

Badger State Games will end after quarter century run

Wisconsin Sports Development Corporation developing new mission

(MADISON, WI) After 25 years of providing an Olympic-style sports experience for thousands of Wisconsin athletes, the Badger State Games will come to an end. Both the Winter and Summer Games will be affected. Wisconsin Sports Development Corporation (WSDC) managed the Badger State Games, and over the past year, its Board of Directors and management team conducted a thorough strategic assessment of WSDC's mission, business model, and the present landscape of organized athletics and events.

“In the final analysis, the Board and management concluded that WSDC has successfully accomplished its mission: for 25 years the Badger State Games filled a significant void in athletics in the State of Wisconsin by conducting a large portfolio of seasonal, amateur athletic events in an Olympic-style format. That void does not exist in the present environment, because the marketplace has become saturated with other athletic organizations and events,” said Dan Doyle, president and chief executive officer of WSDC. “It is time to yield to market forces beyond our control and explore new ways to serve the sports marketplace for the benefit of the State of Wisconsin,” added Doyle.

During the last 25 years, WSDC estimates in excess of 350,000 athletes participated in the Games; the Games served athletes of all ages from 3 to 85; over 30,000 medals were awarded; and over \$85 million of economic benefit was realized by our host venues and communities.

“We are very proud of our accomplishments over the years. The Games have supported dozens of sports and have fostered an environment in Wisconsin where athletes now have a wealth of opportunities to participate and compete,” said Doyle.

“Our entire organization expresses sincere appreciation and gratitude to our sponsors, host venues, and athletes for the privilege of conducting the Badger State Games and to the thousands of commissioners, volunteers, and spectators, without whose assistance and presence the Games would not have been possible,” he added.

The Wisconsin Sports Development Corporation (WSDC) says several factors led to the decision:

- Participation in the Games has dropped significantly over time, primarily due to the explosive growth in organized athletics and events, which have created an intense competition for athletes' time and dollars.
- The economic recession severely impacted retention of sponsorships necessary to fund the Games.
- In the face of significantly decreased participation levels, the business model for the Games is no longer viable.

Doyle says it is possible the Games could be revived in a different format sometime in the future. “Both the Wausau and Fox Cities communities, which are the recent host

venues for the Games, are receptive to continuing a portion of the Winter and Summer Games, respectively,” he said.

The Wausau/Central Wisconsin Convention and Visitors Bureau and its Sports Authority intend to build on the legacy of the Games by working with local groups to continue a number of events in a new format. “We have great facilities, volunteers, and organizers and plan to continue the spirit of the Winter Games in the Wausau area,” said Darien Schaefer, Executive Director of the Convention and Visitors Bureau.

Similar efforts are in the making in the Fox Cities. “It has been an honor to host the Games over the past three years. Even though the Games as we know them are coming to an end, we are excited to continue working with local event organizers that wish to carry on the tradition of these fine competitions,” said Lynn Peters, Executive Director, Fox Cities Convention and Visitors Bureau.

Turning to the future, Doyle said WSDC is researching the viability of a new mission that would transform the organization into a statewide sports authority responsible for facilitating sports-related tourism with the travel community and generating related economic benefits in Wisconsin. “We are in the very early stages of studying the idea and plan to conduct a proof of concept over the next three to six months,” commented Doyle.

Because WSDC will no longer conduct and operate events, efforts are underway to sell or transfer ownership of the following WSDC events so they can be continued into the future:

- *Paddle and Portage*: This annual canoe race is a great Madison tradition beginning at James Madison Park with a 1.5 mile paddle across Lake Mendota, then a one mile portage over the central isthmus and a final 1.5 mile paddle across Lake Monona to Olin-Turville Park.
- *Wisconsin Athletic Hall of Fame*: The Hall is located in Milwaukee and was created in 1951 to honor outstanding Wisconsin sports figures.
- *Lighten Up Wisconsin*: This health and wellness program challenges participants to track exercise routines and food consumption to achieve weight-loss goals. This program will be transferred to Clarity Technology Group, of Madison, Wisconsin, and will be continued under its ownership.

The *Shape Up Badger Kids* event will be deferred indefinitely. The one-day event has occurred in Wisconsin’s K-8 schools each May in conjunction with National Health and Fitness Week.
