



(Above) Hofstra University Stadium, Hempstead, NY

(Left) Hofstra University-Mack Arena, Hempstead, NY

## Long Island, New York – Carrying On a Long Sports Tradition

By Jennifer Alten

The name “Long Island” refers to the area’s geography, obviously, but it also works well to describe its history of sports. While the region might have gotten on the map of sporting event planners when it hosted the Goodwill Games in 1998, or even the yearly Belmont Stakes, Long Island has a rich sports heritage – and an even brighter future.

With abundant private and public facilities, Long Island offers top-notch indoor and outdoor sporting facilities. Throw in easy transportation, quick proximity from New York City and most of the Eastern Seaboard, along with family-friendly extracurricular activities, and it’s no wonder that Long Island draws athletes of all ages and calibers, from youth sports to Olympians.

### Drawing a Wide Variety of Sports

Thanks to the avid sporting culture and plentiful facilities, Long Island draws track and field events, football, baseball, soccer, lacrosse, golf and swimming, to name a few.

“For just a small sampling of the events Long Island has hosted, we’ve had NCAA lacrosse tournaments, NCAA swimming and diving championships, the

ECAC Men’s Tennis Invitational and the U.S. Open Golf Tournament three times in the past seven years,” said Jennifer Rothman, sales manager at the Long Island CVB and Sports Commission. “Long Island has so much to offer anyone looking to organize an event.”

### Easily Accessible and Family Friendly

Long Island is both easy to get to and full of fun activities for the whole family, a combination that makes the area a hit with athletes and their families.

The region is serviced by three airports, the international hub JFK, LaGuardia and the regional McArthur airport on Long Island. The Long Island Expressway’s high occupancy vehicle (HOV) lanes make for a quick trip to most points on the island by car.

“Plus, if you’re coming by plane, you can take the Air Train from JFK to the Long Island Railroad,” said Rothman. “Or if you’re coming from Connecticut, there are several ferries to bring you here.”

Then once athletes and their families are on Long Island, they’ll find a multitude of activities and attractions once their games are over. Depending on their interests, they might enjoy a water park, an amusement park, batting cages, mini golf and numerous restaurants.

“We’re kid-friendly. There is so much to do here. Virtually every town has a bowling alley and a movie theater. It’s a huge draw,” said Rothman.

Jose Lopez, Nassau County’s Commission of Parks, Recreation and Museums agrees. “We’re a hop, skip and jump from NYC. We’re centrally located. Plus, we’re less than 10 miles away from our beaches. It’s all right here at your fingertips.”

But what is bringing athletes of all ages to Long Island in the first place is the sporting facilities. With a mix of public and private venues, such as the facilities connected to Hofstra and Stony Brook Universities, sports event planners will easily find the right place for their event. Some of the venues include:

### Eisenhower Park

This 930-acre park, located in East Meadow, New York offers a gamut of athletic and family activities, which include dozens of athletic fields and courts, a golf course and the Nassau County Aquatic Center, a premier swimming facility. It also features an outdoor theater, playgrounds, fitness trails and more. The athletic fields include 17 baseball fields, four soccer

fields and three football fields.

"Eisenhower Park is our crown jewel," said Lopez. "It's larger than New York City's Central Park. It can hold up to 10,000 people at events."

The 1998 Goodwill Games were held there, during which runner Michael Johnson set a world record on the track. It hosts Division I lacrosse games, such as Duke versus Cornell, because the region is home to so many top-ranked college lacrosse players.

Eisenhower Park also features three golf courses, which has hosted the Men's Senior PGA tournament for the past three years.

Plus, the park will host the Gaelic Games in July, 2010. The event, which is expected to draw more than 4,000 people, showcases Irish football and hurling, a fast-paced sport played with sticks called hurleys and a ball called a sliotar.

### **The Nassau County Aquatic Center**

Part of Eisenhower Park, the Nassau County Aquatic Center is frequently cited as one of the top swimming facilities in the U.S. It often hosts premier swimming and diving competitions, drawing luminaries such as Olympian Michael Phelps.

