

MAY/JUNE 2011

sportsdestinations.com

sports

DESTINATION MANAGEMENT

Essential Planning & Location Strategies for Sports Event Organizers

STAY TO PLAY

HOW TO USE IT
SUCCESSFULLY

2010 WORLD EQUESTRIAN GAMES:

A GAME CHANGER

+
COMMUNITIES
WITH MORE
TO OFFER

MANAGING
SPORTS
TOURS





Minding Your P's and O's Navigating the World of Athlete Visas

By Michael Wildes

As foreign-born players have earned a place in American sports, knowing proper immigration procedures and guidelines has become a necessity for event planners. You may know, for example, that your U.S. born players require a passport to exit this country and travel to another, but requirements also govern international athletes who come to the U.S. to play on tours or leagues here. Two main visas apply:

- **P-1 VISA:** The United States Citizenship and Immigration Services offers a special type of visa, the P-1 visa, meant specifically for athletes and entertainers. This P-1 classification refers to an "alien coming to the U.S. temporarily to perform at a specific athletic competition as an athlete, individually or as a part of a group or team, at an internationally recognized level of performance."¹ A maximum of 25,000 P-1 visas are issued annually and the recruiting team must demonstrate that both it and the athlete are internationally recognized as having a "high level of achievement." The P-1 visa is only issued on a temporary basis but is a dual intent visa, meaning that P-1 athletes can file for permanent residence without violating the terms of the temporary visa status.
- **O-1 VISA:** Athletes who are the "crème de la crème" of their field may pursue an O-1 visa, intended for players of "extraordinary ability." These players must demonstrate that they've risen to the very top of their field, either through an internationally recognized award like an Olympic gold medal or through other criteria. This visa is initially offered for a period of three years, but it can be renewed indefinitely on an annual basis.

While the headache of navigating the complex process of securing U.S. visas is shared amongst the players, managers and agents, consultation with an expert U.S. immigration attorney can prove beneficial to your event and your firm, and help to avoid last minute cancellations or reshuffling of booked talent.

¹ Immigration and Nationality Act (INA) sec. 101(a)(15)(P)(i)