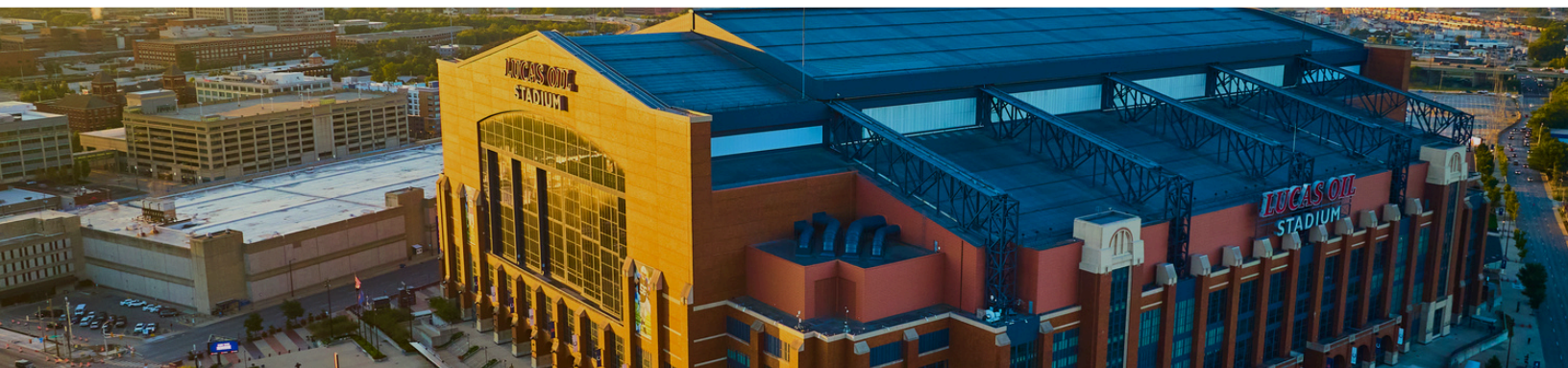




THE BUSINESS OF SPORT

2026



**INDYCHAMBER**



**INDIANAPOLIS
SPORTS INNOVATION
INSTITUTE**

**How Indianapolis
Built the Most Powerful
Sports Economy in America**

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This white paper was developed by the Indy Chamber in collaboration with the IU Indianapolis Sports Innovation Institute (SII). We are grateful to the many civic, academic, and industry partners whose long-term leadership has shaped Indianapolis' sports ecosystem, including Indiana Sports Corp, Visit Indy, Pacers Sports & Entertainment, the Indianapolis Colts, the NCAA, and numerous regional stakeholders contributing to sustained economic growth.



Data analysis support was provided by the Indiana Business Research Center and the IU Indianapolis Sports Innovation Institute research teams.

FOREWORD

Indianapolis has long been recognized as a premier host city for major sporting events. But event hosting alone does not explain the region's economic trajectory.

Over the past several decades, public, private, and civic leaders made deliberate investments to build something more durable: a fully integrated sports ecosystem designed to extend beyond stadiums and game days. The creation of Indiana Sports Corp in 1979 marked the beginning of a regional strategy that treated sport as economic infrastructure.

That long-term vision is visible today not only in the events we host, but in the institutional ecosystem we have built. Few American cities can match the institutional density Indianapolis has built across the sports industry. Indianapolis anchors one of the nation's most concentrated sports business networks, including the global headquarters of both the NCAA and INDYCAR alongside professional franchises, national organizations, venue operators, and a growing network of sports-adjacent enterprises.

Together, these assets have helped shape one of the most concentrated and fastest-growing sports economies in the country. In 2026, Sports Business Journal named Indianapolis the No. 3 Best Sports Business City in the United States, up from No. 11 in 2023.

This report examines the data behind that transformation, from employment concentration and economic output to executive leadership representation and workforce mobility. The findings reinforce a broader truth: Indianapolis is not only a destination for competition, but a place where careers in sport are built and sustained.

As we look ahead, the opportunity is not simply to maintain this position, but to expand it, strengthening talent pipelines, advancing leadership pathways, and continuing to evolve Indianapolis as a national model for sports-driven economic growth.



Matt Mindrum
President & CEO
Indy Chamber

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Indianapolis Has Quietly Built one of America's Most Concentrated Sports Economies

A metropolitan region of more than two million residents has built something that should not exist: a sports economy more concentrated than New York (0.6% of Gross Regional Product), Los Angeles, Chicago (0.4%), and Boston (0.4%).



A Location Quotient (LQ) of 1.94, nearly twice the national average



A Specialization index 32% higher than larger aspirational metros



44.3% sports job growth and 81.2% Gross Regional Product (GRP) growth from 2016-2024



Over four in ten c-suites roles across major league franchises held by women

The evidence suggests that Indianapolis is not a “stadium economy,” but a professionalized, year-round sports business ecosystem that is nearly twice as specialized as the national average, outpaces peer metros in growth, and translates that momentum into industry-leading representation of women in executive leadership. This trajectory reflects a diversified, technology-enabled sports economy embedded in operations, governance, marketing, analytics, and leadership.

