

Atlantic City's Thanksgiving weekend / Nothing but net

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A sleepy, slow-moving Thanksgiving weekend? Not if you dropped in on Atlantic City on either Friday or Saturday evening.

The Atlantic City Expressway disgorged its usual lanes of traffic into the resort, with drivers trying to figure out the easiest way in. Shoppers dodged traffic around The Walk as they ran from store to store. Inside the outlets, lines waited to pay for their bargains.

Nothing quiet here. Finding a parking spot took a bit of climbing and winding up through the casino parking garage.

What made Friday and Saturday nights stand out was inside Boardwalk Hall. Thousands of men, women - and many, many children - cheered and cheered for their favorite men's collegiate basketball team. Rutgers played UMass, Florida played Michigan State, UMass played Michigan State and Rutgers played Florida over two nights.

This was the Legends Classic men's basketball tournament. The Classic was held for two years in a row at the Prudential Center in Newark, but the New Jersey Devils bumped the college teams this year.

Jeffrey Vasser, president of the Atlantic City Convention & Visitors Authority, oversees Boardwalk Hall and the Convention Center. As Florida upset the ranked Michigan State team in the background, Vasser talked about the event and clearly was pleased. He said he was elated to get the call from the Legends Classic promoter about the scheduling conflict. Boardwalk Hall was happy to accommodate the tournament.

Vasser said he visited the Pier Shops at Caesars during the Rutgers-UMass game Friday before the Florida-Michigan State match. He said he saw Michigan and Florida fans throughout the pier, taking their time before their teams played.

Last year, in Newark, the Classic averaged 3,251 spectators over the two nights. This year, in Atlantic City, the Classic averaged 4,390 fans. Many of those 8,780 fans over two nights stayed the night, gambled, ate, spent and left more than their ticket money behind.

This wasn't the biggest event in Atlantic City. It wasn't even the biggest basketball tournament. But it is just the kind of event that Atlantic City must chase.

Congratulations to Vasser and his staff for an exciting and fun family time out.

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