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Baltimore among leaders for Army-Navy's future

Rivalry game could give significant economic boost to area

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Philadelphia has long been the unofficial home of the Army-Navy football game, but Baltimore might be in line to host some of the games after the 2009 season.

M&T Bank Stadium is among four finalists to host games from 2010 through 2014 and perhaps beyond, according to officials familiar with the bid. State marketing officials said the game could help provide a \$22 million economic development boost to Maryland should Baltimore score what is considered one of the biggest rivalries in sports.

A final decision is expected as soon as this week.

The selection committee - composed of officials from the Naval Academy and West Point - could award five or more years of games to one site. Those involved in the process believe it is more likely that the games will be divided among different bidders.

Philadelphia will host this season's contest at Lincoln Financial Field. M&T Bank Stadium and Fed-Ex Field in Landover are competing with Lincoln Financial Field and the new Giants Stadium in East Rutherford, N.J., to host games starting in 2010.

Army officials could not be reached for comment Monday. Naval Academy officials are not commenting until the selection process is over, athletics spokesman Scott Strasemeier said.

Philadelphia has been the game's site 11 of the past 15 years. But representatives of Baltimore's bid, who are hopeful of getting a few games, said Monday that they met with the selection committee in Baltimore in April and touted M&T Bank's proximity to the Inner Harbor and other attractions.

"We obviously highlighted where the stadium is in relation to our downtown community," said Terry Hasseltine, director of the Maryland Office of Sports Marketing. "Literally for three days you can walk to everything, from hotels to nightlife to the stadium. The ease of access is just so relevant here."

The game is conservatively estimated to have an \$18 million to \$22 million impact on the host state, Hasseltine said. The game is often attended by service members from both academies and their alumni and is a favorite of many other

fans for its history and ceremony.

The football game has been played in Baltimore before. The city has hosted the event four times, twice at M&T Bank Stadium (2000, 2007) and twice at Municipal Stadium (1924, 1944). The game has roots back to 1890.

M&T Bank Stadium is the home of the Ravens, who have taken a lead role in Baltimore's bid. The Ravens are responsible under their stadium lease for booking non-Ravens events at the field.

"We're a state-owned facility, and it's a great event for the state and the city," Ravens president Dick Cass said. "It shows the city very well on national television."

Getting Army-Navy games would also be a plus for the club's suite holders, Cass said.

Attracting Army-Navy games is a priority for Hasseltine, a former Kentucky sports marketing official, who was named last summer as the first director of Maryland sports marketing.

Hasseltine said Baltimore's bid noted the city's role in the writing of "The Star-Spangled Banner," whose bicentennial will be celebrated in 2014. The song was written as a poem by Francis Scott Key after watching British forces bombard Fort McHenry.

Said Hasseltine: "If we could get the [Army-Navy] event over that course of time, it would be monumental."

The skinny

Area leaders are hoping to lure the Army-Navy football game to Baltimore and are among four finalists for future games. The host state could see an economic benefit of up to \$22 million. Baltimore has hosted the game four previous times. Those years: 2007, 2000, 1944, 1924.