

How the city seeks to score with sports events

Bed tax money is used to attract events, generate tourism and boost local businesses.

By [Max Marbut](#) | 12:00 a.m. January 10, 2025 | 2 Free Articles Remaining!



Ole Miss head coach Lane Kiffin hoists the trophy after his Rebels defeated the Duke Blue Devils 52-20 in the TaxSlayer Gator Bowl on Jan. 2 at EverBank Stadium.

Provided by the Gator Bowl

BUSINESS

Share

Staging a sports event to stimulate business and inject more cash flow into the local economy is not a new concept in Jacksonville.

The strategy was first implemented in late 1945 when a group of business owners decided it was too quiet in Jacksonville after the holidays. In about a week, they put together the first Gator Bowl game at Fairfield Stadium, on the site of today's EverBank Stadium.



The Wake Forest University Demon Deacons defeated the University of South Carolina Gamecocks 26-14 in front of about 7,300 fans – not enough for the organizers to break even on the game.

As the years went by, attendance increased along with the game's national stature. It now brings thousands of football fans to Jacksonville who reserve hotel rooms, fill the restaurants and other entertainment facilities and stimulate the local economy for two or three days around Jan. 1 each year.



Clemson fans in orange and Kentucky fans in blue attended the TaxSlayer Gator Bowl on Dec. 29, 2023, at EverBank Stadium. Clemson won the game, 38-35.

Provided by the Gator Bowl

Visit Jacksonville, the destination marketing organization for Jacksonville and the Beaches, calculated the economic impact of the Dec. 29, 2023, TaxSlayer Gator Bowl, the most recent game for which figures are available, to be nearly \$9.5 million.

That included spending for hotel rooms, food and beverages, retail sales, transportation, recreation activities and business services.

In the game, Clemson defeated Kentucky, 38-35.

Nearly 21,000 hotel room nights were sold that year and \$463,224 in taxes were collected, according to Visit Jacksonville.

The economic impact of the 80th TaxSlayer Gator Bowl game, played Jan. 2, may have brought more money into the community.

"We are expecting \$12 million or \$14 million this year," Gator Bowl Sports President and CEO Greg McGarity said Dec. 30. In the game, Ole Miss defeated Duke, 52-20.

In addition to the direct impact of fans who attend the game, profits from the event are invested in the community through charitable donations that totaled about \$275,000 from proceeds from the 2023 game, McGarity said.

The city and sports business investment

The city of Jacksonville, through the Duval County Tourist Development Council, invests millions of dollars into grants for events and for marketing Jacksonville and the Beaches as a destination.

The funds are derived from the 6% tax on hotel rooms collected in Duval County.



Gator Bowl Sports President and CEO Greg McGarity

Two-thirds of the collection will finance the Stadium of the Future renovation at EverBank Stadium.

Gator Bowl impact

Economic impact for the Dec. 29, 2023, TaxSlayer Gator Bowl featuring Clemson University vs. the University of Kentucky:

| Category | Impact |
|-------------------|--------------------|
| Lodging | \$2,559,101 |
| Transportation | \$801,934 |
| Food & beverage | \$2,486,251 |
| Retail | \$1,698,237 |
| Recreation | \$1,846,993 |
| Business services | \$71,198 |
| Total | \$9,463,714 |

Source: Visit Jacksonville

Foundation.

In December, Samantha Vance was named the foundation's first executive director.

Before joining the foundation, Vance was CEO of Impact Core Group, a Tallahassee-based management consulting firm that works with nonprofits, corporations and government in sports and entertainment.

The remaining one-third is directed to the TDC to fund Visit Jacksonville and its business, convention and leisure travel marketing programs, provide the grants and maintain reserve funds.

In fiscal year 2023-24, TDC's share of the bed tax revenue was \$10.4 million.

Many of the grants approved for 2024 events and approved in 2024 for 2025 are related to sports.

That includes multiyear grants for signature events including the TaxSlayer Gator Bowl and The Players Championship and single-year grants for high school and collegiate athletic championships, surfing competitions, a youth volleyball tournament and a Professional Bull Riders Series national event.

Grants paid in 2024 and approved for 2025 events total nearly \$1.7 million and are the maximum amount awards based on documented room night sales associated with each event.

