

When Liberty University became the host of the Commonwealth Games five years ago, Athletic Director Ian McCaw was new to the job. Since coming to the Lynchburg campus at nearly the same time, McCaw has been a great partner and advocate for the Games.

McCaw has the honor of welcoming all the athletes and visitors to LU at each Opening Ceremony since the Games were moved to the Hill City.

The partnership has proven beneficial to both sides.

McCaw looks for the ties between Virginia Amateur Sports, LU and the City of Lynchburg to keep getting stronger.

“It’s a great partnership,” McCaw said. “From the Commonwealth Games’ side, Dan and his team are first class operators. At Liberty we’re blessed with some of the best athletic facilities in the nation and we’re happy to partner with the Games to let them be used and be seen.”

He said that the third partner, the City of Lynchburg, also works well in the mix, working to make sure the influx of visitors has everything needed in the way of accommodations, lodging, restaurants, activities, and the accoutrements that set a host city apart from other event destinations.

“There is a lot of synergy here,” McCaw said. “There is great cooperation and teamwork.”

Liberty surveys participants to learn their satisfaction with the venues and the Games.

“It’s anecdotal, but people are very happy here,” McCaw said.

What’s not to like? The Games are played at some of the best college facilities in the country. For example, how many other state games have skiing and snowboarding at their summer events, thanks to a snowflex facility? How about a facility specially designed for paintball? Thanks to LU, Virginia offers those events. Most of Liberty’s venues are new or just a few years old. Some are brand new. This year will mark the first time LU’s new basketball arena is open during the

Games. A new indoor tennis facility is also ready for the first Commonwealth Games action.

While it won't be ready until after next year's Games, McCaw said a new multisport facility with an indoor turf field will be open for the 2023 Games that will have room for several different sports.

When Virginia hosted the State Games of America in 2019, the outstanding facilities made the events successful because they could accommodate the increased number of participants while providing an excellent climate.

While the Games benefit from having facilities that are second-to-none, LU gets valuable outreach from the chance to have thousands of visitors come to campus and see what's there. The sports arenas have more than just the latest in design and technology, there are championship banners to show off.

"Liberty had its best year ever in athletics," McCaw said. "We finished ranked 17<sup>th</sup> in football and we had 10 conference championships this year. All that adds some excitement, as well."

The athletes who want to be part of a winner will notice the success that's obvious all around the various venues.

McCaw said this year should be a celebration of more than just sports; we are returning to normal and getting back to having fun.

The Games were held last year, but safety took supreme precedent and there were no spectators, while the players also deal with restrictions that made the scene look very unusual.

"Thankfully the restrictions have been lifted and we can have a normal 2021," he said.