

Barry and Bonnie Goldberg founded the Capitol Hill Volleyball Classic, which has outgrown its convention center home.



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GROWING GAME

VOLLEYBALL TOURNAMENT NEEDS MORE DIGS

More than 95,177 people crowded the Walter E. Washington Convention Center's halls over President's Day Weekend for the Mizuno Capitol Hill Volleyball Classic. It might not be such tight quarters next year.

What started as a small tournament is now one of D.C.'s largest events, bringing at least 16,500 room nights annually.

The Classic now has the convention center bursting at the seams – and founders Barry and Bonnie Goldberg scrambling to figure out how to accommodate the 100-plus teams on their waitlist.

Enter Capital Sports Ventures, the D.C.-based sports and event venture capital firm behind the D.C. Bike Ride. CSV has taken a financial stake in the tournament – though its CEO Greg Bibb declined to enumerate that investment – and is working with the founders to figure out how to grow beyond the convention center's capacity of 968 teams.

In the short term, there are two options: spreading the tournament out over two weekends or finding an additional location to host more courts. On the latter, there aren't that many locations in the District proper to go. Existing gymnasiums don't have enough room for courts to make the rental price worth it; the large hotel ballrooms might have the requisite ceiling heights, but the ballrooms' chandeliers pose an aer-

ial challenge.

Currently, the D.C. Armory on the RFK campus would be the best option. Events D.C., the conventions and sports authority that operates both the convention center and the Armory, wants to do what it can to help, said President and CEO Greg O'Dell.

"It's a great problem to have. It's a great story that they've grown," O'Dell said.

The Goldbergs have also been watching the potential redevelop-

ment of the RFK campus with interest, given that current designs call for a 350,000-square-foot sports complex to be built in the next five years.

weekend would mean the school-age competitors would have to miss school. Having two sites miles apart also poses a challenge for club staff and spectators.

But the Goldbergs aren't open to the alternative, which would be moving the tournament to another city with a larger convention center. "We have no interest in leaving D.C.," Bonnie Goldberg said. "It's really distinct, and the teams and the players like coming here." In addition, after 10 years at the convention

95,177

The number of attendees at the 2017 Mizuno Capitol Hill Volleyball Classic

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The booking cycle for the Armory is shorter than that of the convention center, so it's possible the tournament could book that space for the 2018 tournament, O'Dell said.

Neither the extra week nor space-splitting scenarios are ideal. Clubs from around the country would not relish having to travel to D.C. two weekends in a row, and having to schedule it on a non-holiday

center, the event runs very smoothly due to the relationship the tournament has built with Events D.C.

Expanding the tournament wouldn't just allow the Classic to let in more U.S. teams; the Goldbergs also dream of having an international component to the event.

The Goldbergs are optimistic they'll find the answer, because they aren't planning to bow out of the tournament business anytime soon.

"As soon as we get 15 inches of snow on the weekend we're supposed to do this thing, I will retire," Barry Goldberg said with a laugh.