

## 5.5 Regional Athletic Assets

### The Importance

Regional sporting events unite the area in supporting local teams competing with opponents from other regions. These teams help people identify with the larger regional community and view the community interests as interrelated.

Professional and college athletics also enhance quality of life and make the Capital District more appealing. By holding frequent events and quality teams, the Capital District's colleges and professional sports organizations provide entertainment and recreation accessible to all the Region's residents.

Horse racing at the Saratoga Race Course brings a large amount of tourism to the region during the summer. Similarly, the Pepsi Arena frequently hosts major college tournaments that bring in out-of-town fans. In the past year the Pepsi has hosted the Frozen Four NCAA Hockey Tournament and the "Sweet 16" and "Elite Eight" rounds of the NCAA Div.I East Regional Basketball Championship.

### Sources for this Indicator

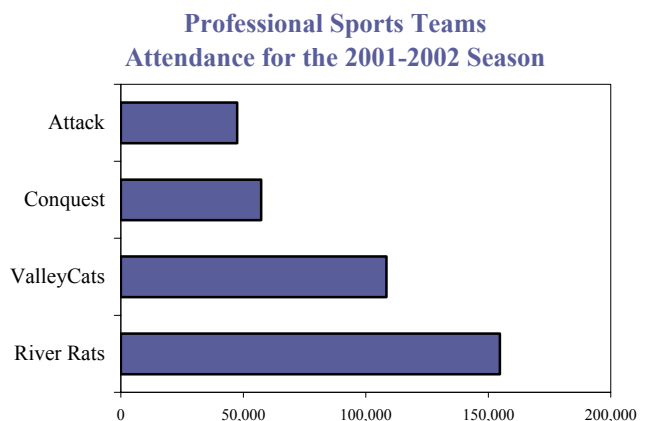
- Each organization was contacted.

### Professional Sports

Currently, the region boasts four professional sports teams:

- The Albany River Rats, American Hockey League team and New Jersey Devils affiliate.
- The Albany Conquest, Arena Football 2 League team.
- The Albany Attack, National Lacrosse League team
- The Tri-City ValleyCats, NY-Penn A Minor League Baseball team and Houston Astros affiliate

Each team provides residents and visitors with a different sporting experience and attendance figures for the sports teams show that the diversity is appreciated. Although, looking at the chart, it is easy to assume the Lacrosse team and the Arena Football team are not as popular as Baseball and Hockey, but it is important to note that the Tri-City ValleyCats and the Albany River Rats have a significantly higher number of home games per season than the Conquest and Attack.

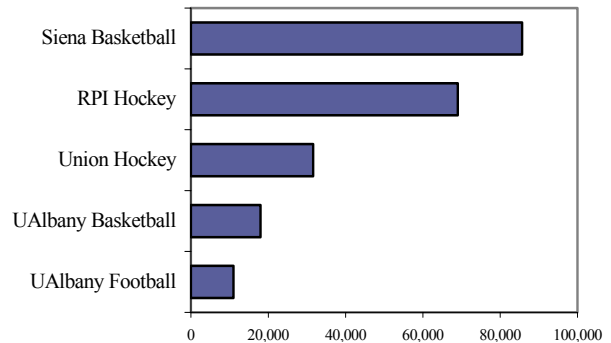


## College Sports

The Capital District is also home to several colleges, four of which offer Division I athletics. The Men's basketball team, the Siena Saints are generally considered the local favorites and have, in the past, been contenders in the Final Four, NCAA tournament, and are also members of the Metro Atlantic Athletic Conference (MAAC) that has their regional playoffs at the Pepsi Arena. The University at Albany has the distinction of being the only entirely Division

I Athletic Program in the region. The most popular sports at U Albany are the Great Dane's Men's Basketball team, America East Conference Members; and the Great Dane's Football Team, Division I AA Northeast Conference Members. Union College and Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute both offer Division I Eastern Colligate Athletic Conference (ECAC) Hockey Teams, the Engineers at RPI, and the Skating Dutchmen at Union. Also, the 2003 ECAC tournament will be held at the Pepsi Arena, which marks the first time ever that the tournament has taken place in a city other than Lake Placid or Boston. The arena has also been host to the NCAA "Frozen Four" Hockey Finals on two occasions in the past. As you can see in the chart, sports teams are quite popular in the region, the Siena Saints actually have attendance figures that are on the same level as the professional sports teams in the region. Again it is important to realize that although the University at Albany Football attendance numbers seem very low, they are only based on 5 home games, while other sports teams have a much greater amount of home games in their seasons.

NCAA Division I College Sports Teams  
Attendance for 2001-2002 Season



## Horse Racing

In addition to the several sports teams, the Capital District is also home to one of the premier thoroughbred horse racing facilities in the United States, The Saratoga Race Course in Saratoga Spring. The meet has been taking place at the end of the summer since 1863 and offers horse racing and wagering to around one million fans each year. There is also year-around harness racing at the Saratoga Equine Sports Center, which also hosts large music festivals in the summer. There are numerous festivals and events associated with horse racing in Saratoga Springs which add to the quality of life and tourism in the Region.