

# IMPROVING THE ATHLETE EXPERIENCE



**W**hile the sports tourism industry's growth is remarkable, it's not an endless stream of revenue to be tapped. Stakeholders in the industry need to understand this growth is being fueled on the backs of hard-working parents and individuals who make great physical and financial sacrifices to compete in their chosen sport.

While the will to win will always be present, the rising cost of travel sports has created an environment where expectations are higher than they've ever been.

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# INTRODUCTION

The success of any sports tournament hinges on more than just the competition. It's about creating a seamless, enjoyable, and memorable experience for coaches, athletes, their families and teams. As event organizers face increasing expectations, they must prioritize streamlining event logistics, fostering clear communication, and addressing affordability challenges.

In today's competitive sports landscape, athletes and their families demand more than just a well-run tournament. They expect efficient processes, transparent communication, and meaningful engagement—all while juggling rising costs associated with participation. For event organizers, meeting these expectations can be challenging but is essential for sustaining and growing their events.

This whitepaper explores practical strategies to enhance the athlete experience—from simplifying registration to improving on-site engagement—and examines innovative approaches to affordability. By adopting these best practices, sports event organizers can build loyal participants, grow their events and make tournaments more accessible for all.

## THE ATHLETE EXPERIENCE

The athlete experience encompasses every touchpoint, from the moment participants register to after they leave the venue. This whitepaper offers actionable insights to improve these key areas:

- ▶ Streamlining the registration process
- ▶ Enhancing communication before, during and after the event
- ▶ Facilitating smooth arrivals and check-ins
- ▶ Addressing affordability to ensure tournaments remain accessible
- ▶ Creating memorable on-site experiences
- ▶ Post-event engagement strategies

By focusing on these critical elements, event organizers can ensure their tournaments not only attract participants but also foster lasting loyalty.



# STREAMLINING THE REGISTRATION PROCESS

A seamless registration process is the foundation of any successful sports tournament. The registration experience often forms the first impression for athletes, teams and parents, setting the tone for their overall engagement. Ensuring that this step is intuitive, quick, and transparent minimizes frustration and builds trust.

A registration system should account for modern expectations like mobile compatibility, secure payment options, and instant confirmations. Offering clear details on schedules, fees, and expectations reduces confusion and empowers athletes and families to plan effectively.

## 1. ADOPT USER-FRIENDLY DIGITAL PLATFORMS

- ▶ Use online registration systems that allow participants to register, pay fees, and upload required documents in one place.
- ▶ Ensure the platform is mobile friendly, as many users prefer to complete tasks on their smartphones.

## 2. PROVIDE CLEAR INSTRUCTIONS

- ▶ Offer step-by-step guides or FAQs to assist with the registration process.
- ▶ Send confirmation emails with details about what to expect next.

## 3. AUTOMATE AND PERSONALIZE COMMUNICATION

- ▶ Implement automated email or SMS reminders for deadlines, payment confirmations, and required documents.
- ▶ Personalize messages to address participants by name, which builds a sense of connection.

## 4. OFFER FLEXIBLE PAYMENT OPTIONS

- ▶ Allow for installment plans or early-bird discounts to make the process more accessible.
- ▶ Include transparency in pricing by itemizing fees during checkout.

## 5. TEST AND OPTIMIZE THE SYSTEM

- ▶ Regularly test the registration platform for usability and fix any glitches promptly.
- ▶ Collect feedback from past participants to identify areas for improvement.



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# EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION BEFORE THE EVENT

Effective communication ensures that athletes, teams and their support systems feel informed and valued throughout the event. Poor communication can lead to misunderstandings, missed schedules and unnecessary stress, detracting from the tournament experience.

Event organizers can enhance communication by utilizing centralized platforms like apps or dedicated websites that provide real-time updates, schedules, and FAQs. Pre-event communication should include clear directions, preparation tips, and answers to common concerns, fostering a sense of readiness and confidence among participants.

## 1. PROVIDE A COMPREHENSIVE EVENT GUIDE

- ▶ Share a detailed guide covering schedules, venue maps, parking, accommodations, and FAQs. Include any additional fees participants and their families may need to pay such as gate and parking.
- ▶ Distribute the guide via email and make it easily accessible on the event website in a mobile-friendly format.

## 2. USE MULTIPLE COMMUNICATION CHANNELS

- ▶ Leverage email, social media and SMS for updates and reminders.
- ▶ If your event is large enough, consider creating a dedicated event app for real-time notifications.

## 3. ENCOURAGE TWO-WAY COMMUNICATION

- ▶ Offer a helpline that's staffed by an individual (not voicemail) or chatbot for quick responses to questions, and email form for more advanced queries.
- ▶ Actively monitor social channel for inquiries and feedback.

## 4. BUILD ANTICIPATION

- ▶ Don't try to touch every platform. Instead, employ social media platforms utilizing one or two popular channels with your audience. This helps you stay on top of communication.



