

Press Box

Sports Organizations



STEVE PENNY

Steve Penny has resigned as president and CEO of USA Gymnastics following allegations that the national governing body had overlooked allegations of sexual misconduct among coaches and officials, including its former national team doctor. Penny began his tenure at USA Gymnastics in 1999 and had been head of the organization since April 2005. USA Gymnastics will initiate a national search for a new president and CEO. **Paul Parilla**, chairman of the NGB's board, will guide the organization in the interim.

National Women's Soccer League Commissioner **Jeff Plush** has resigned. He was named to the post in January 2015. During his tenure, he oversaw the sale of the Western New York Flash to Steve Malik, owner of North Carolina FC, as well as the league's expansion with the addition of the Orlando Pride. A national search for Plush's successor will begin immediately.

LA 2024 has named **Marla Messing** as vice-president and executive director of sport leader relations and **Peter Tomozawa** as vice-president and executive director



MARLA MESSING



PETER TOMOZAWA

for partnerships and board relations. Messing, who served as president and CEO of the 1999 FIFA Women's World Cup, will manage relationships with domestic Olympic and Paralympic stakeholders and work with L.A. and California tech innovators. Tomozawa, formerly the

New Open-Water Series Launched



The Triton Series will include events staged in rivers, lakes, reservoirs and bays with four starting in 2017

A new event series is hoping to make a splash with a focus on open-water swimming, starting with four events in 2017. The **Triton Series**, organized by Open Water Planet, will be staged in four locations, including a river, a lake, a reservoir and a bay. The first event, the Triton River One, will be staged on the Comal River in

New Braunfels, Texas, April 22–23. Further events will be held August 26–27 at the Boulder Reservoir in Boulder, Colorado; September 23–24 at Lake Travis in Austin, Texas; and November 4–5 in Laguna Madre Bay in South Padre Island, Texas.

The series was launched by Bobby Brewer, a former coach and agent, whose mission is to teach skills in open water. "The Triton Series is designed to create a new type of aquatic athlete with a deep understanding of not just open-water swimming, but of how to handle anything that the water and surrounding conditions might throw at them," Brewer said. "These events are designed to train the body and mind to be comfortable, safe and competitive in all water conditions."

Olympic names are associated with the effort, including NBC commentator Rowdy Gaines and four-time gold medalist Lenny Krayzelburg, both of whom were involved in the group's inaugural festival event last year in South Padre Island. For the Triton series, which is seeking hosts for 2018, plans also call for ancillary events such as tubing through chutes in the river, sprint-racing across sand and relay options in longer events. ■

—Jason Gewirtz

executive director of business development for Honolulu Mayor Kirk Caldwell, will manage relationships with institutional partners and board members.



DJ MACKOVETS

DJ Mackovets has been appointed CEO of the World Games 2021, which will be held in Birmingham, Alabama. Mackovets has nearly 40 years of experience in project management, serving in leadership roles at a number of international and national sporting events including the World Police and Fire Games, Major League Baseball All-Star Week, the U.S. Figure Skating Championships and the Super Bowl. The World Games feature more than 3,500

athletes from more than 100 countries competing in more than 30 sports.

The NBA's **Milwaukee Bucks** have acquired the right to own and operate an NBA D-League team that will begin play in Oshkosh, Wisconsin, for the 2017–2018 season. The Bucks will become the 20th NBA team to own and operate a D-League affiliate. Fox Valley Pro Basketball will construct a 3,500-seat arena for the Oshkosh team.

FAI, the World Air Sports Federation, has announced plans to launch an international Air Games Tour. The competition could be held in up to five host cities around the world each year and could start in the second half of 2018. Each event would showcase air sports over four days of activities and competition.

Hosts & Suppliers

Blake Henry has been named general manager of both the Owensboro Convention Center and Owensboro Sportscenter in Kentucky. A 20-year industry veteran, Henry most recently served as director of operations at the Baton Rouge Convention Center in Louisiana.



BLAKE HENRY

Michael Larragueta has been named vice-president of sales at the Reno-Sparks (Nevada) Convention & Visitors Authority. Larragueta most recently served as executive director of sales at the Silver Legacy, Eldorado and Circus Circus properties in Reno.

Haley Lannom has been named sports sales and events coordinator for the Snohomish County (Washington) Sports Commission. She graduated from Western Washington University, where she worked as a sport club liaison and was president of the women's rugby team. Lannom also interned as volunteer coordinator at Whatcom Events.



