

ESPN Wide World of Sports Complex Celebrates 15th Anniversary

LAKE BUENA VISTA, Fla. (March 28, 2012)—With the Braves-Yankees spring training game today at *Champion Stadium*, the ESPN Wide World of Sports Complex celebrates its 15th anniversary.

With the swing of a bat, the sports complex officially opened March 28, 1997 with a Braves-Reds spring training game under the lights that featured the likes of superstar Deion Sanders, Hall of Famer Barry Larkin and former All-Star Fred “Crime Dog” McGriff.

Back then, the place was called Disney’s Wide World of Sports Complex. But over the last decade and a half, the venue has undergone extraordinary growth, including being re-imagined with the ESPN brand, and today stands at the leading multi-sports venue in the nation for youth and pro athletes.

In all, more than 200,000 athletes, coaches and fans visit the 230-acre complex each year to compete in more than 350 different events, which over the years have included Tampa Bay Bucs training camp, the NBA Pre-Draft Camp, the Major League Baseball Draft, the World Cheerleading Championships and the Pop Warner Super Bowl.

To mark today’s 15th anniversary, here’s our *unofficial* look at some of the most memorable moments in the sports complex’s history:

February 11, 2012

First Lady Michelle Obama participates in a fitness activity with local children at the Magic of Healthy Living event at ESPN Wide World of Sports Complex. The event celebrated the First Lady’s Let’s Move! initiative and recognized Disney’s efforts to promote healthier lifestyles among kids and families.

September 3, 2010

Disney Sports launches runDisney, which encompasses all six current Disney marathon and half marathon weekends. The series creates a unique series of destination races that offer one-of-a-kind running experiences over each weekend. The runDisney series also names former Olympian and endurance expert Jeff Galloway as the official training consultant.

July 11, 2010

On the heels of recruiting LeBron James and Chris Bosh to join him in South Florida, Miami Heat star Dwyane Wade visits the complex, and plays in a special 3-on-3 basketball game with AAU girls’ basketball players and Mickey Mouse.

February 25, 2010

A host of sports’ biggest stars help kick off the opening of the newly re-imagined ESPN Wide World of Sports Complex. More than 50 athletes and ESPN personalities, including Olympic gymnast Shawn Johnson, NFL all-pro Chad Ochocinco, softball star Jennie Finch and former LPGA great Annika Sorenstam, walk the “green carpet,” and attend the special grand opening event that also included a Harlem Globetrotters game, MLS exhibition game and a special Atlanta Braves evening practice. Special guests also included Florida governor Charlie Crist, ESPN executive chairman George Bodenheimer and Disney Sports Senior Vice President Ken Potrock.

October 16, 2009

The ESPN Innovation Lab officially opened at Disney’s Wide World of Sports Complex. The lab is used to develop

new products for television broadcasts and is the official 3D broadcast development hub for ESPN.

May 2007

The Tampa Bay Rays hosted the first of two regular-season series at Champion Stadium (the second one was in 2008). In 2008, the Rays swept the Toronto Blue Jays (6-4, 5-3, 5-3) to improve their record at Disney to 6-0 and went on to reach the team's first-ever World Series.

June 2007

NBA Pre-Draft Camp is held Disney's Wide World of Sports Complex in 2007 and 2008. Potential top draft picks – including future MVP Derrick Rose – are involved in drills, games and physical exams under the watchful eye of representatives from virtually every NBA team and the league office. Among the well-known names were Larry Bird, Michael Jordan and Larry Brown.

March 2006

The inaugural World Baseball Classic, a 16-team tournament sanctioned by the International Baseball Federation (IBAF), featured many of the best players in the world competing for their home countries and territories for the first time ever. Disney's Wide World of Sports hosted one of four Round 1 pools (six games). The Dominican Republic, Venezuela, Australia and Italy participated at Disney. Players included David Ortiz, Albert Pujols, Alfonso Soriano, Mike Piazza and Andruw Jones.

July-August 2003

AAU Boys Basketball Super Showcase and National Championships return to Disney and feature a host of future NBA stars, including preps Al Jefferson, Glen "Big Baby" Davis and O.J. Mayo (pictured). Coaches attending include Roy Williams (North Carolina), Bill Self (Kansas), Tom Izzo (Michigan State), Mark Few (Gonzaga) and Billy Donovan (Florida).

July-August 2002

Tampa Bay Buccaneers Training Camp marks the first NFL preseason training camp in the history of Disney's Wide World of Sports. The Bucs' new era under first-year head coach Jon Gruden started at Disney and ended in January 2003 with a Super Bowl title in San Diego. The Bucs conducted joint practices on Aug. 9-10 with the Miami Dolphins (incl. Ricky Williams, Jason Taylor and Zack Thomas) in the outfield of the baseball stadium. The joint practices attracted a stadium record 12,550 fans.

February 1, 2000

National Consortium for Academics & Sports (NCAS) inducts Muhammad Ali into its Hall of Fame. Celebration at the sports complex includes special ceremony renaming Victory Way to Muhammad Ali Way for the day. Legendary sports journalist Dick Schaap serves as Master of Ceremonies.

October 1997

Orlando Magic Training Camp brings Coach Chuck Daly's squad to Disney's fieldhouse prior to the Magic franchise's ninth season. Penny Hardaway, Nick Anderson, and Horace Grant highlighted the Magic roster. The Magic returned to train at Disney in 2003.

March 28, 1997

Disney's Wide World of Sports Complex Grand Opening includes a Major League Baseball spring training game – the Atlanta Braves defeated the Cincinnati Reds, 9-7, in front of a sellout crowd of more than 10,000 at the Baseball Stadium. Reds outfielder Deion Sanders records first hit, steals first base and scores first run in the history of the sports complex, while Braves slugger Fred McGriff hits the ballpark's first home run.

March 16, 1997

PGA TOUR mega-star Tiger Woods conducts his first-ever Tiger Woods Youth Foundation golf clinic at Disney's Wide World of Sports as one of a handful of events that took place just prior to the Grand Opening of the complex. During the event, Tiger provides instruction to 150 junior golfers from Tampa and Orlando. He also receives the key to the City of Orlando from Mayor Glenda Hood.