

# CITY OF CHAMPIONS

Fans flock to **Indianapolis**, where all things sports thrive.

BY GRAHAM FLASHNER

INDY SPORTS GUIDE

**As** a sports town, Indianapolis has long been known as the “Racing Capital of the World,” due in large part to the Indianapolis 500. But for avid fans, there’s a lot more to this city than speed racers. For one thing, its football team won the Super Bowl in 2007. For another, the city is home to the governing bodies of the NCAA, USA Gymnastics and USA Track & Field.

From NBA and WNBA basketball to Triple-A Minor League Baseball, Indianapolis offers a panoply of athletic choices—all part of a grand design by civic leaders to boost the city’s image.

“Sports was used as an economic strategy to bring more business to the city and give it a greater national identity,” says longtime sports journalist and Indy native Bill Benner.

As a result, he says, “Indianapolis is the most diverse sports city in America.”

Planning a visit? Here’s a go-to guide to some of the city’s best sports attractions. >>



# Indianapolis Motor Speedway

» The venerable racetrack will observe its centennial in 2009, and there's no race that conjures up heartland America like the Indianapolis 500, billed as the largest single-day sporting event in the world.

Benner calls it "a mind-boggling sensory experience of color, speed and 300,000 people, all in the same place." Historian Donald Davidson says, "It transcends motor sports. The only thing comparable to it is the Kentucky Derby."

The Indianapolis 500 started in 1911 (missing a few years during the World Wars), with 40 cars racing 500 miles on a surface paved with 3.2 million bricks. In 1961, the track was paved with asphalt; only a three-foot-wide strip of bricks across the start/finish line remains (hence the Speedway's affectionate nickname, The Brickyard).

Sara Fisher—who became the youngest female Indy

driver at age 19 in 2000—says, "It used to be more of a paced race. Now, there's a pressure to lead every lap. It's become a sprint."

In a race where open-wheeled cars can reach a dizzying 220 mph, Fisher says, "Your brain speeds up; decisions have to be made instantly. We cross the span of a football field in less than a second."

Fisher, who currently resides in the city, will try to become the first woman to win the Indy 500 when the 92nd running takes place on May 25. The winner will collect a \$2.5 million prize and, continuing a tradition begun in 1936, celebrate with a ceremonial glass of milk.

If you'd like your own spin around the track, the Speedway offers vicarious thrills.

The Indy Racing Experience, which runs during the summer, puts visitors in a special two-seat Indy race car handled by a professional driver. You'll don a racing suit and helmet and take three laps around the track at warp speeds. The cost: \$475.

Want to get behind the wheel yourself? Follow a certified instructor around the course. You won't be able to go as fast as Fisher, but you can





go up to 90 mph. The cost: \$399 for three laps.

Those seeking a slower-paced alternative can stop in at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway Hall of Fame across the track, where 75 gleaming vintage cars—including the yellow Marmon “Wasp” driven by 1911 winner Ray Harroun—are on display, along with early Formula One cars, stock cars and motorcycles. “It’s the most diversified collection of cars in the world,” Davidson says.

The Indy 500 isn’t the only big event on the city’s racing circuit: NASCAR fans can catch the Brickyard 400 on July 27, and motorcycle racing returns September 12-14 with the Red Bull MotoGP World Championship. On Labor Day Weekend, the Mac Tools U.S. Nationals drag-racing championship will be held at O’Reilly Raceway Park.



**If you can't satisfy  
your competitive sports  
drive in Indianapolis,  
you're not looking  
hard enough.**

Architect's rendering of Lucas Oil Stadium



## NFL and NCAA Action at **Lucas Oil Stadium**

» Football fans who haven't been able to get tickets to see the Indianapolis Colts can take heart: In September 2008, the football team will begin playing at the new Lucas Oil Stadium, a 70,000 seat, open-air venue with a retractable roof. Lucas Oil will replace the smaller RCA Dome, which will be demolished to make room for an expansion of the convention center.

“Finally, you don't have to ask people to go inside to watch football on beautiful fall days,” Benner says.

Designed for basketball, too, the new stadium will

become a prominent fixture in the annual NCAA hysteria known as March Madness. Lucas Oil will host the NCAA Men's Final Four in 2010 and the Women's Final Four in 2011.

The roughly \$700-million venue will offer wider concourses, state-of-the-art video scoreboards, and 183,000 square feet of exhibition space. It will also be connected via skybridge to the convention center and downtown hotels. While Colts fans may lament the loss of ear-splitting crowd noise in the dome—and the advantage it creates for the home team—the Lucas Oil roof will close in winter or inclement weather and the decibel level will rise once more.

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STADIUM RENDERING: INDIANA CONVENTION AND STADIUM BUILDING AUTHORITY

# High School History at the **Indiana Basketball Hall of Fame**

» If auto-racing is Indianapolis' cake, then basketball is the icing. The sport was brought to Indiana in 1894, three years after Dr. James Naismith invented it in Springfield, Mass., and the state took to it like Idaho to potatoes. As Benner says, "We didn't invent the sport, but we perfected it here."

Basketball Hall of Famers John Wooden, Oscar Robertson and Larry Bird grew up in Indiana, taking part in the best high school hoops in the country.

The state's own version of March Madness, "Hoosier Hysteria," pitted big schools against small ones, for a legacy of dynasties and Cinderella stories. Bird, who played for Springs Valley High School in French Lick, recalls, "We used to play in 2,800-seat gyms, and 3,000 people would show up. The rivalries were incredible."