- ▶ Create a social media campaign around your upcoming event. Start early with a welcome message, share countdown posts, background information on the destination – how to get there and get around.
- ▶ Provide sneak peeks of the facility so athletes are not overwhelmed upon arrival.
- ▶ Consider spotlighting teams and athletes that are registered. It's great sharable content and will spur additional registrations.
- ▶ Send both inspirational and motivational messages to coaches and athletes to boost excitement.

# FACILITATING SMOOTH ARRIVALS AND CHECK-INS

The arrival and check-in process are critical touchpoints where lasting impressions of the event's organizational aptitude are solidified. Lengthy wait times, unclear instructions, or logistical hiccups can leave athletes and their families frustrated.

Organizers can create a welcoming and efficient check-in experience by ensuring that there is adequate staffing and clear signage directing participants where to go and when to be there.

Cut down on wait-times by employ digital tools for pre-registration, using QR codes for faster check-in and offering roaming on-site assistance for troubleshooting.

To ensure a seamless process:

## 1. OPTIMIZE CHECK-IN PROCEDURES

- ▶ Use digital pre check-in systems to reduce wait times.
- ▶ Pre-assign check-in times or stations to avoid congestion.

## 2. PROVIDE CLEAR SIGNAGE

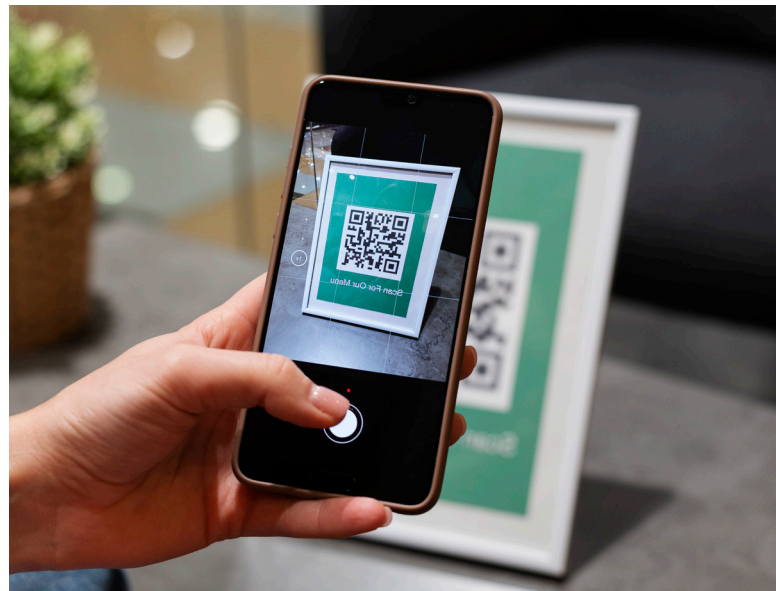
- ▶ Place directional signs and maps throughout the venue.
- ▶ Use color-coded badges or passes for easy identification.

## 3. STAFF FOR EFFICIENCY

- ▶ Train staff and volunteers to assist with check-ins and answer questions.
- ▶ Ensure adequate staffing during peak arrival times.

## 4. OFFER WELCOME AMENITIES

- ▶ Provide participants and their families with welcome kits that include schedules, maps, and event-branded merchandise/order forms.
- ▶ Set up hydration and snack stations at check-in areas.



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“ A well-organized arrival process minimizes stress and sets a positive tone for participants. ”

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# ENHANCING THE ON-SITE EXPERIENCE

On-site amenities and services directly impact athletes' comfort and overall satisfaction during the tournament. The availability of clean facilities, food and beverage options, and appropriate rest areas can significantly influence an athlete's ability to perform at their best.

By choosing high-quality facilities, event organizers demonstrate their commitment to athlete well-being. Additional touches, such as offering healthy food options, massage stations, or recovery areas can elevate the experience and set the tournament apart as a top-tier event.

To elevate the experience:

## 1. FOCUS ON FACILITIES

- ▶ Ensure the venues you utilize have a reputation for clean, well-maintained, and equipped with adequate staffing, seating and restrooms.
- ▶ During summer months, provide shaded or indoor areas for athletes and spectators to escape the heat.
- ▶ During winter months, consider shuttle service to transport guests in comfort.

## 2. CREATE ENGAGING ACTIVITIES

- ▶ Organize a welcome reception to kick off your event, provide local entertainment during breaks, such as music, games, or photo booths.
- ▶ Set up vendor booths offering access to area restaurants, attractions and shopping, plus gear, snacks, or memorabilia.

## 3. PRIORITIZE ATHLETE COMFORT

- ▶ Provide recovery areas where athletes and rest, hydration stations, cooling zones, and medical support.
- ▶ Offer healthy food options tailored to athletes' needs.



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## 4. PROVIDING ENGAGING NON-COMPETITION ACTIVITIES

- ▶ While the competition itself is the focal point, outside activities contribute to a better tournament experience. These activities allow athletes to relax, socialize, and bond with their teammates and competitors, fostering a sense of community.
- ▶ Incorporating features like welcome receptions and wrap-up mixers, game zones, team-building events or local sightseeing options can provide a well-rounded experience. These offerings create memorable moments beyond the competition, increasing the likelihood of athletes returning for future tournaments.

