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Photo courtesy of NCAA
Detroit will offer plenty of events for college hoops fans during the Final Four, like San Antonio did last year.

NCAA Final Four around the corner

Stage set for fan fun, basketball finals in Detroit

By Jon Malavolti
C & G Sports Writer

Bill Ryan can hardly wait for the NCAA Men's Division 1 Basketball Final Four to come to Detroit April 4-6.

"It's pretty exciting now that we're here," Ryan said. "It's going to be a great event."

Ryan isn't necessarily a fan of any of the teams poised to make a run in the college hoops tournament, nor is he a player or a coach.

But as the executive director of the Detroit Local Organizing Committee, Ryan has been working for five years to bring the Final Four to Ford Field.

"From a standpoint of having all the pieces in place to make this thing happen, we're beyond where we thought we would be," Ryan said. "Ford Field is virtually ready to go; the outside events are virtually ready to go. We want this event — now."

Essentially, the only piece left incomplete is finding out which four



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teams will emerge from the 65-team tournament, which gets into full swing March 19, and converge upon Detroit.

“From our perspective, when you’re putting on an event, you set the stage for whoever shows up. There’s lots of anxiety waiting to find out,” he said.

Regardless of whether it’s a powerhouse from the Big East or Atlantic Coast conferences, Michigan State University or a “Cinderella” team from the middle of nowhere, Ryan and the rest of the hosts — Ford Field, the University of Detroit-Mercy, and the Detroit Metro Convention and Visitor’s Bureau — are ready to put on quite a show for metro Detroiters, the four finalists and fans around the country.

“We’re ready; the fans are ready. It’s going to be great,” Ryan said.

Get involved, ticket or not

The first national semifinal game is scheduled for 6:07 p.m. April 4; the second game follows 40 minutes after the conclusion of the first. The national championship tips off at 9:21 p.m. April 6.

Yet whether you’ve got a ticket for the games or not, there will be plenty of activities for hoops fans and people looking for something to do surrounding the Final Four.

The activities, many free, range from catching the Final Four teams and NCAA All-Star squads in action, to interactive clinics and competitions, musical entertainment acts, a 5K Run/Walk and more.

For more information on the Final Four events and activities, check out www.candgnews.com/sports.asp or visit www.ncaa.com/finalfour — where registration forms and volunteer sign-up can be found. Most events should still have openings.

Other community initiatives have been set up to benefit various programs throughout the region, as well.

In total, the Final Four is expected to create an economic impact of \$30 million to \$50 million, and attract more than 30,000 visitors to Detroit. Ryan called that estimation “rather conservative,” noting that San Antonio, Texas, generated about \$70 million hosting last year’s Final Four.

“It’s great that Detroit is hosting the Final Four during these economic times,” Ryan said. “This town is

Event schedule at a glance

- Final Four Friday, April 3, Ford Field — Fans can watch the teams at an open practice for free beginning at noon.
- National Association of Basketball Coaches College All-Star Game, April 3 at Ford Field — Following the open practice, two teams of the NCAA’s top senior players selected by coaches from around the country will play in an all-star game, also free to the public, at about 4:35 p.m.
- NCAA Hoop City, April 3-6, Cobo Center — Fans of all ages can run, jump, shoot and play until the final buzzer at this interactive basketball experience. The cost is \$6-\$8, free for children under 2, for competitions, clinics, performances, photo opportunities, prizes, autograph sessions, surprise appearances and more from noon to 8 p.m. each day except April 4, when the schedule is 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.
- The Big Dance, April 3-5, Detroit Riverfront — Three days of free musical entertainment, including Fergie, Ryan Seacrest, The Pussycat Dolls, Gavin DeGraw, Gym Class Heroes, Staind and others. The show begins each day at 11 a.m. On April 3, it ends at 10:30 p.m.; April 4, it concludes at 8 p.m.; and April 5, it’s over at 8:30 p.m.
- YES Clinics, April 4, Joe Dumars Fieldhouse in Shelby Township, Detroit Renaissance High School and Detroit Western International High School — From 8 a.m. to noon, college coaches present skill sessions in basketball while NCAA Life Skills coordinators conduct sessions in personal enrichment for youths ages 10-16. Parents also participate by attending their own information session.
- The Road to the Final Four 5K Run/Walk, April 4, Detroit RiverWalk — Race begins at Cobo Center and the route highlights the RiverWalk. Entry fee is \$20 by March 28 or \$25 on race day. All participants receive free admission to Hoop City and a chance to win tickets to the Final Four. Proceeds benefit the United Way of Southeastern Michigan Early Learning Communities. Registration is at 7 a.m., and the race starts at 8:30 a.m.
- National semifinals, April 4, Ford Field — The first semifinal game of the NCAA Men’s Division 1 basketball tournament is scheduled to begin at 6:07 p.m. The second semifinal is slated to start 40 minutes after the

resilient and ready to put on a good show. Detroit is one of the best sports towns in the world.”

For more information, visit www.NCAA.com/finalfour or call the Detroit Local Organizing Committee at (313) 262-2900.

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conclusion of the first game.

- NCAA Final Four Dribble, April 5, downtown Detroit — Thousands of youngsters ages 18 and younger will dribble basketballs through the streets of downtown Detroit to Hoop City (Cobo Center) in hopes of breaking a world record.

- National Championship, April 6, Ford Field — The NCAA Men’s Division 1 basketball champion will be crowned at the conclusion of the tournament’s final game, which is scheduled to begin at 9:21 p.m.

— Jon Malavolti

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