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SPORTS

NHL All-Star Game a success on many fronts for downtown Los Angeles

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Attendance at the three-day Fan Fair, Friday's "NHL 100" ceremony at the Microsoft Theater and Staples Center holding not just Sunday's All-Star Game but also Saturday's Skills Competition and Celebrity Exhibition totaled more than 70,000. (Photo by Kyusung Gong, Orange County Register/SCNG)

By **TOM HOFFARTH** / STAFF WRITER

From an economic impact, the benefits for downtown Los Angeles playing host to the 2017 NHL All-Star Game and all its ancillary events spread across the 100-acre sports and entertainment district around Staples Center added up nicely.

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According to numbers Monday supplied by the Los Angeles Sports & Entertainment Commission as well as the Anschutz Entertainment Group, the NHL All-Star weekend generated more than \$20 million in visitor tourism.

That started Thursday with the opening of the Fan Fair at the Convention Center and came to a conclusion with Sunday's 3-on-3 All-Star tournament at Staples Center.

Much of that income came from 8,500 room nights, most of them downtown, and specifically at the JW Marriott and Ritz Carlton situated in L.A. Live and used by the NHL for its headquarters.

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But while all that might be the bottom line by some accountants, it's just as easy to account for the visual impact and access convenience that occurred.

Maybe it's along the lines of how a typical Jan. 1 Rose Bowl always seems to work its Southern California magic.

"Just knowing what I saw from attending, we had the world's most perfect weather – another post-card weekend in January – and the ability to walk to almost every event shows anyone who saw this that all the sponsors will want to come back again, it was so glorious," said Kathryn Schloessman, president of the LASEC.

"There was good energy from all the decorations to the kids running around with jerseys on. It really made downtown fun again."

AEG President Dan Beckerman said the company's ability to "bundle" the arena with hotels, restaurants and exhibit halls allowed the NHL to "take full advantage of one-stop activities that was extremely valuable" and not available when the league had its last All-Star Game at Staples Center in 2002.

"It's unique in a major market to be able to control this much real estate in the heart of a city," Beckerman said.

AEG, LASEC and the L.A. Sports Council work in concert most often to target major sporting events that would benefit Southern California's economy and stature. On the current radar, the 2024 Summer Olympics bid tops the wish list.

But the NHL All-Star Game might refocus attention on winter-month events that should be more attractive for the region as leagues and institutions consider what other viable options there are around the country this time of year.

Already secured for downtown is the 2018 NBA All-Star Game at Staples Center. Looking beyond that, the new NFL stadium in Inglewood has the 2021 Super Bowl and has been targeted for a future men's college basketball Final Four and title game (2022 at the earliest) as well as a College Football Playoff championship game.

"What's nice about L.A. is that we're not just about warm weather, but we're also hot in the event cycle," Schloessman said. "With all we already have going on, any time you can host something in the winter months when other cities are struggling, this looks very good for us."

“The NHL weekend showed how downtown comes together. It wasn’t that way even five years ago, and the NHL got the real opportunity to see it.”

Beckerman said AEG’s properties could have an NBA and NHL All-Star Weekend almost every year if the leagues wanted to, as unrealistic as that possibility is. The NBA’s annual exhibition has been at Staples Center in 2004 and 2011 already.

“We know the leagues have obligations to other cities, but we want to make L.A. as attractive as possible any time,” he said.

NHL commissioner Gary Bettman was asked during Saturday’s news conference why L.A. was awarded the All-Star event. Sure, the Kings are celebrating their 50th anniversary as a franchise, but so are Pittsburgh, Philadelphia and St. Louis (as those who have stayed in their original areas the entire last half-century).

Bettman noted the Blues got to host the annual Winter Classic on Jan. 2, and the Penguins and Flyers are having an outdoor game in Pittsburgh next month.

But even though there was “very competitive bidding, L.A. made a compelling case (for the All-Star Game),” he said. “You can feel the buzz here in L.A. The situation, the setup, logistically here in L.A. Live is perfect for what we’re doing and I think part of this weekend is a testament to (Kings owner and AEG creator) Phil Anschutz’s vision for Staples Center and downtown L.A.

“You can’t make everybody happy all the time, but we’re glad we’re here.”

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