

30 years for Jet Set Sports

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The world's biggest supplier of hospitality for the Olympics marks 30 years in business with the close of the Sochi Olympic Winter Games.

U.S.-based Jet Set Sports started with the 1984 Games in Sarajevo. Company founder Sead Dizdarevic, a Croatian native, saw an opportunity ahead of those Games to make the most of his knowledge of the region and his language skills to create travel packages for U.S. Olympic sponsors. He admits it was a new experience for him.

"Thirty years ago, I didn't know anything about Olympics hospitality. I was the blind leading the blind," he tells *Around the Rings*.

Clients at the time included corporates from a past generation of Olympic sponsors such as Merrill Lynch, American Express, Flying Tigers, ABC Sports, Sports Illustrated, Kraft, and General Foods.

A Jet Set Sports escort at the Sochi airport (Jet Set Sports) "They all came to Sarajevo in great numbers," says Dizdarevic. He says his new venture had close to 5,000 clients in Sarajevo.

Many Olympics later, Dizdarevic and Jet Set Sports counts more than 10 times that number of customers for its services that now include Summer and Winter Olympics.

Also part of the business model for Jet Set Sports are direct sponsorships with Olympic organizing committees such as Sochi 2014 and major national Olympic committees such as the USOC, British Olympic Association, and the Norwegian Olympic Committee.

"It's been quite a journey. And with every Olympics, we learn a lot," he says.

From the just-ended games in Sochi, Dizdarevic says the big takeaway is the need for early preparations. His company was forced to bring in extra staff ahead of the Games to get hotels ready for Jet Set Sports guests when the hotels were unable to do it on their own.

A high-end hospitality lounge at the Sochi Olympic Park operated by Jet Set Sports (Jet Set Sports) "It worked out perfect," he says, despite nervous moments in January. He says customers seem satisfied based on surveys they returned on their Sochi experience.

"We've been getting mostly 10 from our clients. They're very happy," says Dizdarevic.

Dizdarevic says while his business continues to grow, at the same time he's worried about cost pressures, especially on the price of tickets to the Games.

"Empty seats are the result of expensive seats. There are a limited number of people who are able to afford these high prices," he insists.

Rio de Janeiro is the next Olympics on the horizon for Jet Set Sports, which Dizdarevic says offers plenty of challenges. But he is still upbeat about the prospects of Games in an exotic city.

"Rio is a city where people want to go. Rio will be exceptionally desirable. Rio will be exceptionally challenging ... challenging in almost every way," says Dizdarevic.

“But we will manage.”