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NCAA TOURNAMENT RETURNS TO DES MOINES IN 2019

Des Moines is dancing again.

The NCAA men's basketball tournament will return to Wells Fargo Arena in 2019. The city will host the tournament's first and second round on March 21-23 in 2019.

That Tuesday announcement by the NCAA paves the way for Des Moines organizers to officially start planning to be a significant player in the NCAA's biggest annual event.

The tournament came to Des Moines for the first time in 2016, and by most accounts was a success. That event, hosted by Iowa State, included traditional powerhouses Kansas, Kentucky and Indiana.

"We showed the NCAA, the student-athletes and the fans that attended, that we know what we're doing," said Greg Edwards, CEO of the Greater Des Moines Convention and Visitors Bureau.

Edwards said the 2016 tournament pumped at least \$5 million into the Des Moines economy.

"Financially, that was huge," Edwards said this week. "In addition to that, it showed our community pride. Ever since Wells Fargo was built, it was always like 'When are we getting the NCAA men's basketball tournament?'"

Drake will serve as the host school, which means Iowa State, Iowa and Northern Iowa could be sent to Wells Fargo – if selected by the NCAA selection committee.

NCAA men's basketball participants can't play early rounds in regionals their school is hosting, which is why Iowa State played its 2016 early NCAA games in Denver.

Iowa and Northern Iowa also played in the 2016 NCAA Tournament, the Hawkeyes being sent to Brooklyn, and the Panthers to Oklahoma City.

"We got a lot of good feedback from being a host in 2016, about everything," said Chris Connolly, general manager for Wells Fargo Arena. "We were a first-time host. We did great."