Too Early To Tell Extent Of Economy's Impact On Dubai Sports City

By Erik Swanson, Staff Writer

USC-Marshall Sports Business Institute Exec Dir David Carter, who currently is in Dubai as part of a comprehensive study of Dubai Sports City (DSC) and the convergence of sports and entertainment, said it is "hard to determine the extent to which the economic slowdown is harming DSC because there is encouraging news on multiple fronts." However, the timing is "poor for attaining preferred financing, securing major corporate partners, and convincing potential customers of all types to align with the facility given the current market conditions." Carter said Dubai in many respects "appears to be equal parts Las Vegas and equal parts London, as well as Shanghai." The city "strives to be a financial capital while also catering to tourists by offering an expanding -- albeit slowed -- assortment of sports and entertainment options while simultaneously hoping to secure its position as the financial capital of the Middle East." Carter yesterday visited DSC, where he met with DSC Marketing Dir for Sports Business Malcolm Thorpe, and Carter noted the prevailing theme from the visit "centered around the need for thorough integration if the project is to be sustainable." Given the "wealth and influence of DSC principles and the fact that DSC has secured meaningful commitments for the various real estate components," it is "likely more of a question of when, not if," DSC will be completed. And it is "believed that its geography is working to its advantage as not only is it well situated to attract those from the Far East and Europe, but it is also well suited locally." But Carter noted the economic downturn places "added importance on DSC's initial major event," a Pakistan-Australia cricket match next month. If the event "goes well it will certainly help create a buzz about DSC," but if it underperforms, "concerns will certainly be voiced."

MASSIVE UNDERTAKING: Carter said DSC, which will cost nearly $4B to build and will cover 50 million square feet on the western end of Dubai, is "incomprehensible absent a site visit." The development will house a 60,000-seat multipurpose outdoor stadium, a 15,000-seat indoor arena, a 25,000-seat cricket stadium, a field hockey facility accommodating 5,000, and The Els Club, an 18-hole golf course. The golf course has already opened and the cricket stadium is set to host its first match in late April, and Carter said DSC execs "believe the majority of the facilities will be completed within a year, with all of the primary athletic facilities completed in
or about 2012.” DSC also will contain several sports academies, such as those connected to Manchester United Soccer Schools and the Bradenton Preparatory Academy. Carter said the academies will help facilitate a "sense of community," which is "lacking due to the transient nature of Dubai's population." Additionally, the Int'l Cricket Council is "in the process of relocating its headquarters from Lord's Cricket Grounds in London," which Carter said is "significant because it instantaneously elevates DSC's credibility to one of its most important constituencies." DSC also has allocated several million square feet to retail and commercial real estate development. Carter notes "more than 10,000 daily workers are engaged on the numerous aspects of the project's development."

**BEHIND THE SCENES:** Carter's visit to DSC is part of a case study for a chapter on sports-anchored developments in "The Convergence of Sports, Entertainment & Business: Joining Forces to Build Brands and Generate Billions," a book project for which the SBI secured a publishing deal with Stanford Univ. Press in late '07. The research is being supported by five founding corporate partners: professional services firm Ernst & Young, executive search and talent management firm Korn/Ferry Int'l, architectural planning and design firm Rossetti, online ticketing company Tickets.com and Yahoo Sports. Sports Museum of L.A. Owner Gary Cypres also is among the founding partners, and Cypres also helped sponsor the Dubai trip, along with Tim Slavik.