

NEWS



Jacksonville University's Donovan Rivers (33) roars in celebration following the Dolphins' win over Eastern Kentucky inside Swisher Gymnasium during a 2025 ASUN Basketball Tournament quarterfinal on Monday, March 3, 2025. | Submitted, Jacksonville University Athletics

ASUN college basketball tournaments move to Jacksonville

By Will Brown

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The 12-team Atlantic Sun Conference will move its men's and women's college basketball tournaments to Jacksonville's VyStar Veterans Memorial Arena.

The conference, known as ASUN, announced Wednesday the Jacksonville games will begin in 2026, with the announcement coming less than a year after the ASUN moved its headquarters from Atlanta to Jacksonville.



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The conference has members in seven states. Though there are campuses in larger media markets, like Charlotte and Nashville, Jacksonville is the only city in the ASUN with multiple members. Jacksonville University joined in 1998, and UNF arrived in 2005.





Jacksonville University's Zimi Nwokeji dunks over Eastern Kentucky's Montavious Myrick during the ASUN Tournament quarterfinals on March 3, 2025, at Swisher Gymnasium. | Submitted, Jacksonville University Athletics

ASUN Commissioner Jeff Bacon projects that holding 22 games over seven days in March will generate \$10 million in local economic impact.

“The decision to move the tournaments to Jacksonville represents a significant milestone for the ASUN and underscores the city’s growing reputation as a premier destination for major sporting events,” Bacon said in a statement.



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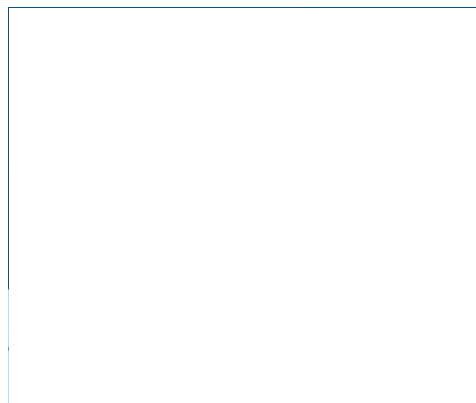
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“The process over the past year has been exhaustive, and I have been tremendously impressed by the volume of interest in our tournaments from so many incredible cities and venues. In the end, Jacksonville’s passion for sports, alongside its outstanding facilities and hospitality, will create an incredible experience for our student-athletes and fans,” he said.

Jacksonville City Council member Ron Salem thinks it’s a natural fit for the conference to hold the tournament where it is headquartered.



Last month, Salem co-introduced a bill ([2025-0140](#)) that would appropriate \$100,000 annually in contingency funds to the ASUN to hold the single-site basketball championship. A public hearing on the ordinance will be part of the March 11 Jacksonville City Council meeting.

“I think March Madness is a national event. I think its exciting that Jacksonville can be a participant in that, where the winner of that is going to the NCAA basketball tournament,” Salem told *Jacksonville Today* on Wednesday.

JU’s men’s team has hoop dreams of the NCAA Tournament. The Dolphins (18-12) play in the ASUN semifinals on Thursday night in Florence, Ala. JU beat Eastern Kentucky 78-67 in the ASUN quarterfinals on Monday night in Swisher Gymnasium in front of 1,000 people.

“Our students, our faculty, they were unbelievable,” JU men’s basketball coach Jordan Mincy said after Monday’s win. “When you talk about the atmosphere of the game, it was a very cool game to be a part of.”



Jacksonville University men’s basketball coach Jordan Mincy speaks with the Dolphins during a timeout of their 2025 ASUN Tournament quarterfinal win over Eastern Kentucky on Monday, March 3, 2025. | Submitted, Jacksonville University Athletics.



If the JU men can win two more games – both of which will be on the road – they will be back in the NCAA Tournament for the first time since 1986.

Meanwhile, JU's women (14-16) will begin their quest for a conference championship on Friday in Conway, Ark., in the first round of the ASUN Women's Tournament.

The ASUN Tournament winner automatically earns a berth in the NCAA Tournament. The conference famously received national attention when the Florida Gulf Coast men's program advanced to the Sweet 16 in 2012.

Jacksonville last hosted an ASUN Tournament in 2021, when it hosted the men's championship. At that time all seven games were played either at Swisher or UNF Arena.

Bacon said holding the tournament at a single site in Downtown Jacksonville will provide an unforgettable experience for the student-athletes.

Jacksonville Mayor Donna Deegan expressed pride that her hometown will have an opportunity to be highlighted during Championship Week.

"The ASUN Tournaments are another shining example of Jacksonville's fast growth and why we're a fantastic place to visit," Deegan said in a statement. "I am grateful for the significant economic impact that will be brought to our community, and to all those who worked so hard to bring it here."



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Will Brown is a corps member with Report for America, a national service program that places journalists into local newsrooms. He previously reported for the *Jacksonville Business Journal*. And before that, he spent more than a decade as a sports reporter at *The St. Augustine Record*, *Victoria (Texas) Advocate* and the *Tallahassee Democrat*. Reach him at will@jaxtoday.org.

