

2015 Best Of Our Valley Winners: Sports

Written by Suzanne Koch

Tuesday, 12 May 2015 15:21 - Last Updated Tuesday, 12 May 2015 15:34

Sports

With fabulous weather year-round, it's no wonder that Arizona is home to some of the best sports venues, teams and players in the country. Here are a few of your favorites.

BY BECKY ANTIOCO



2014 WINNER

BEST PRO SPORTS TEAM, BEST CHEERLEADERS OR DANCE TEAM, FAVORITE ARIZONA COACH AND FAVORITE ARIZONA RATTLEERS PLAYER

>>ARIZONA RATTLEERS

The Arizona Rattlers of the Arena Football League kick off their 23rd season this year, high off of their fifth ArenaBowl victory. The team has made 19 playoff appearances and won nine West Division championships. Founded in 1992 as an expansion team, the Rattlers have drawn almost 2.4 million fans to their games and have four players in the AFL Hall of Fame (Sherdick Bonner, Hunkie Cooper, Randy Gatewood and Bob McMillen). The team is coached by Kevin Guy and features Best of Our Valley Favorite Rattlers Player, Marquis Floyd, who has been a member of the team since 2011. The Arizona Rattlers is involved in appearances, charitable donations and outreach programs with nonprofit and community groups. azrattlers.com.

PHOTO BY BIGGERPICTUREIMAGES.COM

BEST 19TH HOLE

>>THE DYNAMITE GRILLE AT TROON NORTH

Fresh and contemporary cuisine in a relaxed, comfortable setting—that's what you'll find waiting for you in Dynamite Grille after a round of golf at Troon North. The Grille overlooks the 18th hole of the Pinnacle course and is open for breakfast, lunch and dinner, seven days a week. Even if you're not playing golf, you can enjoy a delicious dining experience and incredible patio views, or a game on a flatscreen TV. troonnorthgolf.com.

BEST PRO SHOP AND MOST SCENIC COURSE

>>TROON NORTH GOLF CLUB

Featuring leading labels in both men's and women's sports apparel, including Greg Norman, Under Armour, Nike, Adidas, Travis Mathew and more, Troon North Golf Club has been named an AGM Platinum Award Winner, recognizing premier golf shops. It also carries a full assortment of golf accessories and golf items, jewelry, Maui Jim sunglasses and boutique gift items. Golf World named Troon North Golf Club one of the "100 Best Golf Shops in America." Designed by Tom Weiskopf, the course combines great golf with spectacular views and desert ambiance. Fairways are immaculately groomed, intertwined with the rugged Sonoran Desert landscape. Both the Monument and Pinnacle courses were recently renovated by Weiskopf with two new layouts that bring his original concept to life. This is where you'll find classic Scottsdale desert golf. troonnorthgolf.com.

2014 WINNER

BEST CLUBHOUSE SPA

>>ALVEA SPA AT ENCANTERRA COUNTRY CLUB

From the Spanish word, alveo, meaning "river bed," the name of Alvea Spa comes from the water and oasis themes at the spa. The treatments take inspiration from the holistic ancient healing rituals of the area's native inhabitants, focusing on rejuvenation of the mind, body and spirit. Services include body treatments, massages, manicures and pedicures, facials and waxing. They will also customize packages to meet your relaxation needs. alveaencanterra.com.

BEST CUSTOM GOLF CLUBS

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>>PING

Ping is a family-owned company founded in 1959 in the garage of Karsten Solheim. Solheim's frustration with his putting inspired him to design a putter, which made a "pinging" sound when striking a golf ball. Today, Ping offers innovation, quality and service in the world of golf. All certified club fitters are trained in person at the Phoenix plant or online with a thorough education on the products, how they are manufactured and how to fit them "Karsten's way." ping.com.

2014 WINNER

BEST GOLF CLOTHING & SHOPPING

>>PGA TOUR SUPERSTORE

PGA Tour Superstore provides an unparalleled selection of equipment and clothing for golf and tennis players with exceptional service and guaranteed low prices. Because of their affiliation with the PGA Tour, golfers have access to the same technology and expertise as the card-carrying professionals. There are three Arizona locations, two in Scottsdale and one in Chandler. pgatoursuperstore.com.

2014 WINNER

BEST GOLF COMMUNITY

>>MIRABEL

From a beautifully designed and challenging golf course to refined upscale Scottsdale homes, Mirabel is the ultimate in country-club living. The Desert Lodge Clubhouse offers award-winning dining, fire-lit patios, full fitness facilities, salon and spa, resort-size pool with cabanas and a Har-Tru tennis garden. The Tom Fazio-designed course is a par-71 with tee positions for everyone from beginners to pros. A caddie program and on-course chef and comfort stations distinguish Mirabel from the rest. mirabel.com.

