

Baton Rouge Bowling Championship Wraps Up After \$125M Impact

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Baton Rouge's hosting of the United States Bowling Congress Open Championships has come to a close, following five months of competitive play that significantly boosted the local economy. The event drew more than 58,000 bowlers from across the country and was estimated to generate up to \$125 million in economic activity for the city.

The tournament, which began on March 1 and ran through Monday, operated nearly 21 hours a day at the Raising Cane's River Center. According to Visit Baton Rouge, the city's official tourism bureau, the influx of visitors drove up hotel occupancy across East Baton Rouge Parish by 6% compared to the same period last year, an impressive feat during what is typically considered a sluggish season for tourism.

Local officials and business leaders expressed both pride and nostalgia at the championship's conclusion. "I think they just oughta stay here," said Mayor-President Sid J. Gautreaux III during a press conference, noting the positive atmosphere and community engagement generated by the event. Edwards often made time to visit with participants, learning about their backgrounds and the experiences they enjoyed during their stay.

For hoteliers and hospitality providers, the benefits were clear. Nathaniel Tannehill, general manager of the Hilton Baton Rouge Capitol Center, said the hotel saw over 9,000 room nights booked and about \$1.5 million in room revenue tied to the championship. He noted that the tournament helped sustain business during the typically slow summer months, especially June and July.

Before the games began, Visit Baton Rouge projected the championship could bring an economic impact equivalent to seven home games for Louisiana State University (LSU), where each major football matchup typically adds about \$18 million to the local economy. This year's championship met that expectation, with turnout levels reportedly reaching the highest since 2012, the last time Baton Rouge hosted the event.

Aaron Smith, communications manager for the United States Bowling Congress (USBC), credited the city's hospitality and strong community ties for the high level of participation. "That speaks to the drawing power of this community," Smith said. "The bowlers want to come out to Baton Rouge."

To ensure a lasting legacy, salvageable infrastructure from the championship, such as spectator stands, will be donated to local organizations. Meanwhile, bowling-specific materials like lane equipment and pinsetters will be distributed to bowling centers nationwide.

As the event came to an end, USBC officials expressed their appreciation to Baton Rouge residents and businesses for their support over the 150-day stretch. "It's been a

phenomenal run,” Smith added. “We’re very thankful to everybody who’s helped support along the way.”

The return of the championship to Baton Rouge not only underscored the city’s capacity to host large-scale national events but also proved how strategic tourism planning can pay off in a big way.