## 5. INCORPORATE TECHNOLOGY

Technology plays a pivotal role in optimizing tournament logistics and enhancing the athlete experience. Tools like scheduling apps, live scoring systems and event maps simplify navigation and reduce stress.

Adopting innovative solutions not only improves operational efficiency but also positions the tournament as forward-thinking. These tools can create a more connected and interactive experience, increasing satisfaction for athletes and their supporters.

By investing in a robust registration system and focusing on user experience, organizers can eliminate common pain points and make a strong, lasting impression on participants.

- ▶ Use live scoring apps, live streaming services or screens to keep participants and their supporters updated.
- ▶ Share highlights and updates on social media to boost engagement and consider a daily recap email.

Enhancing the on-site experience creates lasting memories and positive word-of-mouth.



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# MAKING SPORTS TOURNAMENTS AFFORDABLE AND ACCESSIBLE

The rising costs of sports tournaments places a significant financial strain on athletes and their families, potentially limiting participation. Addressing affordability is crucial to creating an inclusive environment where talent—not financial resources—determines who gets to compete.

Organizers can implement flexible payment plans, early-bird discounts, or sponsorship opportunities to ease financial burdens. Providing clear and upfront cost breakdowns ensures families can budget effectively and eliminates surprises, fostering trust and loyalty.

To address this challenge:

## 1. OFFER TIERED PRICING OPTIONS

- ▶ Provide packages that allow participants to choose between basic and premium services.
- ▶ Include group discounts for teams to lower costs.

## 2. PARTNER WITH SPONSORS

- ▶ Collaborate with local businesses to subsidize costs through sponsorships for hardship cases or underfunded communities.
- ▶ Offer branded giveaways or discounts in exchange for sponsorship support.

## 3. NEGOTIATE DISCOUNTS FOR ACCOMMODATIONS

- ▶ Partner with hotels to offer discounted rates for participants.
- ▶ Provide a list of budget-friendly lodging options for lower income participants outside of the host hotel block.

## 4. CREATE SCHOLARSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

- ▶ Establish financial aid programs for athletes or teams facing economic challenges.
- ▶ Promote these opportunities well in advance of registration.



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“ By addressing affordability, organizers can make tournaments more inclusive and attract a wider range of participants. ”

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# POST-EVENT ENGAGEMENT

Post-event feedback is a goldmine for understanding what worked and identifying areas for improvement. Athletes and their families provide unique insights that can help organizers fine-tune future tournaments.

Implementing easy-to-use feedback mechanisms, such as online surveys or app-based reviews, allows participants to voice their opinions. Responding to feedback by implementing changes demonstrates that the organizer values their input, fostering long-term loyalty.

To maintain relationships

## 1. SEND PERSONALIZED THANK YOU MESSAGES

- ▶ Express appreciation to athletes, families and teams for attending.
- ▶ Highlight memorable moments from the event.

## 2. SHARE EVENT RECAPS

- ▶ Post photos, videos, and results on social media and the event website.
- ▶ Send a follow-up email with links to recap content.

## 3. COLLECT FEEDBACK

- ▶ Use surveys to gather insights on what worked well and areas for improvement.
- ▶ Incentivize feedback with discounts on future events.

## 4. PROMOTE FUTURE EVENTS

- ▶ Share early registration details or exclusive offers for upcoming tournaments.
- ▶ Keep participants engaged with regular updates and newsletters.

## BUILDING A SENSE OF COMMUNITY

Athletes thrive in environments where they feel connected and supported. Creating a sense of community within the tournament encourages camaraderie and strengthens the overall experience.

Organizers can foster community by hosting social events, encouraging team interactions, and providing platforms for athletes to share their stories. A strong community atmosphere leaves a lasting impression and encourages participation in future events.

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“ Post-event engagement strengthens connections and increases the likelihood of repeat participation. ”

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# ENSURING LONG-TERM SUSTAINABILITY

Sustainability in sports tournaments not only reflects environmental responsibility but also sets the tone for future success. Demonstrating a commitment to sustainability appeals to athletes who value eco-conscious practices.

Incorporating green initiatives shows that the event prioritizes the broader community. This approach enhances the tournament's reputation and attracts like-minded participants.

For your next event, partner with local sustainability initiatives sponsored by local environmental organizations to promote eco-conscious behavior for both participants and fans.



# A CALL TO ACTION

Creating a positive experience for teams and athletes before, during and after your tournaments is vital for fostering engagement, improving performance, and encouraging repeat participation. From the initial registration process to the final moments of the event, every interaction shapes the athlete's journey.

Improving the athlete experience is a continuous process that requires innovation, empathy and collaboration. By implementing the strategies outlined in this whitepaper, sports event organizers can create memorable, accessible, and effective events that foster loyalty and attract more participants.

Sports Planning Guide is here to support your journey in enhancing sports events. Subscribe to our magazine and newsletter and contact us anytime to learn more about how we can help your organization deliver outstanding athlete experiences.