HALEY LANNOM

Sites & Venues

Leaders of the bid by **Budapest, Hungary**, to host the 2024 Olympic and Paralympic Summer Games have said they will abandon the effort, leaving Los Angeles and Paris as the only remaining cities bidding for the Games. The move to withdraw from the competition comes after more than 250,000 people signed a petition seeking the city's withdrawal from the race.

The NFL has announced that it will return to Mexico City in 2017 when the Oakland Raiders host the New England Patriots, the winner of Super Bowl LI, at **Estadio Azteca**. The date

THE LEADERSHIP COACH

Leadership on the Rink

This past July, my oldest daughter transferred from a junior college in California to the University of North Dakota, and she asked me to visit. And I knew if I did that I wanted to see a hockey game. Before embarking on a professional tennis career, I had dreamed of playing in the NHL. What's more, UND has the best collegiate hockey rink in the country.

The game I attended was one of the best sporting experiences I have had: the design of the building, the cheerleaders on skates, the band walking around the arena between periods, the announcers firing up the



crowd. Combine this with a sellout crowd and you have a model for a truly wonderful sporting experience.

Equally impressive, though, was the coach, former NHL player Brad Berry. When we met, he told me about his character-building philosophy. When we exchanged ideas, he

took a full page of notes (an important aspect of being a good leader). He was very humble, as are most hockey players. Win or lose at their impressive home, the players at UND get more than a great experience. They get the invaluable life leadership skills that every coach and leader should make sure they impart. ■

The Leadership Coach is Peter Burwash, founder of Peter Burwash International, which manages tennis instruction programs worldwide. His books are available through the Media Zone at SportsTravelMagazine.com. He can be reached at leadershipcoach@schneiderpublishing.com.

and time of the game will be determined in conjunction with the release of the NFL schedule, which is expected to be unveiled this spring. The game in Mexico is the fifth international game confirmed for 2017.

Professional Bull Riders and Oilers Entertainment Group have announced that the PBR Global Cup will be held at **Rogers Place** in Edmonton, Alberta. Scheduled for November 9-11, the PBR Global Cup will feature the world's best bull riders from Canada, the United States, Mexico, Brazil and Australia.

The Confederation of North, Central America and Caribbean Association Football has announced the host cities for the knockout stages of the 2017 CONCACAF Gold Cup. **Philadelphia** and **Glendale, Arizona**, will host the quarterfinal doubleheader matches. **Pasadena, California**, and **Arlington, Texas**, will each host a semifinal. The final will be in **Santa Clara, California**.

The **Hawaii Convention Center** recently unveiled its new sports courts,



HAWAII CONVENTION CENTER

a \$1.1 million investment that aims to attract more events to the state. The portable sports courts can be configured to simultaneously stage up to 28 regulation volleyball or badminton matches, 18 high school basketball games or 11 futsal matches.

Sponsors & Licensing

Marriott International has announced that it will become an

GOVERNING BODY DOSSIER

Water Polo Scoring Big in Participation

While some sports may be struggling with participation and membership, water polo is not one of them, according to recent data released by USA Water Polo and the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS).

The national governing body, based in Huntington Beach, California, has seen membership grow 25 percent in the last five years, from 35,750 in 2011 to 44,773 in 2016, an all-time high. Although the sport has always had a strong base in California (about 72 percent of members are still from there), the sport is gaining in areas such as Utah, Illinois, Texas, Michigan and Oregon, where water polo is played at the club level.

And several factors at the youth level have excited Christopher Ramsey, the CEO of USA Water Polo, even more about the future. "In a relatively short time, water polo has become a very hot sport," he said.

Event growth. Ramsey attributes the growth to several factors. For starters, the number of clubs offering people the chance to participate at a high level has been on the upswing for years. "Those people out running clubs have reached a new level of maturity in the way they're operating their businesses," Ramsey said. The sport is also seen as a healthy alternative to other sports, where players may be more prone to injuries, Ramsey suggested.

And the NGB's largest event, the Junior Olympics, may also be playing a factor. That event includes 650 teams from across the country (typically 1,000 teams apply for entry) and is usually held in Northern or Southern California over eight days in July. Over the last 10 years, the NGB has focused on the event experience and

has made moves such as ranking officials by performance, adding higher-quality equipment and increasing the number of games a typical team will play to eight or nine as opposed to five or six. Ramsey said that as word spread about the quality of the experience, more clubs began developing their talent, which has led to a larger and better pool of athletes.

Texas effort.

