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## Paradise Jam Hits Midway Point With Men's Championship

Sports / **Published On November 26, 2019 04:07 AM /**

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According to the territory's top youth athletic official, the Paradise Jam college basketball tournament on St. Thomas will leave behind millions of visitor dollars and a wealth of goodwill between college sports fans and the U.S.V.I.

The tournament – at its mid-point with the men's University of Nevada win over Bowling Green Monday night – is expected to contribute more than \$2 million to the local economy when the games conclude Nov. 30. Paradise Jam women's tournament begins on Nov. 28 and ends on the 30.

This year, the tournament secured 4,000 room-nights in territory hotels and other accommodations, according to Commissioner Calvert White of the V.I. Department of Sports, Parks and Recreation.

“Paradise Jam is a definite boost to the economy,” Mr. White said. “When we talk about sports tourism in the territory, this is what we are talking about.”

Between advertising, flights in, hotel rooms and spending on-island, Paradise Jam is the cornerstone of the developing sports tourism industry. The college ball teams bring fans, friends, family.

By tournament’s end, more than 4,000 room-nights at hotels, resorts and other accommodations will have been booked, as have countless taxi and safari rides, rental cars, dinners and shopping excursions.

“Paradise Jam is the blue print for sports tourism in the Virgin Islands. We hope to continue to bring the events that will bring athletes and fans to the territory,” Mr. White said.

Mitchell Neaves, vice president for institutional advancement at UVI, said, "Our community is immersed in basketball this time of year. We have some of the most well coached college teams in America on our campus competing for a championship over the course of two weeks. There are few places in the country that have bragging rights that comes with hosting such an expansive roster of teams on their home court. Having 24 basketball teams in the Virgin Islands helps to broaden the exposure of our territory to the parents, students and alumni of these institutions. Basketball team family members spend a considerable amount of time and resources planning for their journey to our home."

He added, "For many, their arrival a few days ago was the first experience visiting the Virgin Islands or the Caribbean region, and we believe hosting a first-class basketball tournament on our campus will have a net positive outcome for our community. Games are being streamed live and fans posting to social media about their experiences on-island. We understand sports tourism is having an impact when we are unable to secure a reservation at a downtown restaurant on Championship Monday."

If you’ve paid attention, you know the road to the NCAA Tournament passes through the U.S. Virgin Islands. This year’s tournament featured teams that played in past year’s March Madness tournament.

The women’s tournament will get underway on Thursday, Nov. 28, and run until Saturday, Nov. 30. The teams include UT Arlington, University of Louisville, Oklahoma State University and University of Oregon. The teams playing in the Reef Division are Washington State University, Baylor University, Indiana University and University of South Carolina.

To mark its 20th anniversary in the Virgin Islands, Paradise Jam 2019 will be celebrated under the theme: “Community, Compassion and Courage.”