2014 WINNER

BEST INSTRUCTOR

>>JASON REDDINGTON, HEAD TEACHING PROFESSIONAL AT MIRABEL

As head teaching professional, Jason Reddington helps Mirabel members improve their games using the same techniques he used to coach players like PGA Tour and Ryder Cup golfer Jeff Overton. Reddington has won tournaments at every level and has received several teaching awards. mirabel.com.

2014 WINNER

BEST PUBLIC COURSE

>>QUINTERO GOLF CLUB

Often described as one of the "purest golf experiences" in the Southwest, Quintero was created in the tradition of the world's most renowned golf courses. Their focus is on providing golfers with the finest playing surfaces, warm hospitality and the ultimate challenge for their individual games. It plays at more than 7,200 yards from the championship tees and 5,043 from the forward tees, with generous landing areas and strategic bunker placement. quinterogolf.com.

2014 WINNER

BEST SPORTING EVENT

>>WASTE MANAGEMENT PHOENIX OPEN

The Greatest Show on Grass has become a signature event for Arizona, drawing the world's top golfers and hundreds of thousands of spectators from around the world. Visitors come to the Waste Management Phoenix Open for the weather, the sport and the entertainment, and are always satisfied on all fronts. Since its inception in 1932, proceeds raised through the Phoenix Open have surpassed \$100 million in charitable giving. wmphoenixopen.com.

BEST SPORTING GOODS STORE

>>REI

It began as a group of 23 mountain-climbing buddies and is now the nation's largest consumer cooperative. Whether you're new to outdoor adventures or a seasoned pro, it's important to have quality outdoor gear. REI designs its own line of award-winning gear and clothing and sells brand name gear for trails, slopes and waterways. They've been on Fortune's list of the 100 Best Companies to Work For every year since the rankings began. And, REI donates millions of dollars to support conservation efforts, as well as sending volunteers to clean up beaches, restore local habitats and more. rei.com.

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BEST SPORTS VENUE

>>UNIVERSITY OF PHOENIX STADIUM

University of Phoenix Stadium is home of the Arizona Cardinals and the Annual VIZIO Fiesta Bowl. Host to two Super Bowls, the stadium seats 63,400 (expandable to 72,200), and with its retractable roof and field, is a marvel of design, engineering and technology. The highest-grossing and most-attended event at the stadium was WrestleMania XXVI, which grossed \$5.8 million in 2010. Home to concerts, trade shows, corporate functions, sports and more, University of Phoenix Stadium has won numerous awards since its groundbreaking in 2003. universityofphoenixstadium.com.

2014 WINNER

BEST SPRING TRAINING FIELD

>>SALT RIVER FIELDS AT TALKING STICK

Surrounded by some of the most beautiful mountain views in all of baseball, Salt River Fields at Talking Stick is the spring training home of the Arizona Diamondbacks and the Colorado Rockies. Here, fans have opportunities to interact with their favorite players, and are never far from the action due to the unique layout of the stadium. It is a clean, safe, family- friendly environment that showcases the sport in a fun atmosphere. saltriverfields.com.

2014 WINNER

MOST PHILANTHROPIC ATHLETE

>>KURT WARNER, FIRST THINGS FIRST

By now, most everyone knows Kurt Warner's inspirational story. Undrafted and cut by the Green Bay Packers, stocking shelves in a grocery store, eventually playing for the Arena Football League before being noticed by the St. Louis Rams, and going on to a standout career as quarterback. From that experience came the idea of First Things First, an organization dedicated to impacting lives by promoting Christian values, sharing experiences and providing opportunities to encourage everyone that all things are possible when people seek to put "first things first." Projects include Treasure House home for adults with developmental disabilities, Homes for the Holidays, which rewards single parents who achieve the dream of homeownership, and countless others. kurtwarner.org.

2014 WINNER

FAVORITE FEMALE GOLFER

>>CRISTIE KERR

Over the course of her career so far, Scottsdale resident Cristie Kerr has 16 LPGA victories, including two major championships, and more than 140 top-10 finishes. She is the highest-earning American woman golfer of all time, a two-time ESPY winner for Female Golfer of the Year and a recipient of the Muhammad Ali Award for sportsperson of the year. Off the course, she is a prominent breast-cancer activist, founding Birdies for Breast Cancer, which has raised more than \$2.5 million since 2003. Aside from golf and philanthropy, she partnered with Pride Mountain Vineyards to create Curvature Wines, with 100 percent of the proceeds going to breast cancer research. cristiekerrgolf.com.