This white paper outlines how that concentration was built, how it continues to accelerate, and what trajectory indicators suggest about the future of sports business in Indianapolis.

I. BUILT WITH PURPOSE



KEY INSIGHT

Indianapolis did not inherit its sports economy. It built it deliberately, over more than four decades, through public policy, patient capital, and sustained civic coordination.

Most cities treat sport as entertainment. Indianapolis has treated it as economic infrastructure since the 1970s, and that decision explains the concentration, growth, and leadership pipelines documented in this report.

The foundation is institutional and intentional:

- Indiana Sports Corp, founded in 1979, was the nation's first sports commission, establishing a regional discipline of treating sport as a development engine decades before peer cities followed.
- The Capital Improvement Board, created by the Indiana General Assembly in 1965, owns and operates Lucas Oil Stadium, Gainbridge Fieldhouse, Victory Field, and the Indiana Convention Center, and generated a record \$251.6 million in tax and operating revenue in fiscal year 2024.
- Its financing is engineered to protect residents, relying on hospitality taxes that capture out-of-state visitor spending rather than local property tax.
- Standing bid funds, including a statewide sports and tourism fund, make event hosting a continuous recruiting program rather than a series of one-off wins.
- More than \$3 billion in recent public and private infrastructure, anchored by North America's most extensive downtown skywalk system connecting more than 37,000 hotel rooms to the city's venues, keeps Indianapolis competitive as a host year after year. (Source: Sports Business Journal, 2026)

This was guided by a published strategy. The Indiana Sports Corp 2050 Vision and its "Team Indy" coalition align hotels, venues, teams, governing bodies, and government behind a single long-term plan.

The clearest evidence that this is a transferable model, and not local luck, is that other governments are now copying the framework, and that Sports Business Journal named Indianapolis the No. 3 Best Sports Business City in the United States in 2026, up from No. 11 at the ranking's 2023 debut.

II. A MID-SIZED CITY WITH NATIONAL SCALE



KEY INSIGHT

A metro of more than two million residents has built a level of sports business concentration typically associated with markets many times its size. Despite its size, Indianapolis has one of the most concentrated sports economies in the United States.

Indianapolis ranks 3rd among ten comparison metros in sports employment concentration, with a Location Quotient of 1.94.

An LQ above 1.0 indicates a higher-than-average industry concentration relative to the national baseline. At 1.94, Indianapolis nearly doubles the national average in sports industry employment concentration.

Further, the region's Specialization Index of 1.32 indicates that Indianapolis maintains a 32% higher sports industry concentration than larger aspirational markets such as New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, and Boston.

For its size, Indianapolis performs well beyond what its metro scale would suggest. Sports contributes 0.7% of total Gross Regional Product, exceeding New York (0.6%), Boston (0.4%), and Chicago (0.4%) despite having a fraction of their population.

Importantly, this concentration is not driven by a single organization but is distributed across teams and governing bodies, indicating a stable and resilient industry cluster. This structural strength translates directly into economic impact.

For its size, Indianapolis demonstrates disproportionate sports economic impact.

3RD

**AMONG TEN SPORTS
METROS IN EMPLOYMENT
CONCENTRATION**

III. GROWTH THAT OUTPACES THE MARKET



KEY INSIGHT

Indianapolis' sports sector is growing faster than the broader regional economy and faster than peer sports markets.

Concentration alone does not define competitiveness. Growth trajectory does. Between 2016 and 2024 while the broader Indianapolis regional economy grew 15-20%:

Sports jobs grew 44.3%

Sports-related Gross Regional Product (GRP) increased 81.2%

This growth shows both workforce expansion and rising economic output. The NAICS category "Promoters of Performing Arts, Sports, and Similar Events with Facilities" experienced 105.9% job growth during this period.

While organizational workforce estimates are directional rather than audited employment counts, Lightcast profile analysis suggests measurable workforce expansion across Indianapolis' sports cluster. From 2023-2025 alone, flagship organizations added 206 net employees based on professional profile-based workforce analysis data:

Pacers Sports & Entertainment: +95

NCAA: +81

Indianapolis Colts: +30

These gains signal acceleration. Together, these trends indicate not just growth, but sustained acceleration, positioning the sports sector as a leading driver of economic expansion in Indianapolis.

44.3%

**SPORTS JOB
GROWTH**

81.2%

**SPORTS RELATED
GRP GROWTH**

IV. WHERE SPORTS CAREERS ARE BUILT TO LAST



KEY INSIGHT

Indianapolis is one of the few markets in America where a person can build an entire career in sports, entering the industry, moving across organizations, earning advanced credentials, and rising into leadership, without ever relocating.