The 80,000-square-foot center includes a "stretch" 50-meter pool that is 68 meters long, with three movable bulkheads. It also features a diving well with a 10-meter competition diving tower – the only one in the New York metropolitan area – and 1- and 3-meter springboards.

### **Mitchel Athletic Center**

This 49-acre complex in Uniondale, New York, hosts numerous high school, collegiate and professional athletic events. It includes a 10,000-seat track and field stadium with nine lanes, along with an oval field suitable for football, soccer, lacrosse, field hockey and rugby, replete with new artificial turf.

Mitchel is home to the Long Island Lizards, a professional lacrosse team and the Long Island Fury amateur soccer.

### **Stony Brook University**

Stony Brook University hosts numerous football, lacrosse and field hockey tournaments, both high school and collegiate. One of the draws is its Kenneth P. LaValle Stadium.

The four-level stadium, which costs an



Mitchel Athletic Complex, Uniondale, NY



Nassau County Aquatic Center, East Meadow, NY

estimated \$22 million to build in 2002, has a seating capacity of approximately 8,200. It has seating on three sides, a press box and renovated locker rooms, along with new field turf. This past October, the stadium unveiled a new LED video display video board that measures nearly 20 feet high by 50 feet wide along with two new scoreboards.

"The new video display and scoreboards are exciting additions to LaValle stadium," said Jim Fiore, Stony Brook University director of athletics. "Our fans' experience will be greatly enhanced as a result of these upgrades to one of the top athletics venues in the Northeast."

The stadium has hosted a multitude of high-level events and championships and has served as a practice site for the final cut of the USA Men's Lacrosse national team. It will host the 2010 NCAA Men's Lacrosse Quarterfinals as well as 2011 NCAA Women's Lacrosse National Championship.

### **Hofstra University**

Hofstra's James M. Shuart Stadium is the largest outdoor sports and entertainment complex on Long Island with 13,000 seats. It features network-quality lighting system for television broadcasts, along with Field Turf.

Shuart Stadium has become a focal point of the Long Island sports scene in recent years, serving as the home of the NCAA Division I Men's Lacrosse Championship Quarterfinals, the NCAA Women's Lacrosse Championship, numerous conference championships, the Hero's Bowl and various high school championship games. The stadium also serves as a home for the Long Island Rough Riders of professional soccer's A-League.

"From our media press boxes to ability to televise to our suites, we have all-encompassing facilities that meet the needs of fans, athletes and events managers," said Jack Hayes, director of athletics at Hofstra. "Another important draw is our accessibility," Hayes continued. "We're half an hour from New York City and right off the highway."

Plus, Hofstra has an indoor practice bubble, which is ideal for practicing in inclement weather.

"The word is out in many circles and people are very interested in bringing events to Hofstra," said Hayes.

### **Additional Venues Also Draw Crowds**

Other venues on Long Island include the Nassau Veterans Memorial Coliseum in Uniondale. Home of hockey's New York Islanders, the Coliseum seats 18,000 and hosted the U.S. Wrestling Championship in 2006.

The Baseball Heaven Sports Complex in Yaphank, New York boasts of seven synthetic baseball fields. It has the amenities of a professional ballpark, including below-grade dugouts, connecting bullpens, warning tracks, a P.A. system and electronic scoreboards.

The Pratt Center at Long Island University's C.W. Post Campus in Brookville is a 77-square-foot facility that seats 3,000 with three full-sized basketball/volleyball courts, an elevated Mondo-X indoor jogging track and an eight-lane pool. Plus, the outdoor Hickox Field at C.W. Post hosts field hockey, lacrosse and football events and seats 5,000.

"On Long Island, we have everything athletes of every age and level could want – from our easily accessible location to affordable hotel options to incredible facilities, not to mention all the fun to be had," said Rothman. "It's simply a place not to be missed." **SOM**