No surprise, then, that the 14,000-square-foot Indiana Basketball Hall of Fame, about 40 miles east of Indianapolis, is the only hoops museum in the country dedicated to high school basketball. In addition to a wide range of memorabilia and artifacts, it features exhibits like the "Last Shot" exhibit, which re-creates the last five seconds of a game, so you can try to sink the winning basket.

## BOBBY PLUMP GAVE THE 1954 GAME HIS "BEST SHOT"

Fifty-four years after making the most famous last-second shot in Indiana basketball history, Bobby Plump, now 72, has achieved legend status.

The "Shot Heard 'Round Indiana" became a legend and eventually inspired the hit 1986 movie *Hoosiers*, a fictionalized account of Milan High School's famous championship season.

The shot also changed Plump's life. He went from a shy, introverted kid to an outgoing businessman.

"I was forced to do things I never would have done," Plump says. "That shot helped bring me out of my shell."

Unlike the end of the movie, Plump says, "I didn't say I'd make the shot or act as a decoy. But when I took the shot, I knew it was going in the minute it left my hand."

Plump jokes that the true significance of what he'd accomplished didn't sink in "until about 15 years later."

While the shot may have defined Plump to millions of basketball fans, Plump has not let it define him.

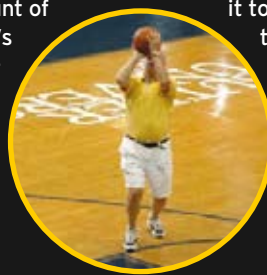
"As an instantaneous thrill, there's nothing to compare it to," he says. "But there've been a lot more important things in my life."

That includes wife, Jenine, three children and seven grandchildren.

These days,

Plump is a successful businessman, and the owner of Plump's Last Shot, a cozy bar/restaurant, like the one in "Cheers," where everyone knows your name.

And how would Plump's life be different if he had missed the shot? "For one thing, I wouldn't be sitting here talking with you right now," he laughs.



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# Conseco Fieldhouse

» This retro-modern NBA arena, which opened in 1999, hosts the Indiana Pacers and the WNBA Indiana Fever. Although spacious, an intimate atmosphere prevails, maybe because Conseco—with its exposed girders, arched windows, wooden signs and roll-out bleachers—was partly modeled on the Hinkle Fieldhouse. The arena feels like part high-school gym and part state-of-the-art 21st-century arena—and is a great place to watch a basketball game. Larry Bird, now president of basketball operation for the Pacers, calls it “the finest building in our league.”



## » INDY SPORTS GUIDE

# Hinkle Fieldhouse

» Looking like an old railway station, the 80-year-old Hinkle, located on the Butler University campus, is listed in the National Register of Historic Places and is a state treasure. Former NBA player George McGinniss once called it “the best basketball court in America.”

For serious Hoosier fans, Hinkle is hallowed ground: It's the site of the “Milan Miracle,” tiny Milan High School's upset over heavily favored Muncie Central in the 1954 high school championship. The movie *Hoosiers* recreates the classic game in the same fieldhouse.

“It's the coolest old arena you'll ever see,” Benner says.

# The Best of the Rest

» Catch Minor League Baseball downtown at Victory Field, with the Indianapolis Indians. Want to check out who will be heading to Beijing for the 2008 Olympics? Indiana Sports Corporation will host the U.S. Olympic diving trials June 18-22 at Indiana University's Indianapolis campus. Come winter, hockey buffs can watch the Indianapolis Ice face at the Pepsi Coliseum. Finally, don't miss the NCAA Hall of Champions, which celebrates the best of college sports.

Get the picture? If you can't satisfy your competitive sports drive in Indianapolis, you're not looking hard enough. ■

MIDWEST AIRLINES offers daily flights to and from Indianapolis. Details can be found at [midwestairlines.com](http://midwestairlines.com)

## INDY GO-TO GUIDE

**Conseco Fieldhouse**  
317-239-5151  
[consecofieldhouse.com](http://consecofieldhouse.com)

**Hinkle Fieldhouse**  
317-239-5151  
[butlersports.com](http://butlersports.com)

**Indiana Sports Corporation**  
800-443-4837  
[indianasportscorp.com](http://indianasportscorp.com)

**Indianapolis 500**  
317-492-6700  
[indy500.com](http://indy500.com)



**Indiana Basketball Hall of Fame**  
765-529-1891  
[hoopshall.com](http://hoopshall.com)

**Indianapolis Motor Speedway Hall of Fame**  
317-481-8500  
[indianapolismotor Speedway.com](http://indianapolismotor Speedway.com)

**Indy Racing Experience**  
888-357-5002  
[indyracingexperience.com](http://indyracingexperience.com)

**Lucas Oil Stadium**  
[iccrd.com](http://iccrd.com)

**NCAA Hall of Champions**  
800-735-6222  
[naaa.org](http://naaa.org)

**O'Reilly Raceway Park**  
317-291-4090  
[oreillyracewaypark.com](http://oreillyracewaypark.com)

**Pepsi Coliseum**  
317-927-7500  
[in.gov](http://in.gov)

**RCA Dome**  
317-262-3400  
[iccrd.com](http://iccrd.com)

**Victory Field**  
317-269-3545  
[indyindians.com](http://indyindians.com)