Sports careers are usually built on movement. The standard path means changing cities, teams, and leagues every few years to keep advancing. Indianapolis offers a different model, and it is a direct result of the density documented in this report.

Because the cluster spans franchises, governing bodies, major events, sports technology, media, operations, sponsorship, and adjacent businesses, a professional can change jobs, change specialties, and move up without leaving the city. The market is concentrated enough to hold a full career.

Talent that moves within the market, not out of it

Talent recirculates within Indianapolis rather than leaving it. Professionals move among the Speedway, the Colts, the Indians, the Pacers, the NCAA, and local universities, and flagship organizations post net workforce gains year over year.

The market's anchor institutions are also stable enough to support a long tenure in a single organization, with the NCAA, INDYCAR, and the Colts retaining staff well beyond the industry's transient reputation.

A city that trains its own talent

The career case extends into the classroom. Few cities offer this much sports-specific higher education in a single market, and the programs are built for people already working in the industry:

- IU Indianapolis: a B.S. in Sport Management with a Kelley School of Business foundations certificate, an accelerated B.S. and M.S. in Sports Analytics through the Luddy School, a “Business of Sports” co-major at Kelley, and a dual B.S. in Sport Management and Master of Legal Studies track through McKinney School of Law.
- University of Indianapolis: a Master of Science in Sport Management whose courses are co-taught by working executives from the NCAA, professional franchises, and athletic departments, with required internships at organizations including the Colts, Pacers, Indy Eleven, and the Speedway.
- Butler University: an undergraduate Sports Media program and an online Sports Management master's launched in 2025.
- Marian University: a Business in Sports specialization with internships at the NCAA, the Speedway, Lucas Oil Stadium, and Victory Field.

While retention and mid-career mobility are well supported, further analysis is needed to quantify entry-level hiring and early-career mobility.

Estimated profile-derived turnover and tenure signals indicate comparatively strong retention:

- NCAA: 4% turnover, 6.8-year median tenure
- INDYCAR: 3.7% turnover, 6.5-year median tenure
- Indianapolis Colts: 6.6% turnover

These retention figures describe the cluster's anchor institutions. Across the full cluster, including high-velocity startups, turnover runs higher, a normal signature of a maturing sector. The stability of the anchors reflects long-tenured institutions choosing to base year-round operations here.

Data Gap: Entry-Level Pipeline

While tenure metrics demonstrate retention, further analysis is needed to quantify entry-level hiring growth and early-career mobility patterns.

V. A LEADING CITY FOR WOMEN WHO WANT TO RUN SPORTS



KEY INSIGHT

Indianapolis is one of the best markets in America for building a career in sports, combining top-tier executive representation, a deliberate leadership pipeline, and the volume of opportunity that comes with a concentrated sports economy.

The case rests on three things working together. Women hold a high and consistent share of executive roles across the city's franchises. Formal programs actively move women into and up those roles. And a concentrated sports economy simply offers more places to build a career.

In partnership with the IU Indianapolis Sports Innovation Institute, executive leadership representation was analyzed across major league professional franchises in 12 comparison cities using a composite benchmarking framework. A 2D C-Suite Share Composite was developed, accounting for both the total percentage of female executives citywide and the consistency of representation across teams, preventing a single outlier organization from skewing results.

Under the C-suite analysis, Indianapolis ranks:

- 2nd nationally in the 2D C-Suite Share Composite (82.15)
- 41.67% female representation across total C-suite roles (Citywide Total)
- 40.97% average female representation per team (Per-Team Average)

The analysis also examined broader organizational leadership representation across professional sports organizations using a 2D Leadership Index, which evaluated executive, managerial, operational, and player-facing leadership roles across major league sport franchises.

