



## **Gulf Coast Showcase**

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## **24 COLLEGE BASKETBALL TEAMS BOUND FOR SOUTHWEST FLORIDA IN THE GULF COAST SHOWCASE AND NAPLES INVITATIONAL**

*New eight-team tournament in Naples joins the annual Gulf Coast Showcase at Hertz Arena*

**ESTERO, Fla. (July 29, 2021)** – College basketball returns to Southwest Florida this November when the ninth-annual Gulf Coast Showcase tips off at Hertz Arena bringing 16 teams to the market Thanksgiving week. And for 2021, tournament operator bdG Sports also is launching the Naples Invitational, a new eight-team tournament held at the Community School of Naples.

The action tips with the Gulf Coast Showcase men’s tournament on Nov. 22-24 at Hertz Arena. The eight-team tournament will be headlined by defending Sun Belt Tournament champion and NCAA Tournament participant App State, a Vermont program that has won five straight America East titles (regular season or tournament) and Mid-American Conference power Akron. The men’s tournament starts on Monday, Nov. 22 with the following pairings:

- 11 a.m. ET – Rice vs. Evansville
- 1:30 p.m. ET – Vermont vs. Oakland
- 5 p.m. ET – Akron vs. Fordham
- 7:30 p.m. ET – App State vs. Delaware

Game times for Tuesday and Wednesday will be the same with semifinal games on Nov. 23 at 5:00/7:30. Wednesday’s championship game will tip at 7:30 p.m.

After a day-off on Thanksgiving, the women’s tournament tips on Friday, Nov. 26 headlined by NCAA Tournament participants UCLA, Iowa State and South Dakota State. The women’s tournament still owns the reputation as the premier women’s in-season event in all of college basketball. Past champions include UConn (2014 Gulf Coast Showcase champion), Stanford (2015), Baylor (2016), Notre Dame (2017), Texas (2018) and Gonzaga (2019).

“Since its inception, the Gulf Coast Showcase has attracted the very best in women’s college basketball,” said Women’s Tournament Director and CBS/ESPN analyst Debbie Antonelli. “I fully expect to see six or seven teams in this year’s field playing in the NCAA Tournament in March and our champion competing for a Final Four berth.”

The first-round pairings for this year’s women’s tournament are as follows:

- 11 a.m. ET – South Dakota State vs. UMass



- 1:30 p.m. ET – UCLA vs. Kent State
- 5 p.m. ET – Iowa State vs. Charlotte
- 7:30 p.m. ET – Penn State vs. St. John's

Game times for Saturday and Sunday will be the same as the men's tournament.

The Gulf Coast Showcase will once again support the Golisano Children's Hospital of Southwest Florida. The hospital is the only children's hospital between Tampa and Miami and provides vital health care for the region's sick and injured children and their families. The hospital's facility provides 300,000 square feet of space, 128 pediatric and NICU beds, a 17-bay emergency department, a freestanding pediatric pharmacy and in-hospital school classroom.

#### **Naples Invitational Tips on Nov. 22**

The Naples Invitational field also is limited strictly to mid-major programs and the eight-team field will feature a strong slate of games for the first-year event. Seven of the eight teams have earned NCAA Tournament bids in the past decade including ETSU (won the SoCon Tournament title in 2020 before the postseason was cancelled due to COVID-19), Murray State led by NBA star Ja Morant in 2019, Wright State in 2018 and Kent State in 2017.

The tournament will be played Nov. 22-24 at the Community School of Naples where the venue has a college-length floor and shot clocks. The first-round pairings for the Naples Invitational are:

- 12 p.m. ET – Kent State vs. James Madison
- 2:30 p.m. ET – Wright State vs. George Washington
- 5:30 p.m. ET – ETSU vs. Murray State
- 8:00 p.m. ET – Missouri State vs. Long Beach State

Tuesday's semifinals will be played at 5:30/8:00 with the championship game being held on Wednesday night.

With two dozen teams visiting Southwest Florida during a holiday week, the expected economic impact will be significant as the destination location continues to recover from the pandemic.

"With the Gulf Coast Showcase serving as one of the oldest college basketball tournaments in the Sunshine State, we're excited to be planning the 2021 events to have full fields and with typical crowds once again," said Brooks Downing, CEO of bdG Sports. "Last year, we were one of the few event operators that staged games during the pandemic and kept our teams 100 percent safe and continuing to play, all thanks to the Covid-free #BeachBubble we created. To have 16 teams in Fort Myers and meet a growing demand by creating an additional eight-team men's event in Naples will likely bring a \$2 million impact to the area. It's an exciting day for basketball fans on the Gulf Coast and we're excited to create that massive of an impact in an area we call home."



**Ticket and Fan Travel Information**

Fan travel information, including preferred hotel rates at the official tournament resorts, and ticket information can be found at the official event websites – [www.gulfcoastshowcase.com](http://www.gulfcoastshowcase.com) or [www.naplesinvitational.com](http://www.naplesinvitational.com) – and on social media at @GCShowcase.

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