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SPORTSBIZ

For SCC, being badminton feels very, very good



KANA ITO: Watch the birdie.

Photo Courtesy of Suffolk Community College

Successful U.S. tourney has Suffolk school eyeing long-term commitment

By JACQUELINE BIRZON

Suffolk Community College's agreement to host the 2014 Yonex U.S. Badminton Championships accomplished three things – it increased exposure for the school, introduced professional badminton to this region and provided Suffolk County with a business boost.

More than 190 athletes from 31 countries flew to Long Island for the six-day tournament, held July 8-13 at the Brentwood campus' 57,000-square-foot Health,

Sports and Education Center field house. It was the first time in the Yonex event's 18 years that the championships were held on the East Coast.

"We thought this would be a good opportunity to show real, world-class badminton to the East Coast," said Deputy Tournament Director Junichi Kasuga, who noted Yonex – a Japanese manufacturer of badminton equipment and other sports gear – considered several tri-state-area venues for the 2014 championships but selected SCCC for its intimate stadium-like setting.

After holding the tournament in Orange County, Calif., for nearly two decades,

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For SCCC, national badminton tournament is quite a racket

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tournament organizers are now looking to build national traction – and to open themselves to eastern audiences deposited an \$80,000 rental fee to utilize the SCCC facility, according to Kasuga.

The college's events management team pursued the opportunity in force, noted SCCC President Shaun McKay, since it was on par with the college's overriding initiative to maximize local and regional exposure. Sponsorships were slim and attendance was roughly 50 percent below what organizers had hoped for, but the tournament still brought 2,500 spectators to the Michael J. Grant campus – and in addition to the \$80,000 rental fee for SCCC, pumped more than \$530,000 into the regional economy through hotel, food, transportation and ticket purchases, said Jennifer Rothman, sales manager for the Long Island Convention & Visitors Bureau.

"This was a business investment beyond badminton that put Suffolk Community College on the map," McKay said. "Our name was broadcast worldwide."

More than 200 million global viewers tuned into online streams of the tournament, including more than 81 million



viewers in India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Maldives, Bhutan and Nepal, according to the college.

Hauppauge-based UpSky Hotel was selected through a bidding process as the hotel of choice for athletes and their friends, families and coaches. UpSky Director of Sales and Marketing Eileen Kory said over the tournament's six-day span, the hotel booked more than 500 rooms and arranged shuttle services for guests to var-

ious regional restaurants and beaches, among other tourism destinations.

The tournament offered winners prizes totaling \$120,000, with a top individual prize of \$20,000. For the first time in tournament history, Kasuga said, an American female took first place in the women's singles tournament, while most of the other competitions – including men's singles and doubles and women's doubles – were dominated by players from Vietnam, Thailand

and Indonesia.

Kasuga and other tournament organizers were impressed with the Suffolk venue – so much so that a partnership that would have SCCC hosting the 2015 U.S. Badminton Championships is already in the works. That includes working with regional badminton groups to attract sponsors for next year's event, the deputy tournament director noted.

"We were happy to work with Suffolk," Kasuga said. "The venue is very much up to international standards. We want to continue with them there, it's still available."

With ample parking spaces around the athletic facility, a gym on the college's Selden campus and a new fitness center on the east campus, McKay said SCCC is poised to create evolving, long-term partnerships with organizations like Yonex.

"We could host preliminary rounds in different locations and bring the finale to the main campus," McKay said. "Our plan for growth is real, and they've realized the energy we have."

"As far as I know, they plan on being here a long time," the SCC president added. "Now, we're just waiting for a contract in writing."

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