

XVI Pan American Games

Written by David Harper

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—Ojo Sports Editor



The 16th edition of the PanAm Games begins in Jalisco, Mexico in a few days. This will be the third time that Mexico has hosted the event, which makes it the first nation within PASO (Pan American Sports Organization) to host three times. Mexico City hosted them in 1955 and 1975. Like the Olympics the PanAm Games are held every four years. The first Games were held in Buenos Aires in 1951 and the 2007 Games were held in Rio de Janeiro.

Guadalajara originally bid for the 2003 games but lost to Santo Domingo. PASO members agreed that Guadalajara would get the 2011 Games and so their bid was unopposed. The 2015 Games will be held in Toronto, Canada.

Guadalajara and the State of Jalisco will host approximately 6,000 athletes from 42 countries.

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They will compete in 36 sports comprising 361 events. The biggest single sport is athletics where 47 events are contested and second is swimming with 34 events. There are 35 different venues and the majority of them are newly built just for the Games. They vary from the large Omnilife Stadium (49,500 seating) where the opening and closing ceremonies will be held, down to the still being constructed Stadium Tlaquepaque (seating 1,200) where the Rugby Sevens will be contested. All of the new construction will become part of Jalisco's improved athletic facilities and will benefit the city and the state for many years to come.

Events are not limited to greater Guadalajara but will also be held in Puerto Vallarta (sailing, marathon swimming, triathlon and beach volleyball), Tapalpa (mountain biking), Ciudad Guzman (rowing and canoeing), Lagos de Moreno (baseball) and Lake Chapala will have the water skiing events (just east of Chapala).

Among the lesser known games that will be played is *Basque Pelota*. This is a very old game originally, as the name suggests, from the Basque areas of Spain and France. It was contested once in the Olympics (1900) but it has a growing following and is now played in many countries. There will be 10 events in this sport with eleven countries, including the USA and Canada, having entrants. Mexico and Argentina will have the most competitors (18). It is also called Fronton and in the USA a variant called Jai Alai is played. Competitors for the PanAm Games had to qualify via the 2010 world championship in Pau, France.

As is normal with huge events cost overruns are expected. Originally the building budget was US\$250 million but is now expected to be over \$750 million. This money is obtained from every available source and while much is provided by sponsors State taxes were also increased to help cover costs. The four principal sponsors are: Nissan, Scotiabank, Telcel and Telmex. Many second and third tier sponsors are also involved.

The benefits to Guadalajara are multiple and various. For example the Omnilife Stadium is already the new home of the famous Guadalajara Chivas soccer team. In addition to the sports venues new hotels have been built because of the Games and available rooms have increased from 16,000 to 21,000. New road construction, the second terminal at the airport, a new bus system (Macrobus), Auditorio Telmex and a convention center are all tied to the Games.

Some nations were worried about sending their athletes to Mexico because of the unfavorable press coverage of crime and drug gangs. Mexican officials have reassured contesting nations by beefing up security and the costs will be huge. It is expected that a force of 10,000 will be on

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patrol including all city and state police forces as well as army and navy personnel. Another huge cost is administering athlete's drug and doping tests. This is estimated at US\$100 million with probably half coming from sponsors.

There was a scare recently that some Mexican meat contained the banned (for athletes) drug clenbuterol. Mexican officials had to assure competitors that such meat would not find its way into the eating halls in the athlete's village. High performance athletes are very strict about diets and often teams, or even coaches, bring their own food for their athletes, even cooking it for them themselves.

Direct revenue generation will be around US\$70 million with \$50 million of that being from TV rights, the remainder being ticket and official merchandise sales. This amount is not much compared to the outlay but, as mentioned, the new venues will add much to quality of life for years to come.

At previous PanAm Games, the largest teams were usually from the USA, Canada, Argentina and Brazil but this time it is expected that Mexico will have a largest team. Most events are subject to qualifying, so a country can only send athletes who have made the qualifying standard. Also the Games are officially recognized as an event where athletes can use their performance here to meet Olympic qualifying standards.

Some of you may have seen the Games' three mascots depicted locally. They represent Jalisco and Guadalajara. They are "Gavo" representing the Blue Agave plant, "Huichi," a deer representing Huichol traditions and the female identity, and "Leo," a lion representing the strength of the people of Guadalajara and it is part of the city's coat of arms.

Tickets are still available online from Ticketmaster Mexico and other local outlets. The writer has bought some through Ticketmaster and found the experience only slightly challenging.