

# Nathan Benderson Park Selected as Venue for World Rowing Masters Regatta

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**UNIVERSITY PARK** -- Nathan Benderson Park will boost the Manatee-Sarasota tourism industry with another world-class rowing event in 2018.

The venue was chosen this week to host the World Rowing Masters Regatta in 2018. The Masters Regatta is open to any amateur or professional rowers age 27 or older. Participants compete in different age categories over 1,000 meters.

FISA, the governing body for the sport of rowing, sent requests for interest about a year ago to all 140 national rowing federations.

Four other national federations expressed interest in hosting the Masters Regatta in addition to the U.S. Some of the other national federations dropped out of the running during the preliminary period, said Ronald Chen, member of FISA's Masters Rowing Commission, though he wouldn't specify how many or which federations dropped out.

After site visits and interviews, the FISA Masters Commission made recommendations to the FISA Council who accepted the Commission's nomination.

The combined power of Nathan Benderson Park as a venue and the vacation appeal of the Manatee-Sarasota area won the bid, Chen said.

"But apart from the 'on the water' conditions, we also seek a location that would attract participation by the largest number of masters competitors, who are in some ways 'sports tourists' who combine competing at the WRMR with other recreational and leisure activities," he said. "Sarasota/Bradenton's bid impressed the Commission as a recreational destination that many of our competitors and their families would enjoy."

The 2015 Masters Regatta will be this weekend in Haze-winkel, Belgium, where more than 3,000 rowers will compete.

The Suncoast Aquatic Nature Center Inc., or SANCA, the managing nonprofit of Nathan Benderson Park, submitted its bid for the Masters Regatta in April. SANCA President Paul Blackketter said the nonprofit became interested in the Masters Regatta after securing the 2017 World Rowing Championships.

The Masters Regatta is the largest of all events organized by World Rowing. Bidding is open for the 2018 and 2019 World Rowing Coastal Championships. SANCA will bid for the Coastal Championships and information will be released soon, Blackketter told the Bradenton Herald.

Thousands of rowers and their friends and family may take their first trip to Florida for the Masters Regatta.



Members of the Oak Ridge Rowing Association work to place their racing shell for a masters national championship event at Nathan Benderson Park in Sarasota. The Masters Regatta is open to any amateur or professional rowers age 27 or older.

Paul Videla/Bradenton Herald File

Director of Sports for Visit Sarasota Rob Wells said sometimes one trip is all it takes.

"That's one of the key reasons we go after events like this," Wells said. "It introduces the area to a whole different group of people that has maybe never even been to Florida. They plan on staying four days, and once they're here they start making plans to come back six months or a year down the road."

Sean Walter, director of sports for the Bradenton Area Visitors and Convention Bureau, said it's not just the number of guests brought by events like the Masters Regatta, but the type, too.

"It's the type of demographic that have professional careers with higher disposable incomes, thus staying longer in our destination, which creates a greater economic impact to our region -- and, of course, the Bradenton area," Walter said.

Beyond the economic impacts to the Bradenton-Sarasota area, the selection of the 600-acre Nathan Benderson Park for the Masters Regatta shows its virtue as a venue. The park's lake covers 400 acres.

"FISA has confidence in the venue, the operations team, infrastructure and the designation to support such a large international regatta," Blackketter said.

A \$5 million, 24,000-square-foot finishing tower broke ground in August as the first of what Scott Anderson, vice president of philanthropy for the Nathan Benderson Park Foundation, described as "phenomenal" amenities to be added to the park. Anderson mentioned a children's playground, multiuse boathouse and amphitheater, among others, as future additions.

Nathan Benderson Park also will host the Rio de Janeiro Olympic Rowing Trials in 2016 and the NCAA rowing national championships in 2018.