

COLUMBUS BUSINESS FIRST

March Madness was slam dunk for Arena District bars buoyed by Dayton Flyers, West Virginia fans

By Evan Weese | Columbus Business First | Monday, March 23, 2015

Arena District bars and restaurants knew this would be a busy weekend since as long ago as 2012, when the city was named a host site for NCAA men's basketball tournament games.

It wasn't until the University of Dayton won its First Four matchup and advanced to the round of 64, however, that business owners had an inkling of just how bustling the streets around Nationwide Arena would be.

Dayton Flyers fans traveled in droves from less than an hour away, and were joined by large contingents from West Virginia University and six other teams assigned to the March Madness site.

"I think the tournament this year versus 2012 got a much better draw," said Tim Emery, franchisee of Boston's Restaurant & Sports Bar on Nationwide Arena's southwest corner. "You could see the result."

Bars around the arena drew shoulder-to-shoulder crowds on Friday and Sunday, thanks in part to both Dayton and West Virginia advancing to the round of 32 teams.

"There was a huge impact from them," Gordon Biersch General Manager Stewart Miller told me. "Those two teams alone traveled well. And they partied, they like to drink."

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Boston's and Gordon Biersch, along with R Bar and the Three-Legged Mare, hosted watch parties for fans of specific teams as organized by the Greater Columbus Sports Commission. Executives



from the four restaurants say business would have been up even without the viewing parties, but they eased coordination and helped the atmosphere.

"It made us more part of it," said Michael Darr, co-owner of the Three-Legged Mare and R Bar on Nationwide Arena's east side.

Darr said sales were up well over twice the typical amount during a non-event weekend, and that NCAA action in Columbus proved more fruitful even than the National Hockey League's All-Star Game at Nationwide Arena in January.

Emery said Boston's had its biggest day ever on Friday when all eight teams played throughout the day.

"This weekend was actually stronger than All-Star Weekend." ■