



St. Pete/Clearwater Comes Alive With College Ball This Weekend

Big East/Big Ten Baseball Challenge Draws 18 Teams, Hundreds of Players to Area

St. Pete/Clearwater, Fla. (February 20, 2009) – Collegiate baseball players from two of the country's most recognizable athletic conferences have descended upon the St. Petersburg/Clearwater area this week for the inaugural BIG EAST/Big Ten Baseball Challenge.

Hosted by the St. Petersburg/Clearwater Sports Commission, the event takes place February 20-22 at various current and former spring training venues in the area.

Connecticut (BIG EAST) and Michigan State (Big Ten) kicked-off the Challenge with the first of the tournament's 27 games at 10 a.m. today at Clearwater's Jack Russell Stadium. In addition to Michigan State, the Big Ten's Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Northwestern, Ohio State, Penn State and Purdue will make the trip south to start their season. Along with Connecticut, the University of South Florida, Georgetown, St. John's, Seton Hall, West Virginia, Cincinnati and Notre Dame will represent the BIG EAST.

The tournament presents the St. Petersburg/Clearwater area with an exciting opportunity to showcase the area's attractions, from its award-winning beaches to the top-notch sporting facilities located throughout the county.

"We are thrilled to be hosting a collegiate baseball event of this magnitude," said Kevin Smith, Director of the St. Petersburg/Clearwater Sports Commission. "It's a wonderful opportunity for us to highlight the many attractions the area has to offer and to enhance our reputation as a leader in sports tourism."

The tournament schedule consists of eight inter-conference games each day with the remaining two Big Ten teams playing each other in a non-conference tilt. Clearwater's Bright House Field will be the site for Purdue's matchup with the University of South Florida on Saturday night at 7:30 in a game which will be televised locally on Bright House Sports Network.

Bright House Field, the current spring home of the Philadelphia Phillies and Jack Russell Stadium---the Phillies former Clearwater home---are two of the six locations that will host

games. The Naimoli Complex, St. Petersburg's four-field complex formerly used by the Tampa Bay Rays; Dunedin Stadium, spring home of the Toronto Blue Jays; McKechnie Field, the Bradenton ballpark which hosts the Pittsburgh Pirates each spring; and Red McEwen Field, the home of the University of South Florida, will also be used.

Individual venue passes can be purchased for \$5, but an all-tournament pass providing access to all 27 games is available for \$10. To purchase tickets online or for more information, please visit the BIG EAST/Big Ten Baseball Challenge Web site at www.BigEastBigTenChallenge.com.

For more information about Visit St. Pete/Clearwater: www.VisitStPeteClearwater.com

Contact: PR Director David Downing: David@Floridasbeach.com

Phone: 727.464.7213

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