

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Five College Basketball Teams Will Compete In USVI's Newly Announced Summer Paradise Jam; Games Start In August

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ST. THOMAS -- The U.S. Virgin Islands is now an approved destination to host National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division I teams and, in addition to hosting basketball, volleyball and swimming events, the territory can facilitate the participation of soccer, lacrosse and other NCAA-sponsored sports during the summer months.

The approved games are a new partnership with Basketball Travelers Inc., which runs the successful Paradise Jam tournament in the territory, and will be called summer Paradise Jam, according to Nels J. Hawkinson, Basketball Travelers Inc. executive

director.

The approval was hailed by Governor Kenneth Mapp at a Government House press conference here on Friday as a huge boost for sports tourism opportunities in the territory. Mr. Mapp was accompanied by Dept. of Tourism Beverly (D.O.T.) Commissioner Nicholson-Doty; Sports, Parks and Recreation Commissioner Pedro Cruz; and Assistant Commissioner of Sports, Parks and Recreation Calvert White.

"With all 24 NCAA Division I sports teams now able to travel to the U.S. Virgin Islands for summer tours, we look forward to being part of the growth of the Paradise Jam competitions and to the possibility of hosting other NCAA sporting events," Mr. Mapp said, recognizing the potential for a significant positive impact on the territory's economy. "This is an amazing opportunity to expand our sports tourism portfolio and our facilities."

The announcement follows successful lobbying that saw the territory, in the case of NCAA, being viewed as a foreign destination, said Mr. Hawkinson. Previously, the territory was viewed as part of the U.S. (which it is), but the NCAA teams are allowed to travel and play outside the U.S. once every four years, and in order to qualify, it was important that the USVI be deemed a foreign destination.

The USVI and Basketball Travelers have partnered to bring five men's college basketball teams to the territory as early as this August now that the USVI has been approved as an international or foreign tour destination for Division I colleges across the United States. Mr. Hawkinson, whose Basketball Travelers organizes both domestic and international basketball competitions for college and high school teams, said there are 340 Division I universities in the United States, each with approximately 25 sports with 50 potential in now visit the islands.



From left to right: : Assistant Commissioner of

Sports, Parks and Recreation Calvert White; Commissioner of Sports, Parks and Recreation Pedro Cruz; Governor Kenneth E. Mapp; Tourism Commissioner Beverly Nicholson-Doty; and Basketball Travelers Executive Director Nels J. Hawkinson at Friday morning's news conference at Government House on St. Thomas.

"We're very excited to build on the success we've had for the last 18 years with Paradise Jam and to bring additional teams here," he said. "We're looking forward to this new initiative and continuing our great partnership with the U.S. Virgin Islands and its people."

Currently visiting the U.S. Virgin Islands for the 50th time, Mr. Hawkinson said his love affair with the territory is still as strong as it was 20 years ago when he first visited on a

cruise ship. "That's what makes your islands. Everywhere I go [people] are friendly... and it's so wonderful to know that when we bring groups here that people are friendly and they understand basketball and sports."

Three U.S. Division I schools, James Madison University, the University of Northern Colorado and Vanderbilt University, will visit the territory this August for the Paradise Jam Summer Tours, along with Canada's Carleton University and Brock University.

"This partnership opens doors for new business in the summer and fall, with the potential to host more basketball teams and athletes in other areas," said Mrs. Nicholson-Doty, who also revealed that Paradise Jam has a 22:1 return on investment for the government, with one of its event filling 400 hotel rooms. Additionally, Paradise Jam -- through its basketball competitions in the fall -- produces \$2.4 million in direct economic impact and more than \$6 million in media exposure. "The event has a 22:1 return on investment for the U.S. Virgin Islands, so we are looking forward to this opportunity to have many more types of these sporting events as we build our sports tourism network," she said. Mrs. Nicholson-Doty added that D.O.T. has been hard at work developing marketing strategies specifically for college and university audiences.

The Paradise Jam Summer Tours, which allow visiting teams to experience the natural beauty of the USVI while playing competitive out-of-season games against international opponents, will feature basketball games on St. Thomas, and for the first time, on St. Croix at the Central High School gymnasium. Mr. Mapp said the gymnasium requires 15 sets of enhancements to be ready for the summer games, and that a company on St. Croix, whose identity Mr. Mapp did not reveal because the company wanted to make its own announcement, will donate all the material needed, while the government will provide labor.

In addition to the five teams traveling to the territory, the USVI National Team will compete in the summer tours, marking the first time in 15 years the national team will compete in the islands. The team's first faceoff will be the opening game of the Paradise Jam Summer Tours on August 13, on St. Croix against Vanderbilt University.

Mr. White, who is working directly on the initiative, said that in light of the unprecedented success of the Paradise Jam Basketball Tournament and the growth of the sports tourism market, the Department of Sports, Parks and Recreation looks forward to strengthening its partnership with D.O.T. and Basketball Travelers.