2ND

**NATIONALLY IN
THE 2D
C-SUITE SHARE
COMPOSITE**

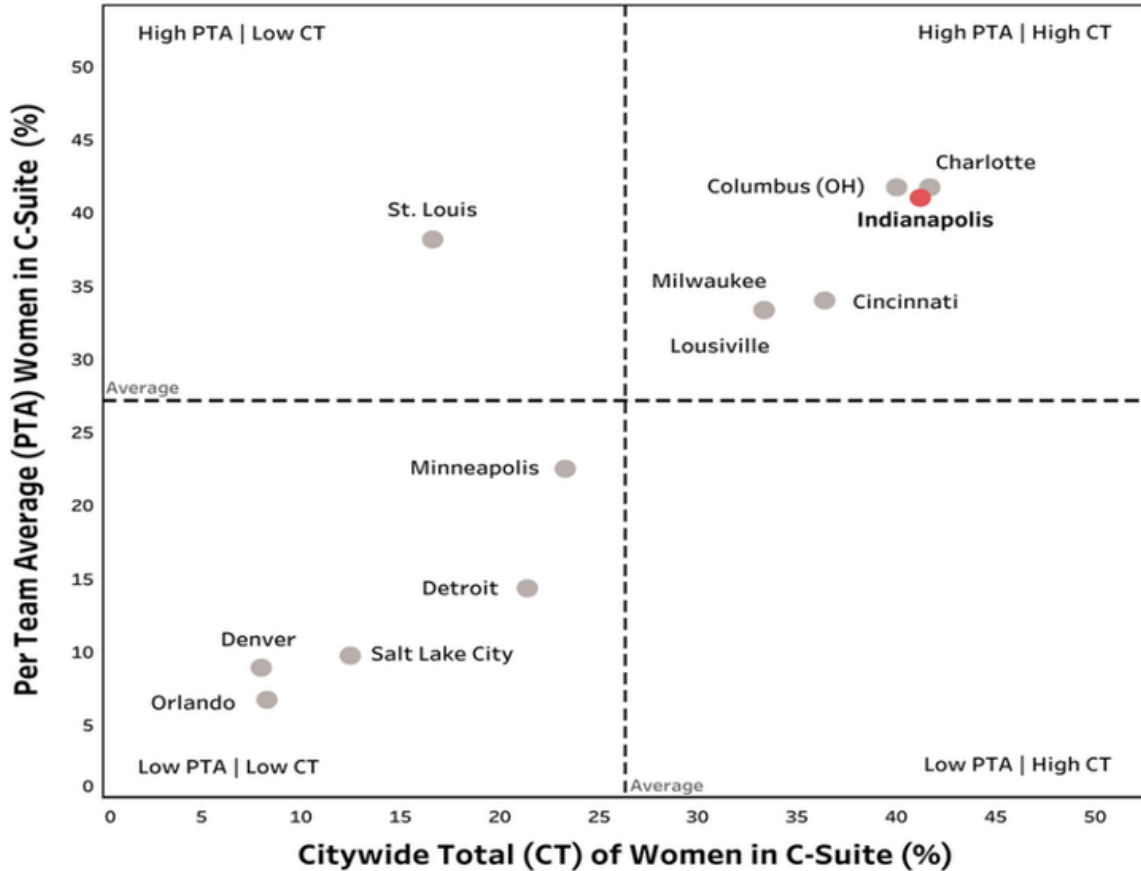
41.67%

**FEMALE
REPRESENTATION
ACROSS C-SUITE
ROLES**

40.97%

**AVERAGE
FEMALE
REPRESENTATION
PER TEAM**

Women's C-Suite Share in Major League Sport: Indianapolis vs. U.S. Cities



Under the broader leadership analysis, Indianapolis ranks:

- 2nd nationally in the 2D Leadership Index (73.68)
- 37.46% female representation across total leadership roles citywide
- 36.22% average female leadership representation per team

Importantly, this representation is consistent across teams, not driven by a single outlier organization, suggesting that Indianapolis has developed a structurally embedded leadership ecosystem for women across professional sports organizations.

2ND

**NATIONALLY
IN THE 2D
LEADERSHIP
INDEX**

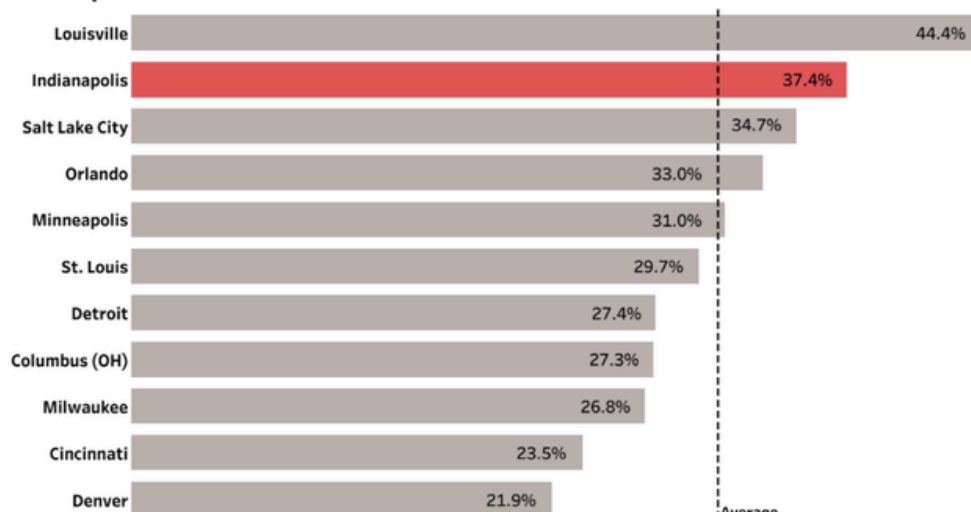
37.46%

**FEMALE
REPRESENTATION
ACROSS CITYWIDE
LEADERSHIP**

36.22%

**AVERAGE
FEMALE
REPRESENTATION
PER TEAM**

Percent of Women Leaders in Major League Sport (Citywide Total): Indianapolis vs. U.S. Cities



Additional analysis of NFL front offices reinforces this pattern. Among NFL teams, the Indianapolis Colts rank in the top quartile for women in C-Suite roles, with 37.5% female representation in executive leadership. The organization ranks 5th among 29 teams analyzed and in the 86th percentile league-wide, positioning Indianapolis among the strongest markets in the country for female leadership representation in professional football.