FAVORITE PHOENIX MERCURY PLAYER

>>DEWANNA BONNER

After a standout college career at Auburn, DeWanna Bonner was drafted by the Phoenix Mercury fifth overall in the 2009 WNBA draft. In her rookie year, she was named Sixth Woman of the Year, led the team in rebounds, and outscored the entire opponent bench three times. She ranks second in the franchise for career double-doubles and rebounding average, and is one of just five players in Mercury history to record multiple 30-point games in a single season. phoenixmercury.com.

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FAVORITE ARIZONA DIAMONDBACKS PLAYER

>>PAUL GOLDSCHMIDT

First baseman Paul Goldschmidt was drafted by the Diamondbacks in 2009 and has gone on to become a Gold Glove and Silver Slugger award winner. He is one of only three National League players to have earned both top offensive and top defensive player honors and has been National League All Star for the past two seasons. Goldschmidt finished second in National League Most Valuable Player voting for the 2013 season, the best finish of any player in club history. dbacks.com.

PHOTO BY JENNIFER STEWART

FAVORITE ARIZONA CARDINALS PLAYER

>>LARRY FITZGERALD

The Valley's favorite Cardinal was drafted by the team third overall in the 2004 NFL draft. Since then, Larry Fitzgerald has become a franchise leader, not only in the hearts of the fans, but also in receptions, receiving yards, receiving touchdowns, total touchdowns, and other offensive categories. He has been to eight Pro Bowls and ranks 12th all-time in NFL history for receiving yards per game. Off the field, his First Down Fund focuses on helping families via summer programs and after-school activities, and supports health-related organizations geared toward families. azcardinals.com.

FAVORITE COLLEGE ATHLETICS

>>ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY

Phil Mickelson, Pat Tillman, Danny White, Reggie Jackson, Byron Scott—all have worn a Sun Devil jersey. More than 100 Sun Devils have made it to Major League Baseball, and countless others have found success in the other 20-plus sports offered by the Arizona State University athletic department. Sun Devil fans are passionate about their sports and their mascot, Sparky, whose new look sparked impassioned debate. If there's ever any doubt about Sun Devil loyalty, trying wearing the colors of that "other" Arizona school on Mill Avenue on game day. thesundevils.com.

2014 WINNER

MOST CHALLENGING COURSE

>>THE GOLD COURSE AT THE WIGWAM

Designed by master designer Robert Trent Jones Sr., The Gold Course rivals the famed South Course at Firestone Country Club, another Trent Jones Sr. creation. A winding par-72 course that covers more than 7,430 yards, the course will challenge even the best golfers. Part of Arizona history since 1929, The Wigwam is best known for its 54 holes of championship-caliber golf, none better than The Gold Course. wigwamarizona.com.

BEST PRIVATE CLUB

>>SCOTTSDALE NATIONAL GOLF CLUB

Scottsdale National Golf Club, owned by well-known GoDaddy founder and philanthropist Bob Parsons, is a YAM Worldwide company. Protected on three sides by thousands of acres of wilderness designated for preservation, the Scottsdale National Golf Club is an exclusive desert oasis, in a pristine pocket of the McDowell Mountains, with uncontested 360-degree views and unparalleled golf. Currently, significant renovations are being completed with a goal to add additional holes and open a new state-of-the-art clubhouse within the next few years. Membership is by invitation only. sngc.com.

FAVORITE PHOENIX COYOTES PLAYER

>>SHANE DOAN

Shane Doan was drafted seventh overall in the 1995 NHL draft by the Winnipeg Jets, who moved to Arizona to become a Coyote for the 1996-97 season. He has been team captain for 10 consecutive seasons and is a leader on and off the ice, finishing second on the team in goals and fourth in points despite missing 13 games due to illness. From a charitable standpoint, he works with Phoenix Children's Hospital, Phoenix Rescue Mission, and United Blood Services, which sponsors "Doaner Night" at Coyotes home games. coyotes.nhl.com.

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FAVORITE MALE GOLFER

>>RICKY BARNES

Ricky Barnes was a four-time All-American at the University of Arizona, and the US Amateur Champion in 2002. He turned pro in 2004 after capturing low amateur honors at the 2003 Masters, outscoring his playing partner Tiger Woods in the first round. He earned his PGA Tour card in 2008, and tied for second in his first US Open the following year. He lives with his wife and children in Scottsdale. rickybarnesgolf.com.