



**CONTACT: Kimberley Baker**  
Director, Marketing/Media  
(713) 844-3638 – Office  
[kbaker@houston.org](mailto:kbaker@houston.org)

# NEWS RELEASE

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## **SPORTS WEEKEND DRAWS CROWDS, BUSINESS HOUSTON REGION EPICENTER OF BASKETBALL, GOLF WORLDS**

HOUSTON – The raucous basketball fans and packed golf galleries that will descend upon the Houston region this weekend when the NCAA Final Four Men’s Basketball Championship and the Shell Houston Open (SHO) kicks into high gear has the business community cheering about the positive impact both stellar sports spectacles are expected to have on the local economy and the national perception of our area.

“This week the Houston region is the center of the sports world,” said Greater Houston Partnership President & CEO Jeff Moseley. “This weekend is not just about hoops and holes, it’s about the dollars and cents that will help move our economy forward. More importantly, it is about the opportunity to position Houston as business champions in the eyes of corporate decision makers for years to come.”

The epicenter of college hoops lands in Houston on Saturday when foes the Virginia Commonwealth University Rams, University of Kentucky Wildcats, Butler University Bulldogs and University of Connecticut Huskies square off in the semifinals with the championship game airing in primetime on Monday.

“Hosting the Final Four is something every major city in the United States would love to have the opportunity to do, which makes the bidding process extremely competitive,” said Janis Schmees, Executive Director of the Harris County – Houston Sports Authority.

With its multiple first-class facilities and fanatical sports fan base, the region has a competitive edge over other destinations and will be able to host even more major sports events in the future, Schmees said.

“This is a valuable opportunity for us to show off the changes to our city and promote who we are,” said Greater Houston Convention & Visitors Bureau President and CEO Greg Ortale. “The fact that we have already been awarded the 2016 Final Four before we’ve even hosted the 2011 tournament speaks to the confidence organizers have in Houston to produce a major sporting event and deliver a quality experience.”

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**GREATER HOUSTON PARTNERSHIP**

[houston.org](http://houston.org)

1200 SMITH, SUITE 700, HOUSTON, TX 77002 | PHONE: 713-844-3600 | FAX: 713-844-0200  
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Roughly 77,000 fans are expected to attend one or more of the Final Four games with approximately 70,000 of the screaming hoops followers trekking to the Houston region from outside of the area. Direct spending related to the Final Four may top \$100 million, according to estimates from the GHCVB and the Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts. Economic impact ranges from \$30 to \$50 million for major sporting events like professional sports all star games.

The annual Houston Shell Open tees off this week featuring a duffer's dream team of world-ranked golfers including 16 major championship winners; the No. 1 player and nine of the Top 20 players in the current World Golf Rankings. Pro-Am play began on Monday with the professionals hitting the greens today through Sunday.

The Houston Golf Association (HGA) has been conducting PGA TOUR events since 1946, making Houston's tournament the 10th oldest on the schedule.

"Our tournament attendance will be well over 100,000 people," said HGA President & CEO Steve Timms. "PGA TOUR estimates the economic impact of the Shell Houston Open is \$20 to \$30 million."

"On Tuesday, we were pleased to announce that the Shell Oil Co. would extend our sponsorship of the SHO through 2017," said Shell Oil President Marvin Odum. "Last year, the Shell Houston Open, along with other golf-related fund-raising activities by the HGA, generated \$2.1 million for charity – bringing the charity contribution to more than \$50 million over the past 20 years helping hundreds of thousands of young people. The tournament couldn't be staged without the help of thousands of volunteers."

"Houston is a flagship community for top sports," said Moseley. "Young athletes are introduced to world-class facilities while coaches are welcomed into a community that embraces sports of all kinds. The Houston region has a legacy of growing talent in football, basketball, golf and all types of sports. Add to that, Houston has the sports infrastructure in place to hold major sporting events just as our business infrastructure is in place to help multinational companies to expand and grow."

Recent rankings shore up the region's position as business champions. Houston created 320,000 jobs from Jan 2000 to December 2010, more than any other metro except Washington, DC. *Site Selection* magazine recently noted the area as having the second most number of corporate expansions and locations in the country while *Fortune* magazine recognized Houston as being home to the third most number of *Fortune 500* companies in the U.S.

"The lasting impact of this year's Shell Houston Open and NCAA Final Four will be felt even after the last putt is made, and the last basket is shot," said Moseley.

GHP is the primary business advocate for the 10-county Houston region. Visit the Greater Houston Partnership at [houston.org](http://houston.org).

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