When expanding the C-suite analysis to include both major and minor league organizations, Indianapolis ranks 4th nationally.

Pathways and Programs

Representation here is supported by intent, not left to chance:

- W.E. ARE NEXT, an Indiana Sports Corp initiative under the 2050 Vision, is designed to accelerate the next 100 women executives across the sports industry.
- WISE Indianapolis, established in 2023, runs the WISE Within mentorship program to advance early-career women in sport.

Opportunity at Scale

A concentrated, growing sports economy widens the on-ramp, offering more entry points, more lateral moves, and more executive seats than a market this size would normally provide. The Indiana Fever underscore the momentum: the franchise's recent surge prompted a \$78 million dedicated training facility, a long-term investment in women's professional sport that few markets can match.

The findings position Indianapolis among the top markets nationally for women in executive sports leadership. Indianapolis is not only a leader in hosting women's sports events. It is also emerging as one of the strongest cities in America for women leading sports organizations.

VI. MORE THAN GAME DAYS



KEY INSIGHT

Indianapolis built a diversified, year-round sports industry, not an event calendar.

Innovation, entrepreneurship, and long-term professional clusters, not marquee weekends, are what set it apart from every other market.

Most sports cities are event economies. They host, they collect the visitor spending, and they compete for the next bid. Indianapolis is built differently. Beneath the events sits a permanent sports industry: governing bodies, a technology sector, an engineering base, and an entrepreneurial pipeline that generate jobs and investment every day of the year, not only when a championship is in town.

The franchises anchor the cluster, but they are its most visible layer, not its largest story. What Indianapolis built around them is the difference.

A diversified cluster: four primary professional economies

Lightcast profile analysis identifies roughly 2,816 professionals across 45 sports organizations, distributed across four primary professional economies, each with its own occupational profile:

- Governing bodies are white-collar administration, reflecting the NCAA and INDYCAR headquarters and national bodies including USA Track and Field, USA Gymnastics, and USA Football.
- Motorsports is an engineering and commercial sector, anchored by the Indianapolis Motor Speedway, INDYCAR, and Dallara.
- Professional teams provide operations, sales, and management roles.
- Sports technology and services is genuinely technical, with about a quarter of its workforce in computer and mathematical occupations.

This is not a game-day labor market. It is a professional cluster organized around sport.

Workforce composition highlights a diversified professional structure:

- 40.2% of Sports Governing Body talent in Arts, Design, Entertainment, Sports, and Media roles
- 45.4% of Motorsports employment in Office and Admin Support
- 24.5% of Sports Tech workforce in Computer and Math occupations

Technology and entrepreneurship: the differentiator

The clearest evidence that Indianapolis built an industry rather than a host city is its sports-technology economy, and the state treated that economy as economic development from the start. Sports Tech HQ, a joint venture between the Indiana Economic Development Corporation and Indiana Sports Corp, was funded through the state's 21st Century Research and Technology Fund and anchors a collective of more than 50 companies.

The ecosystem has a track record. From 2019 to 2025, a national accelerator based in Indianapolis, the Techstars Sports Accelerator Powered by Indy, graduated 67 companies that collectively raised more than \$150 million in outside venture funding.

Techstars operated this Accelerator with significant support from Indiana Sports Corp, the Colts, Pacers, NCAA, INDYCAR, and the Indianapolis Motor Speedway.

The pipeline produced companies, not just cohorts. Out-of-state startups relocated to Indiana, including Edge Sound Research, DaVinci Wearables, and Motion, and several local companies have been acquired by larger platforms.

The engineering base runs deeper still. Purdue's Ray Ewry Sports Engineering Center relocated to Dallara in Speedway, tying university research directly to commercial motorsports and creating a pipeline for technical talent into the sector.

Talent that feeds the wider economy

The surest sign this is a real economy and not a sports bubble is that its talent flows outward. Professionals trained in Indianapolis sports organizations move into the region's largest employers, including Salesforce and Eli Lilly. The sports cluster is not isolated from the regional economy; it is a source of talent for it.

This is why Indianapolis is different. Other markets chase the spectacle. Indianapolis built the industry that outlasts it.

VII. EVENTS AS ECONOMIC INFRASTRUCTURE



KEY INSIGHT

Indianapolis has converted major sporting events into long-term economic and workforce development infrastructure.

