

# STREET & SMITH'S SportsBusiness JOURNAL

This Week's News

## Big bounce for corporate travel at tournament

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Corporate travel for the upcoming NCAA men's basketball tournament is up strongly compared with last year, marking another sign of economic recovery from the downturn of 2009. Mirroring rebounds seen already this year for Super Bowl XLIV and the NBA All-Star Game, ticket brokers, corporate travel firms and the NCAA all say that the number of business-related bookings for the tournament, culminating in the April 3-5 Final Four in Indianapolis, is up by double-digit percentages.

"Things are looking very good. There is undoubtedly a refreshed feeling in the market," said John Wallace, vice president and general manager of RazorGator's corporate business, which is up more than 60 percent for the tournament compared with last year's event. RazorGator's PrimeSport division, the official travel partner of the NCAA, is marketing Final Four packages for between \$1,500 and \$4,200 per person, with additional fees for optional seat upgrades.

Final Four packages are the featured offerings of PrimeSport's corporate-level bookings for the tournament, but it markets packages for the opening weekend and regional rounds of the event as well.

"We're definitely getting much more advance business as opposed to a rush of last-minute buys we had last year, and our marketplace [secondary ticket] business is also up across the board," Wallace said.

The location of this year's Final Four is playing a role in the uptick. The corporate travel business for 2010, despite the gains, remains slightly below levels seen for the 2008 tournament, which ended in San Antonio. But the change in locales from Detroit for the Final Four a year ago to Indianapolis this year is undoubtedly providing a boost to this year's numbers.



**The corporate mood is much improved from last year's Final Four in Detroit.**

"We were battling perceptions more than anything last year," said Robert Tuchman, executive vice president of Premiere Global Sports, which is up more than 40 percent for this year's tournament and is selling all-inclusive Final Four packages for \$2,000 to \$4,000 each, depending on seating location. "The economy was obviously down and still is recovering, but there was a stigma that companies shouldn't travel to events, and a lot of that has lifted in the last six months."

Companies in the technology sector have shown a particularly strong interest in NCAA-related corporate travel, organizers say, but they add that the rising interest has been seen across multiple sectors and business sizes.

"It's really been broad-based," said Greg Shaheen, NCAA vice president of basketball and business strategies. "There are a lot of factors coming into play, not the least of which that Indianapolis is one of the favorite host cities out there and a place where there's a lot of history and heritage for this event."