The future of sports and business

In early 2024, Visit Jacksonville, the Duval County TDC and the city of Jacksonville, in partnership with local collegiate and professional sports organizations, launched the private nonprofit Jacksonville Sports



Samantha Vance is the first executive director of the nonprofit Jacksonville Sports Foundation.

She founded and now is board president of Ladies Learning to Lead, a statewide nonprofit that helps young women with college and career preparation and she a former member of the Florida Commission on the Status of Women.

Vance received a bachelor's in political science with a minor in public administration from Florida State University and a Certificate in Nonprofit Executive Management from the FSU Jim Moran Institute.

Vance is responsible for overseeing the administration, programs, financials and strategic plan of the organization and will recruit corporate sponsors, build community support and attract and bid to bring new events to Northeast Florida.

"We will work on every level to bring sport events to Jacksonville and elevate Jacksonville into a vibrant hub for sports tourism," Vance said.



Michael Corrigan

Visit Jacksonville CEO Michael Corrigan chairs the Jacksonville Sports Foundation and says it is succeeding in its first year in operation.

"Visit Jacksonville and many other entities throughout the destination have been focused on sports tourism for years. After years of laying the groundwork and building relationships with sports organizers like the NCAA and large-scale event promoters, our work is paying off," Corrigan said.

"We are focused on events that will work best for Jacksonville and fit comfortably in our facilities."

New events in pipeline



The inaugural Jacksonville Sports Foundation Invitational featuring the University of Florida and the University of South Florida men's basketball teams was in December at VyStar Veterans Memorial Arena with nearly 6,000 fans in attendance. The game was televised on the SEC Network showcasing Jacksonville.

In October 2024, the NCAA awarded the University of North Florida the 2027 NCAA Division I Men's & Women's Outdoor Track & Field First Round Championships.

Edward Waters University was awarded the 2027 NCAA Division II Women's Volleyball Championship and the 2028 NCAA Division II Men's and Women's Outdoor Track & Field Championships.

Sports grants

Duval County Tourist Development Council sports-related grants totaled \$1.67 million in 2024-25.

| Event | Grant |
|---|-----------|
| TaxSlayer Gator Bowl | \$330,000 |
| The Players Championship | \$300,000 |
| Constellation Furyk & Friends | \$40,000 |
| UNF track and stadium infrastructure upgrade | \$150,000 |
| Super Girl Surf Pro Series | \$240,000 |
| Amateur Athletic Union Championships | \$60,000 |
| Jacksonville College Baseball Classic | \$40,000 |
| Spartan U.S. Championship | \$80,000 |
| Tropical Ice Challenge Volleyball Tournament | \$70,000 |
| Donna Marathon Weekend | \$70,000 |
| Jacksonville College Baseball Classic | \$50,000 |
| Michelob Ultra PBR Jacksonville | \$80,000 |
| AAU Track and Field National & Club Championships | \$80,000 |
| College Hockey National Championship | \$80,000 |

Source: Duval County Tourist Development Council

Jacksonville will host the AAU College Ice Hockey National Championships in March 2025, USA Gymnastics Trampoline and Tumbling Elite Challenge in May 2025, USA Surfing Prime Series in March 2025 and ESA Southeastern Regional Championship Surfing in April 2025.

"Not only do we have state-of-the-art facilities at several local colleges, Hodges Stadium at UNF, for example, we also have natural spaces like the Beaches for surfing, the river for rowing and triathlon, New World Sports Complex for cross country and large parks with open spaces," Corrigan said.

"We have great professional sports venues like EverBank Stadium and VyStar Veterans Memorial Arena. Even The Igloo is hosting hockey tournaments. All of it is coming together now to bring sporting events that will be held across Jacksonville," he said.

The foundation's strategy is built on four pillars, Vance said: catalyzing economic development, fostering inclusion and diversity, enhancing community well-being and collaborating with stakeholders.

The foundation plans to convene a sports community leadership roundtable comprising representatives of the city's professional and collegiate sports, along with community interest groups.

"We can help the teams to collaborate more. We can help each other fill more seats at all the games. Sports has the ability to create community impact that goes beyond room nights," Vance said.

"Everyone knows that we have the Jacksonville Jaguars, but we have sports events that not everyone knows about. We can benefit visitors and residents."

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