Major sporting events generate national visibility. But visibility alone does not create sustained economic value.

Indianapolis' advantage is not simply its ability to host marquee events, it is the region's ability to convert those events into long-term economic development, workforce attraction, and national brand equity.

Since its founding in 1979, Indiana Sports Corp has hosted more than 500 national and international sporting events, including Super Bowl XLVI, the College Football Playoff National Championship, Men's and Women's NCAA Final Fours, and 15 Big Ten Football Championship Games. Collectively, these events have generated more than \$5 billion in direct spending in the community.

This model continues to accelerate.

The 2026 NCAA Men's Final Four, hosted alongside the Division II, Division III, and NIT championships in the same weekend, is projected to bring more than 70,000 visitors daily over four days, generating approximately \$400 million in economic impact for Indianapolis.

The future pipeline remains equally significant. Confirmed upcoming events include:

- 2026-2028 Big Ten Football Championship Game
- 2026 Big Ten Women's Volleyball Tournament
- 2027 Big Ten Men's Basketball Tournament
- 2028 NCAA Women's Final Four
- 2028 U.S. Olympic Team Trials - Swimming
- 2029 NCAA Men's Final Four

In addition, Indianapolis secured a first-of-its-kind long-term partnership with WWE to bring its three largest stadium events, Royal Rumble, SummerSlam, and WrestleMania, to Lucas Oil Stadium, reinforcing the city's ability to compete for global entertainment properties beyond traditional sports. These three WWE events alone represent more than \$300 million in combined economic impact.

This is not event tourism, it is economic infrastructure. These events are not won by chance. Indianapolis competes for them through standing public bid funds and converts them through tax mechanisms that recycle visitor spending into venues and services.

Each event strengthens hotel demand, transportation systems, hospitality jobs, media visibility, corporate engagement, and long-term talent attraction. Events also create leadership pathways, including women-led workstreams across operations, sponsorship, communications, and venue management.

Indianapolis has built a system where major events serve as both showcase and catalyst, reinforcing the region's ability to convert attention into investment, careers, and long-term economic growth.

VIII. THE NEXT CHAPTER OF SPORTS-DRIVEN GROWTH



KEY INSIGHT

Indianapolis' advantage compounds. Confirmed institutional, infrastructure, and event commitments extend the model well into the next decade.

- A new Gainbridge Fieldhouse skywalk will connect to a Pacers Sports & Entertainment mixed-use development, including a Ritz-Carlton hotel and a Live Nation music venue, in 2028.
- A convention center expansion will add 143,500 square feet and connect to a new 800-room Signia by Hilton.
- Indiana University's \$110 million James T. Morris Arena will serve as headquarters for USA Track and Field.
- USA Gymnastics' new national training center is being built in the Indianapolis region, targeted for 2028.

(Source: Sports Business Journal, 2026)

Indianapolis' advantage is not defined solely by its event calendar. It leverages a mature ecosystem of institutions, talent, infrastructure, and organizational density capable of shaping the future of sports business itself.

CONCLUSION

Indianapolis did not build its sports economy around spectacle alone. It built the operating system around sport: the institutions, workforce, governance structures, and business infrastructure required to sustain year-round growth.

What began more than four decades ago as a deliberate civic strategy has matured into one of the nation's most concentrated and durable sports business ecosystems. That intentionality drove the long-term regional vision: to treat sport not simply as entertainment, but as economic infrastructure capable of generating investment, talent, institutional growth, and national relevance.

That vision has compounded over time. Today, Indianapolis stands as a market increasingly recognized on the national stage, including recent recognition from Sports Business Journal as one of America's leading sports business cities. This distinction reflects more than the events the region hosts. It reflects the density of institutions, leadership pathways, operational expertise, and business connectivity that define Indianapolis' broader sports economy.

For professionals, the question is no longer whether sports jobs exist in Indianapolis. The question is whether the region now represents one of the most strategically concentrated markets in the United States for long-term career growth, executive advancement, and institutional opportunity in sport. The data suggests that it does.

More importantly, the findings suggest that Indianapolis has entered a new chapter. The region is no longer defined solely by its ability to host the biggest moments in sport, but by its ability to shape the future of the industry itself.

What began as a bold civic bet has become one of the region's defining economic advantages. The next opportunity is not simply to maintain this position, but to expand it: strengthening talent pipelines, deepening leadership representation, and continuing to evolve Indianapolis as a national model for sports-driven economic growth.

METHODOLOGY

Data sources include:

- Analysis by the Indiana Business Research Center using Lightcast industry data.
- NAICS-based cluster analysis
- Professional profile aggregation (2023–2025 net gains)
- Executive leadership research conducted by IU Indianapolis Sports Innovation Institute
- Comparative metro benchmarking

All findings reflect available data current as of January 2026, published March 2026, and are subject to refinement as additional modeling is completed.

