisconsin – Cherry Bomb Lacrosse)

*“It just seemed like there wasn’t a whole lot of entertainment for my family.”* (Wisconsin – Cherry Bomb Lacrosse)

In addition to being confused about or unaware of regional amenities and attractions, some tournament participants did not feel particularly welcome in the Traverse City area. As a resident of Byron City, Michigan expressed it, *“The area is beautiful...especially this time of year. However, we've found the local people to be quite rude and not real friendly.”* Another visitor from Michigan’s upper peninsula notes, *“The only one negative is that SOME locals are a bit stuffy. They need to realize that tourism is TC's bread and butter and should treat out of towners spending their hard earned money there better.”*

Some approaches (several adapted from other communities running similar tournaments) to both give participants a sense of welcome and engage them with the region are as follows:

1. Provide an introduction to the region at the time of registration - email or mail brochures, maps, etc.
2. Solicit expanded business sponsorship, so participants can gain a sense of business support and so that businesses can make themselves visible to attendees
3. Ensure that local businesses and local citizens are aware of tournaments and are cognizant of when they will occur
4. Use public signage and light pole banners to acknowledge tournaments and welcome visitors
5. Provide orientation materials, including maps, brochures and other resources at the time of registration and throughout the tournament
6. Create a welcome event in downtown Traverse City
7. Consider public transit options to loop visitors from fields to commerce centers and downtown areas
8. Employ a tournament concierge who can serve as an information source for tournament attendees throughout their stay

Pursuing these or similar approaches will both give visitors a sense of welcome and maximize the extent to which tournaments can serve as gateway experiences.

#### 4. Introduce More Tournaments

As this analysis has shown, youth athletic tournaments can produce profound economic benefits to regional economies. While there is a limit to the number of tournaments that can be hosted within a given sport, there are many other youth team sports that do not yet have tournaments within the Traverse City area.

There are opportunities in almost all areas of athletics including more traditional sports such as baseball, softball, hockey, basketball, volleyball, etc., as well as opportunities for emerging and lesser known sports including field hockey, rugby, ultimate frisbee and many others.

The elements of a youth athletic tournament that seem to make it particularly effective as a generator of economic activity for a community such as Traverse City are as follows:

- Multiple days of competition
- Existing regional leagues with “travel” or “select” divisions nearby
- A “moderate” level of competitiveness that attracts travel teams but is not restricted to the regional/national elite
- Sufficient assets (e.g. fields or courts) to provide a positive tournament experience
- Sufficient regional amenities and natural beauty to provide a positive regional experience

Beyond youth sports, other types of non-athletic youth events such as music competitions, Odyssey of the Mind, robot competitions, etc., also can produce comparable economic benefits. The criteria listed above can apply to these youth events as well.

For some communities, the reputation as a sports and recreation destination can even become established as part of the regional “brand”

## 5. Enhance Regional Athletic Facilities

Cities that have caught on to the economic boom that youth sports tourism can provide for local communities have recognized the importance of creating the infrastructure, facilities and community support in order to be competitive with other regions trying to create their own youth tournaments. These communities typically invest in both outdoor fields as well as an indoor facility that can extend the sports tourism business through the winter months.

As Steve Huettel’s article in the Tampa Bay Times points out, communities with the biggest facilities in one location have the advantage. In the article, Kevin Smith, who oversees sports tourism for Pinellas County, said: "The trend is toward multi field complexes, whether it's for soccer, field hockey or Frisbee."

These facilities are important for the growth and sustainability of youth sports tournaments. They also serve as destinations for annual camps and clinics. What’s more, they provide residents, both youth and adults, with opportunities to participate in sports and other wellness activities.

For some communities, the reputation as a sports and recreation destination can even become established as part of the regional “brand.” Cities such as Greenville, S.C., with youth soccer and Chattanooga, Tenn., with softball have worked hard

to attract regional and national sports tournaments and championships that bring hundreds of thousands of dollars into those communities. Daytona Beach, Fla., and Las Vegas, Nev., host the National Youth Football Championships, which bring 10,000 young athletes and their families to these cities. Orlando, Fla., puts on a major youth soccer tournament, the Disney Classic, over New Year's weekend. (Wigh, 2011)

Investments in sports and recreation infrastructure have a tremendous potential to generate strong economic returns and to attract talent for economic growth.



This analysis has shown that youth athletic tournaments can be significant short- and long-term drivers of economic activity, as well as key vehicles by which regional economies can attract the talent they need to grow.

In order to fully realize the benefits of such tournaments, regional leaders should work to ensure the following:

- That tournament participants have a positive tournament experience, including easy access to fields and ample parking
- That visitors have sufficient access to accommodations
- That tournament visitors have a positive experience of the region, including a sense of welcome and information that allows them to fully explore regional amenities

With a sound approach to supporting and engaging tournament visitors, the region has a tremendous potential to expand the number of youth sports tournaments it hosts, to build out the sports and recreation infrastructure and to enhance the regional brand.

## References

- Chen, Chao-Chien and Hsu, Chich-Hsien. (2008) Sport Commissions and Amateur Sports Research of Case Study. *The Journal of Global Business Management*, Vol. 4 , 2.
- Florida, Richard. *The Rise of the Creative Class*. New York: Basic Books, 2002.
- Fullinwider, R. Institute for Philosophy & Public Policy. (2006) *Sports, Youth and Character: A Critical Survey*. CIRCLE working paper 44. The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE).
- Huettel, S. (2010, September 18). Youth sports means big dollars for local tourism. *Tampa Bay Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.tampabay.com/news/business/tourism/article1122302.ece>
- Kelly, Jack. (2007). Looking to sports for development dollars. *American City and County*, 115.
- Kurtzman, J. (2005). Economic Impact: Sport tourism and the city. *Journal of Sport Tourism*, Vol. 10, No. 1, pp. 15-21.
- McGovern, Brendan. *The Impact of Youth Sporting Events on the Local Economy*. The Catalysts for Intellectual Capital 2012. College of Community & Public Affairs Binghamton University. Retrieved from [www.cic2020.org/FinalPapers/paperbrendan.doc](http://www.cic2020.org/FinalPapers/paperbrendan.doc) on May 21, 2012.
- Wigh, R. (2011, February, 24). Economy and You: Youth sports pay economic dividends. *Savannah Morning News*. Retrieved from <http://savannahnow.com/exchange/2011-02-24/economy-and-you-youth-sports-pay-economic-dividends>

## Appendix: Detailed Calculations

### Tournament Attendance

Survey respondents (parents and parent/coaches) were asked to indicate the number of their children who played in the relevant tournament and the number of additional individuals who travelled with them to attend the tournaments. A weighted average\* of results, per youth athlete, is as follows.

Parent(s) per athlete	1.16
Sibling(s) – not playing in tournament	0.53
Grandparent(s)	0.20
Other adult(s)/friend(s)	0.23
Misc. other people	0.02
TOTAL	2.14

*\* Typical household groups actually consist of 4.64 individuals. This number must be reduced to account for an average of 1.2 competing children per group and the average of 0.28 “extra” youth tournament athletes who car pool with attending family groups.*

Study Source: Avenue ISR