Outdoor recreation has always been a staple for West Virginia from beautiful scenery to muddy trails. For years, that’s been the pride of the Mountain State, more specifically the Tri-State area and Southern West Virginia.

There’s a new player in the game now — sport tourism — and it has been a game changer for the region, adding to an already healthy tourism industry in the state.

Sport tourism refers to travel that involves either observing or participating in a sporting event staying apart from their usual environment. Sport tourism is a fast-growing sector of the global travel industry and equates to $600 billion a year.

Simply put, it means that people spectating, or participating in a sporting event, are traveling from their hometown to another location. When these tourists reach their destinations, the destination city stands to benefit greatly.

Perhaps no municipality in the Tri-State area knows that better than Barboursville. For more than a decade, they’ve hosted major national soccer tournaments at the city’s park, most recently the U.S. Soccer Eastern Regional Championships, which brought more than 200 teams from 13 states to the Tri-State.

In past years, Barboursville Park has been the host site, but this year it was split between Barboursville and Shawnee Sports Complex in Dunbar. Barboursville Mayor Chris Tatum said the decision to split up the sites was an easy one.

“I think anyone who is looking at this as a competition is looking at it from the wrong angle because we all stand to benefit from something like this,” Tatum said. “There’s a share for every city on Interstate 64 from Huntington to Charleston.”

A share of the capital, that is. When the country’s largest youth soccer tournament is in town, there’s