# Youth Sports' Billion-Dollar Building Boom Has Developers, Cities Playing Ball

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Pro sports mean big money for commercial real estate, especially as increasingly elaborate mixed-use districts are established around stadiums. But with billions of dollars flooding into new projects centered around youth sports, it's not just the pros driving development opportunities.

Commercial real estate and local economic development officials see incredible potential in America's increasingly expensive relationship with kids' sports, and the increased time and financial commitments families are willing to make.

"I know it seems like a large-scale undertaking and a large-scale development, but there's multibillions of dollars of development directly around these facilities," said Montierre Development CEO Jaime Douglas, whose firm is set to break ground on a $1B youth sports project in suburban Orlando. "We're just taking all the parts of the ecosystem of travel sports and combining them into one project."

The Dynasty, expected to break ground this year in Ocoee, Florida, represents the latest generation (https://www.sportsbusinessjournal.com/Articles/2025/03/17/future-youth-sports-complexes/)of all-in-one, mixed-use developments using the booming youth athletics economy as an anchor.

The 159-acre complex will include 150K SF of high-tech indoor training facilities; 17 convertible fields for soccer, football, baseball and lacrosse; a pair of full-service hotels; and 350K SF of dining, retail and entertainment — a mecca for little leagues and a magnet for parents' money.

According to the Aspen Institute's latest Project Play study (https://projectplay.org/news/2025/2/24/project-play-survey-family-spending-on-youth-sports-rises-46-over-five-years), the $40B that families are collectively spending on youth sports annually is twice the amount that flows through the NFL.

The average U.S. family spent $1,016 on their child's primary sport in 2024, including $414 on travel and lodging. That's a 46% increase over the last five years. Factor in spending on other sports, and that figure climbs to $1,500 per child. Those figures highlight why a project like the Dynasty can boast multiple revenue streams from hosting tournaments.

"You may come for two hours of sports, but then you have 22 hours of hospitality that you can utilize as a family," said Anne-Marie Douglas, president of Montierre Development.

Sports Facilities Cos. co-founder and CEO Jason Clement predicts the youth sports industry, which is currently valued at $52B, (https://ncys.org/the-hidden-costs-of-youth-sports-financial-strain-and-emotional-toll-2/#:~:text=Economic%20Impact,families'%20ability%20to%20keep%20up.) will hit $77B in the next couple of years.

His firm, which designs, builds and operates these facilities, has 25 projects in the pipeline across the country. Cities are recognizing the return on investment, he said, seeing other municipalities succeed and wondering why they're sending their kids and dollars elsewhere.

"The highest and best use for a piece of property is not a bunch of ball fields, right?" Clement said. "But municipalities now are saying, well, hold on a second. This is an important component of our infrastructure, in terms of quality of life, but it can also spur economic growth, so it's worth the investment."

Traditionally, cities and municipalities have provided land to real estate developers willing to build out vast swaths of pitches, ball fields and practice grounds for young athletes.

But as travel leagues have become more commonplace, and tournament play more popular, what was once a collection of fields with a few concession stands has become vast multi-use districts with vacation-level entertainment options as well as bars and restaurants for the parents.

The Dynasty, for example, combined 11 parcels of land to create a large assemblage near major highways and a short drive from a collection of top-tier theme parks. Officials in Ocoee saw it as a key part of their economic redevelopment plan. Studies done for Montierre Development forecast that there will be up to 8 million annual visitors to the complex annually.

Take the 276-acre Legacy Pointe project in Springfield, Illinois, which includes the $67M Scheels Sports Park, named after a local sports and recreation store, and the nation's largest air-supported dome.

Developer Steve Luker said he and his firm, Legacy Pointe Development, had been working on the project for more than a decade. And in 2017, the city of Springfield began looking into the benefits of a sports complex, commissioning a study from a consulting group and eventually offering to partner with any developer willing to take on the project.

"Our vision was to create something where people would come, stay, eat and play," Luker said. "But this evolved, and now it's bigger than we had dreamed to begin with. The families coming in Thursday nights and leaving Sunday night never have to leave the development."