APPENDIX

- A. NAICS Definitions
- B. Professional Sport Leadership Representation Methodology
- C. NFL Front Office C-Suite Leadership Benchmarking
- D. Lightcast Company Workforce Profile Analysis
- E. Data Confidence & Interpretive Notes
- F. References

A. NAICS Definitions

To evaluate Indianapolis' sports economy as an industry cluster, analysis incorporated North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) categories aligned with sports-related economic activity.

These categories included:

- Spectator Sports
- Sports Technology and Related Professional Services
- Motorsports Operations and Supporting Enterprises
- Sports Governing Bodies and Associations
- Venue Operations and Sports Facility Management

Cluster definitions were developed collaboratively by the Indiana Business Research Center to capture both direct sports employment and adjacent operational activity that contributes to the Indianapolis regional sports ecosystem.

Because sports-related economic activity often spans multiple NAICS classifications, this framework should be interpreted as a structured representation of the regional sports business cluster rather than an exhaustive accounting of every sports-related enterprise.

B. Professional Sport Leadership Representation Methodology

2D C-Suite Share Composite

To examine gender representation in executive leadership across professional sports, the IU Indianapolis Sports Innovation Institute (SII) analyzed front office structures within the NFL, NBA, WNBA, MLB, MLS, NHL, and NWSL across 12 Midwest and sport-dense comparison cities. The analysis focused specifically on C-suite roles, representing the highest level of organizational decision-making within each franchise.

Because no single metric fully captures how leadership representation functions within a market, the SII developed a two-dimensional framework, the 2D C-Suite Share Composite, to assess both the scale and distribution of women in executive roles.

The first measure, Citywide Total (CT), reflects the percentage of all C-suite positions held by women across teams within a city. This provides a view of overall representation and captures the cumulative availability of leadership opportunities at the city level. The second measure, Per-Team Average (PTA), calculates the average share of women in C-suite roles across individual teams. By weighting each organization equally, PTA accounts for differences in front office size and provides insight into the typical leadership environment within a given market.

Combined additively for a final score, these measures offer a more complete picture of gender representation, distinguishing between cities where women's leadership is concentrated within a small number of organizations and those where it is more consistently distributed across teams. The combined 2D composite allows for balanced comparisons across markets of different sizes and organizational structures.

Data were collected between November 2025 and January 2026 through a combination of web scraping and manual review of publicly available front office directories, supplemented by direct outreach to organizations where needed. Teams without verifiable or complete organizational data were excluded following multiple contact attempts. Gender classification was conducted using a naming-based model and validated through human review, and C-suite roles were identified through two independent rounds of classification to ensure consistency. All calculations were performed twice to confirm accuracy.

Leadership roles were classified using an intentionally broad framework designed to capture formal organizational influence across professional sports organizations. Included roles consisted of managers, directors, vice presidents, C-suite executives, and head leadership roles, as well as operational, player-facing, medical, and performance leadership positions. Administrative support positions, individual contributor roles without leadership responsibility, entry-level positions, and execution-focused roles were excluded. In organizations with shared staff across affiliated teams, individuals were counted once to avoid duplication.

To support comparison across cities, results were additionally evaluated using quartile groupings and z-score standardization, allowing each market's performance to be assessed relative to its peers. Indianapolis ranked in the top quartile nationally on both the Citywide Total and Per-Team Average metrics and exceeded a z-score of 1.0 on both measures, indicating significantly above-average representation compared to peer markets.

Within this framework, Indianapolis ranks second nationally in the overall 2D Leadership Index and stands out as one of the top-performing professional sport markets in the country for women in leadership roles. Women hold approximately 37% of leadership positions across Indianapolis professional sport organizations, and importantly, representation remains relatively consistent across teams rather than being concentrated within a single organization. This pattern suggests that Indianapolis has developed a mature and structurally embedded leadership ecosystem across professional sports.

Among the comparison cities included in the analysis, the top three composite scores were recorded in Louisville (88.00), Indianapolis (73.68), and Orlando (65.36), with scores across all cities ranging from 41.04 to 88.00.

C. NFL Front Office C-Suite Leadership Benchmarking

To examine gender representation in executive leadership across the National Football League, the IU Indianapolis Sport Innovation Institute analyzed front office organizational structures across NFL franchises using the NFL C-Suite Share metric. The analysis focused specifically on C-suite leadership positions, representing the highest level of organizational decision-making within NFL front offices.

The NFL C-Suite Share metric was defined as the proportion of women occupying C-suite leadership positions relative to men within each NFL organization. This framework was designed to allow direct comparison of executive leadership representation across franchises while accounting for variation in front office structure and executive team size.

