

MOVIN' ON UP



Fans cheer in the second quarter during an NBA game between the Oklahoma City Thunder and the Denver Nuggets at Paycom Center in Oklahoma City on March 9. NATHAN J. FISH/THE OKLAHOMAN

OKC debuts at No. 86 in survey measuring sports reputation around the globe

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Oklahoma City has joined the ranks of the world's top sports cities, making its debut in a global survey that measures cities' associations with sports.

Burson, a global communications company, ranked Oklahoma City among the top 100 sports cities in the world in the 15th edition of its study. The city was one of five newcomers added to this year's list after earning enough votes from survey respondents to break into the rankings for the first time.

Oklahoma City Mayor David Holt said the ranking aligns with the city's aim of becoming a globally-known destination.

"Sports is one of the most important ways that cities around the world establish a global identity. And I have said for years that it is OKC's aspiration to be a global city," Holt posted on X.

At the top of the list are New York City, Paris, and Los Angeles. The trio ranked at the top in last year's ranking, but the Big Apple jumped from third to first, bumping the previous and future Summer Olympic hosts down a spot each.

Oklahoma City ranked 86th on the 2026 list, but the city could climb in future rankings as several sports events are on the city's horizon, including in 2028 when OKC will be home to the softball and canoe slalom competitions during the Summer Olympics.



Thunder fans cheer during Loud City Live at Paycom Center in Oklahoma City on May 22 for Game 3 of the Western Conference Finals. The Thunder has brought back Loud City Live, an official watch party at Paycom Center during road playoff games. BRYAN TERRY/THE OKLAHOMAN

Among the findings from Burson, cohosting major sporting events can create new movement among the list.

“Instead of concentrating attention in one destination, major events now lift several cities at once, and the largest gains go to the hosts with the most room to grow,” the report reads. “Co-hosting lowers the price of entry, but it does not

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guarantee a return. Secondary hosts have the most headroom. Their task is to turn a shared event into a distinct story of their own.”

The study cited specific cases, including Vancouver, Canada; San Francisco, California; Atlanta, Georgia; Houston, Texas; and New York City, which all saw movement on the list after having some part in the 2026 FIFA World Cup.

Holt is hopeful that Oklahoma City’s role with the 2028 Summer Olympics alongside Los Angeles will continue that upward trend.

“I think the lifting of our brand on the global stage that will result from the Olympics is something we are still coming to understand. I believe the real value of our hosting in 2028 is the way we will leverage it for years to come,” Holt said in a statement to The Oklahoman. “It will once again change the way the world sees us.”

In addition, Holt pointed to new projects like the Oklahoma City Thunder arena and Oklahoma City United stadium as other future draws for sports fans.

“Our arena will be one of the finest in the world, by every objective measure. It would seem that if the ranking’s current criteria is maintained, we should see continued momentum,” Holt said.

What are the best sports cities in the world?

According to Burson, these are the best sports cities in the world: 1. New York City, New York 2. Paris, France 3. Los Angeles, California 4. London, Great Britain 5. Madrid, Spain 6. Barcelona, Spain 7. Milan, Italy 8. Lausanne, Switzerland 9. Munich, Germany 10. Manchester, Great Britain

