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LAKE BUENA VISTA, FL (Jan. 12, 2018) – As part of the 20th anniversary celebration of its ESPN Wide World of Sports Complex, Walt Disney World Resort officially opened a new multi-purpose sports and entertainment arena Friday, continuing the growth and expansion of the 220-acre Disney sports venue that is widely regarded as the leading facility for youth sports in America.

ESPN Wide World of Sports executives, along with AAU and Varsity executives, marked the grand opening with a ribbon-cutting ceremony that featured streamers as cheerleaders performed a high-energy routine involving Minnie Mouse, who sported her new cheerleading outfit.

Starting Friday, The Arena at ESPN Wide World of Sports Complex will host its inaugural event — the prestigious UCA and UDA College Cheerleading and Dance Team National Championship — which runs through Sunday.

The 8,000-seat arena will host a variety of major indoor sporting events from basketball to volleyball to gymnastics to wrestling. The venue also will host *runDisney* Health & Fitness Expos during *runDisney* race weekends, beginning with the Disney Princess Half Marathon Weekend presented by Children's Miracle Network Hospitals in February.

The new arena is the third indoor competition venue at ESPN Wide World of Sports Complex and is one of the largest in the country designed specifically with cheer and dance events in mind. Its launch marks another milestone for the Disney sports facility, which opened in 1997 and pioneered a new type of sports vacation experience where athletes at all levels and ages can pursue their sports dreams.

"We have created one of the most unique sports arenas in the country," said Faron Kelley, Vice President of Disney Sports. "We sat down and really listened to what our partners told us they needed the space to look like and what we ended up with is a fantastic new arena. We look forward to hosting many events in our new building for years to come."

One of the unique features of the arena is its flexibility. It can be converted to host more than six regulation-sized basketball and volleyball courts and can be further expanded to host open-floor exhibitions and other major events, such as the College Cheerleading and Dance Team Championship, which will feature more than 4,700 athletes.

"We are thrilled to have our 35th College Cheerleading and Dance Team National Championship as the

inaugural event in the new arena,” said Varsity Brands Founder and Chairman Jeff Webb. “This year, we’ll host seven premier events and welcome nearly 70,000 athletes to ESPN Wide World of Sports Complex. Our athletes and coaches are going to be very excited when they see the space, the warm-up areas and all of the other amenities that truly make this building one of a kind. We’re looking forward to a fantastic event, in a great building that’s being hosted by a terrific partner in Disney.”

Other features of the new arena include two versatile auxiliary venue spaces, an attached box office, plus built-in loges and judges’ boxes with seating for approximately 70 people. There are also seven concession stands and 35 concession points of sale, which will include specialty items such as hazelnut churros, chocolate banana empanadas, donut chicken, Greek Dogs, and an Adobo Chicken Rice Bowl.

“We spent countless hours doing research to make sure we designed a building that caters to the needs of existing partners and potential future partners, including developing sports such as e-sports and futsal,” Kelley said. “The word we kept coming back to was flexibility and our new arena has something special and unique for all of our partners.”

The addition of the arena is another step in Disney’s efforts to expand its sports business through a relentless growth strategy centered on enhancing existing events, developing new and more diverse events such as tournaments, competitions and entertainment and creating additional sports experiences for our guests.

Future plans for the sports complex include expanding the portfolio of outdoor sports, continuing to host high-profile events such as the 2018 NFL Pro Bowl Week and further supporting the 100-plus existing events that take place at the sports complex year around.