Many of these new complexes have been designed to be flexible and multi-use in order to host a variety of sports for as much of the year as possible, with the option to host corporate events and concerts during gaps in the schedule.

In addition to perennial powerhouses like basketball, soccer and baseball, sports including flag football, ice hockey and lacrosse have gained traction, and girls' sports have shown substantial growth and expansion.

The industry has detailed projections on hotel room nights and spending broken down per sport. For boys' basketball, players tend to share hotel rooms, versus girls' volleyball, where there tends to be a room per player and family. The Dynasty is being conceived as a true vacation destination due to its location near Orlando, setting up the opportunity to cash in.

“The spend per family for these events has doubled in the last five years,” Clement said.

Often, these projects will be structured as public-private partnerships, where municipalities use subsidies to bring in private developers, who use the sports complex as an anchor tenant to ideally bring in additional commercial projects and catalyze economic development.

In Overland Park, Kansas, AdventHealth Sports Park at Bluhawk, a $125M, 420K SF complex with an ice rink, turf fields and basketball and volleyball courts, was developed by Price Brothers Management Co. with $53M of state-issued sales tax and revenue bonds.

In New Lenox, Illinois (https://sportsplanningguide.com/the-next-evolution-of-youth-sports-destinations/), where the 100-acre Crossroads Sports Complex is being built, town leaders have designated 70 adjacent acres for retail, restaurants and hotels as a means to capture tax dollars and pay for the

facility's development. For the Scheels project at Legacy Pointe in Springfield, a local sales and hotel tax will help support the development, and local organizations, including Scheels and the Springfield Clinic, will be partners.

“The developers who are successful in developing privately as part of a broader development are still utilizing heavy public incentives,” Clement said.

The industry has also brought in substantial private equity investment, which is attracted to a youth sports landscape that is fragmented among numerous leagues, regions, games and tournament providers.

Youth Sports Business Report founder Cameron Korab said the landscape is “100% changing,” with an influx of private equity capital and a number of roll-ups, in which different sports entities and leagues get combined under one roof by groups like Unrivaled Sports. This push for bigger groups and more tournaments has created a massive need for more facilities, said Korab, which has been one of the biggest drivers of this big cash inflow into the industry.

“These destination-type facilities are a mix of Disney World and youth sports,” Korab said. “Sports are expensive, vacations are expensive, so why not merge the two? Parents are spending not just their whole weekend, but their whole summer at these events.”

Despite the presence of projects like The Dynasty, where the entire development and entertainment ecosystem is owned by a private developer/operator, Clement says he’s seeing more projects trend back toward municipal ownership of the sports complex.

Local leaders want to control the sports facilities to ensure that local leagues and residents have access to much-needed recreational facilities, he said, and they can quickly see the benefits from such developments by creating tax increment financing districts around the sports fields and leveraging hotel taxes so these larger events can help pay for the development over time.

There have been some misses. Developers behind the $250M Arizona Athletic Grounds pleaded guilty to securities fraud and identity theft after their bid to bamboozle investors came to light earlier this year

(https://www.wsj.com/finance/investing/a-desert-oasis-for-youth-sports-was-built-on-a-financial-mirage-1515625a?gaa_at=eafs&gaa_n=ASWzDAikbs6BFMHn4dq94NiiQ3PLv7jTlFZRYdMjbTatFWdcSpv4Dt52PArGWT_0cc%3D&gaa_ts=686cb7b2&gaa_sig=75MjMFwplYp5ZkQbd7wvTaSbhqDv2h7eA_2UeMf7YhTtDqslS2NcH3P1fg%3D%3D). It's easy to see one of these complexes on a summer weekend "printing money" and make some erroneous financial assumptions about the financing and business model, Clement said.

And youth sports participation, now at 54.6%, has waned slightly from its prepandemic high of 56.1% of kids, potentially a sign of other interests and increasing financial burdens making it harder to participate in tournaments and expensive lessons.

But the increasing interest in the youth sports economy and real estate suggests the boom isn't over.

"I don't think it's been overbuilt, I think it's drastically underbuilt," Douglas said.

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