High schools may offer the largest area for growth. According to the NFHS, girl's high school water polo participation grew 7.9 percent over the past five years, while boy's high school rates rose 5.5 percent. And that may grow

even more as the University Interscholastic League, which governs high school sports in Texas, will consider adding water polo as a varsity sport later this year. If approved, it would be the first new team sport added since 1999. One key endorsement has come from the Texas Interscholastic Swim Coaches Association. "They recognized that swimming was a semester activity and bookending it with water polo would be a great thing for their athletes, schools and facilities to keep them humming through the whole academic year," Ramsey said. "That was a bit of a game-changer."

A growing base of strong younger players is having effects at the highest level of the sport, where the U.S. women's team won Olympic gold in 2012 and 2016. The women's goalie in 2016, Ashleigh Johnson, grew up in Florida, and Thomas Dunstan on the men's team played in Connecticut—states that were not traditional hotbeds. "To me," Ramsey said, "they're another shining example of the sport moving into truly a national direction." ■

—Jason Gewirtz



USA Water Polo leaders believe the Junior Olympics may be playing a role in growing participation in the sport.

official **NCAA** corporate partner across all 90 NCAA championships, making it the official hotel partner of the NCAA. The multiyear deal includes the NCAA basketball tournaments and grants Marriott International marketing, media and activation rights at all NCAA championship events. Marriott will also offer tournament experiences to members of its rewards program.

D.C. United and **Audi of America**, which owns and operates Audi car dealerships in the United States, have announced a naming rights partnership for the MLS team's new stadium. Under construction in southwest Washington, D.C., and scheduled to open in 2018, the venue will be named Audi Field.

NASCAR has partnered with **American Medical Response** to bolster



NASCAR/AMERICAN MEDICAL RESPONSE

NASCAR's emergency response system and expand its medical support model. AMR will add a doctor and paramedic to the on-track safety team for each Monster Energy NASCAR Cup Series weekend.

Through a multiyear partnership with **Gatorade**, the **NBA Development League** will be renamed the NBA Gatorade League, marking the first time a U.S. professional sports league has named an entitlement partner. The agreement also includes a new logo as well as production of video content.

Through a multiyear partnership, **Cheez-It** and **Pringles** have become the official snacks of **Major League Soccer**. The deal features the "Kick It with The Pros Sweepstakes," which includes a grand prize of a VIP trip to the 2017 MLS All-Star week in Chicago.

The **National Women's Soccer League** has announced that A+E Net-

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works has bought an equity stake in the league. **A+E** will work with the league to launch NWSL Media, and Lifetime will become an official sponsor and broadcast partner of the NWSL in a three-year deal that begins this month.

The **2017 Rock 'n' Roll Los Angeles Half Marathon** has a new title sponsor: **United Airlines**. The Halloween-themed race is expected to welcome more than 15,000 participants, October 28–29. The Los Angeles sponsorship follows the recent announcement that United Airlines will serve as the title sponsor of the Rock 'n' Roll Marathon Series events in Washington, D.C., and San Francisco.

DuPont Protection Solutions, which produces Kevlar, has announced a two-year global agreement with **Nitro Circus**, the action sports entertainment company. DuPont will work with Nitro Circus athletes and gear providers globally and at the Nitro World Games, which will be held in Salt Lake City, June 24.

The **Drone Racing League** and **Allianz** have entered a multiyear partnership. Allianz will serve as the title



sponsor of the 2017 Allianz World Championship series, which will consist of six races to be broadcast in more than 75 countries starting in June.

Lexus has renewed its role as the official and exclusive automobile partner of the **Amgen Tour of California** men's and women's cycling events. The five-year extension includes two stage entitlements, sponsorship of the King/Queen of the Mountain contests, vehicle integration for the race and entourage, and Lexus-branded areas on race day.

NBC Sports Group and the **Red Bull Air Race World Championship** have signed an exclusive multi-year U.S. media rights agreement beginning with the 2017 season. NBC,

NBCSN, *NBCSports.com* and the NBC Sports app will present coverage of the international competition, which includes eight races in seven countries.

SMG, the world's largest convention center management firm, and **Experient**, an event management company, have renewed their partnership, which helps the companies simplify contracting and expand business opportunities.

And Finally...

Lego Systems Inc. has announced the launch of the **2017 Lego Play Ball Tour**, which will visit 15 Minor League Baseball stadiums across the country. Each ballpark will designate an on-site play area that will offer interactive Lego experiences for kids. Features of the Lego Play Ball Tour include the chance to build and launch your own Lego creations, photo opportunities with large-scale Lego models and special prizes. ■

—Edited by Jennifer Lee



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