Data were collected between November 2025 and February 2026 through a combination of web scraping and manual review of publicly available NFL front office organizational structures, supplemented by direct outreach to organizations where necessary. Teams without verifiable or complete organizational data were excluded following multiple contact attempts. Gender classification was conducted using a naming-based model triangulated with human review, and C-suite roles were identified through two independent rounds of classification to ensure consistency. All calculations, quartile analyses, z-scores, and percentile rankings were performed twice to confirm accuracy.

C-suite roles were defined to include C-level executives, Presidents, General Managers, General Counsel when serving as the organization's top legal officer, and Owner/Chairman/Partner-related roles paired with executive responsibilities. In organizations without a formal C-suite or President/General Manager structure, Chairman and Executive Vice President positions were used as proxy executive seats. Roles such as Senior or Executive Vice President, Assistant General Manager, Senior Advisor, Senior Counsel, and Vice President & General Counsel were excluded. Coaching staff were not included in the analysis.

To support comparison across organizations, results were evaluated using quartile groupings, z-score normalization, median benchmarking, and percentile rankings, allowing each NFL franchise's executive leadership representation to be assessed relative to league peers.

Within this framework, the Indianapolis Colts rank among the top-performing NFL organizations for women in executive leadership representation. The Colts rank fifth among the 29 NFL teams included in the analysis and second among Midwest NFL markets, with women holding 37.5% of C-suite positions within the organization. Based on quartile placement and z-score normalization, the Colts fall within the top quartile league-wide for women's executive leadership representation and rank in approximately the 86th percentile among NFL franchises.

Among NFL teams included in the analysis, the top five C-Suite Share scores were recorded by the Chicago Bears (66.67%), Carolina Panthers (50.0%), Detroit Lions (42.86%), Philadelphia Eagles (40.0%), and the Indianapolis Colts (37.5%), with scores across the league ranging from 0% to 66.67%.

D. Lightcast Company Workforce Profile Analysis

To assess workforce composition, organizational growth patterns, and professional retention indicators within Indianapolis' sports business cluster, the Indiana Business Research Center conducted company-level workforce analysis using Lightcast Company Analytics data.

Lightcast (formerly Emsi Burning Glass) aggregates publicly available professional profile information, online job postings, and other open-source workforce intelligence signals to estimate organizational employment characteristics.

The analysis evaluated 45 sports-related organizations across four primary categories, noting that "sports facilities" includes just a single organization*:

- Sports Technology and Services
- Motorsports
- Sports Governing Bodies
- Professional Teams
- Sports Facilities*

Metrics analyzed included:

- Profile-based workforce growth trends
- Estimated employee tenure and turnover patterns
- Occupational composition by company category
- Comparative benchmarking against automatically generated peer organizations

Important methodological considerations:

Profile-Based Measurement

All workforce indicators are derived from publicly available professional profiles rather than audited employment records or internal organizational HR data.

Directional Interpretation

Results are intended to identify directional workforce trends and structural characteristics of the regional sports cluster rather than precise employment totals.

Coverage Limitations

Organizations with limited digital workforce presence may be underrepresented, particularly smaller companies, startups, contract-based employers, and seasonal workforce segments.

Estimated Retention Metrics

Turnover and tenure measures are inferred from profile activity patterns and should be interpreted as approximations rather than exact organizational retention records.

Across the analyzed sample, Lightcast captured approximately 2,816 professional profiles representing a partial but analytically useful view of workforce dynamics across Indianapolis' sports cluster.

E. DATA CONFIDENCE & INTERPRETIVE NOTES

This white paper integrates findings from multiple data sources, each with distinct methodological approaches and confidence parameters.

These include:

- Indiana Business Research Center at Indiana University (IBRC) regional employment and economic modeling
- Lightcast profile-based workforce analytics
- IU Indianapolis Sport Innovation Institute original leadership representation research
- Public organizational benchmarking and comparative metro analysis

Where findings rely on profile-derived workforce intelligence, results should be interpreted as directional indicators rather than official audited employment counts.

Comparative visualizations are intended to illustrate relative patterns across benchmark metros and organizational categories using best available data current as of January 2026, published March 2026. All findings reflect data current as of January 2026, published March 2026, and remain subject to refinement as additional modeling and validation are completed.

F. REFERENCES

Broughton, David. "Best Sports Business Cities: No. 3 Indianapolis." Sports Business Journal, 18 May 2026, www.sportsbusinessjournal.com/Articles/2026/05/18/best-sports-business-cities-no-3-indianapolis/.

This report was produced through a partnership between the Indy Chamber and the IU Indianapolis Sport Innovation Institute. As Central Indiana's largest business advocacy organization, the Indy Chamber works alongside civic, corporate, academic, and community partners to strengthen the region's economy, expand opportunity, and support long-term growth. Together, our organizations are committed to advancing research, strengthening talent pipelines, and helping position Indianapolis as a global center for sport, innovation, and economic opportunity.

Learn more and access additional resources at www.indychamber.com