

ESPN Wide World of Sports Complex Celebrates 20 Years

ESPN Wide World of Sports Complex celebrated its 20th anniversary on Tuesday, March 28th. Disney Sports executives Maribeth Bisienere and Faron Kelley marked the occasion with a special on-field moment during the Atlanta Braves-Baltimore Orioles spring training game at the sports complex.

Reggie Williams, former Cincinnati Bengals star and founding executive of the ESPN Wide World of Sports Complex, threw out the ceremonial first pitch before the Braves game, which also featured 20th anniversary merchandise and music and trivia from 1997.

Since its opening on March 28, 1997, ESPN Wide World of Sports Complex has remained a preeminent multi-sport facility for professional, collegiate and youth sports events of all levels, from AAU Basketball National Championships to the NFL Pro Bowl Week.

In its 20-year history the sports complex has hosted more than **three million athletes**, including some of the biggest names in sports – Muhammad Ali, Venus and Serena Williams, Tiger Woods, Derek Jeter, Shaquille O’Neal, Tom Brady, Lionel Messi and Mia Hamm. The complex hosts **100 annual athletic and entertainment events** featuring **70 different sports** and over the years has hosted major events such as NFL Pro Bowl Week (2017), the Invictus Games (2016), the inaugural World Baseball Classic (2006) and Tampa Bay Buccaneers training camp (2002-2008).

ESPN Wide World of Sports Complex was one of the first major sports facilities in the country, blazing a new trail in youth sports tourism. In its wake, countless other youth sports complexes have emerged around the country to meet the increasing demand, as **27-percent of all travel taken in the U.S. is solely for organized sporting events.*** ESPN Wide World of Sports Complex and others comprise what is now an estimated **\$7 billion youth sports industry.***

While the celebration kicked off on March 28, there will be more tributes throughout the year to commemorate the anniversary and emphasize the positive impact of youth sports. Additionally, there will be new sports-related initiatives announced that will continue Disney’s long-standing support of youth sports nationally and that will continue to drive tourism in Central Florida for the next 20 years and beyond.

*Data sourced from a May 2014 National Association of Sports Commission Study