

“PENSACOLA HARDWOOD SERIES” BRINGS MAJOR COLLEGE BASKETBALL TO PENSACOLA

Full Slate Of Division I Men’s Basketball At The Pensacola Bay Center This Fall

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

PENSACOLA, Fla. (Aug. 25, 2026) - Russ Potts Productions, Inc. (RPPI) and the Pensacola Bay Center are thrilled to announce the *Pensacola Hardwood Series* - multiple college basketball events scheduled for October and November of this fall.

The series begins with the *Southern Tip Off*, a high-powered matchup between Atlantic Coast Conference staple **Florida State University** and Southeastern Conference contender **Mississippi State University** on Saturday, October 10 at the Pensacola Bay Center.

This premier preseason showcase brings elite Power Four basketball to the Florida Panhandle, giving fans an exclusive early look at both programs ahead of the regular season.

“This Power Four matchup will deliver an exciting night of college basketball for Pensacola and sports fans throughout the Panhandle,” said **Zach Franz, President of RPPI**. “It is a tremendous addition to the Pensacola Hardwood Series and further establishes the city as a premier destination for high-profile collegiate sporting events.”

“Our connection with college athletics runs deep in Pensacola, and having elite basketball programs come play in our great city is a testament to that,” **Pensacola Mayor DC Reeves** said. “We know the teams and their fanbases will have a wonderful experience in our community, and I appreciate everyone involved in bringing these events to life right here.”

Both head coaches expressed enthusiasm for testing their squads early in a high-intensity neutral-site environment:

“We’re incredibly excited for the opportunity to play Mississippi State in Pensacola. This will be our first time stepping on the court together in a game setting, and it’s something our entire team is really looking forward to,” said **Florida State Head Coach, Luke Loucks**. “We have a tremendous fan base throughout the Panhandle, so the opportunity to bring Florida State basketball to Pensacola is special for our program.”

“We look forward to competing against Florida State in Pensacola at the Southern Tip Off,” said **Mississippi State Head Coach, Chris Jans**. “This will be a great early-season opportunity for our program and a quality test as we prepare for the upcoming regular season schedule. We also appreciate RPPI and the sponsors for their commitment to making this event possible and look forward to a great experience in Pensacola.”

While this exhibition contest won't count toward the all-time series, it renews a matchup fans haven't seen in over a decade - the two programs last met in 2015, with Florida State coming out on top 90-66. The series is currently tied at 5-5, with Mississippi State winning two of the three meetings during the 2000s. Friday's game offers both fanbases a rare rematch and a chance to see how each program has evolved since.

The *Pensacola Hardwood Series* continues with the *Coastal Classic*, an exciting matchup between Sun Belt Conference contender **South Alabama** and West Coast Conference powerhouse **Loyola Marymount University** on Thursday, November 12 at the Pensacola Bay Center.

This non-conference clash brings West Coast and Gulf Coast basketball styles together in Pensacola for an early test as both programs build momentum for their respective conference schedules. South Alabama and Loyola Marymount haven't played each other in over two decades, so this game offers fans a very rare matchup in an exciting neutral site setting.

"We can't wait to bring two top-tier programs like South Alabama and LMU to Pensacola for the Coastal Classic," said **RPPI President, Zach Franz**. "South Alabama has a massive regional fanbase, and bringing in a strong WCC program like Loyola Marymount makes this a can't-miss game for basketball fans in the Panhandle."

"We're thrilled to host the Pensacola Hardwood Series in Escambia County," **District 3 Commissioner Lumon May** said. "It's always an exciting time when we can bring college basketball to Northwest Florida and showcase our community as a destination for sporting events. On behalf of Escambia County, I'd like to welcome all of the players, coaches, and fans, and wish all of them a wonderful tournament."

The South Alabama Jaguars bring a proud basketball tradition to this matchup, with a program that has been in multiple NCAA Tournaments over the years, and have produced a steady pipeline of talent. Under head coach Richie Riley, now in his eighth season, the program posted a 21-12 record last season and hopes to post another winning record this season.

"We're excited for the opportunity to play in the Coastal Classic," said **South Alabama Head Coach, Richie Riley**. "Being able to play at the Pensacola Bay Center gives our guys a chance to compete at our conference tournament venue against a very good opponent. It should also be a fun opportunity for our fans to make the short trip over to Pensacola and support us."

The Loyola Marymount Lions capture national attention with their record-setting offensive style. Under head coach Stan Johnson, now in his seventh season, LMU carries a rich heritage that resonates across all of college basketball.

"We are excited about the opportunity of playing in the Coastal Classic against a tremendous program like South Alabama," said **Loyola Marymount Head Coach, Stan**

Johnson. "There's no doubt that this game will help us become a better team as we move through the season."

The final *Pensacola Hardwood Series* event is the *Battle at the Bay*, an exciting intra-state showdown bringing **Florida State University** back to Pensacola to take on hometown favorite **University of West Florida** at the Pensacola Bay Center on November 29, 2026.

This will be the University of West Florida's first season as a Division I institution, following their official announcement on April 2, 2026. They begin their Division I journey as a full multi-sport member of the Atlantic Sun Conference and a football-playing member of the United Athletic Conference - a joint strategic initiative announced this past July.

"Anytime you have the opportunity to compete against a program like Florida State, it's something our players and staff can be excited about," said **UWF Men's Basketball Head Coach, Tanner Smith**. "We're looking forward to competing against the Seminoles and giving our fans another memorable night of basketball in Pensacola."

Florida State will be in the midst of a challenging 14-game non-conference schedule prepping for ACC play. This will be Coach Loucks' second season as head coach at FSU as he looks to lead the Seminoles through another competitive campaign.

"We're also excited to return to the Panhandle in November to play West Florida. They're building a new Division I program, and we're looking forward to suiting up and competing against them," said **FSU Men's Basketball Head Coach, Luke Loucks**. "Personally, I have a lot of connections to Pensacola, with my wife Stevi being from Gulf Breeze, so being able to bring our team to the community and share Florida State basketball with our fans there makes this opportunity even more meaningful."

Russ Potts Productions, Inc. and Pensacola Bay Center representatives commented on the *Battle at the Bay*, and the overall *Pensacola Hardwood Series*:

"Connecting major college athletics with local communities is at the heart of what we do," said **RPPI President, Zach Franz**. "The Battle at the Bay gives Pensacola fans the opportunity to root for their local Argonauts while hosting one of Florida's premier sports brands, the Florida State Seminoles."

"The Pensacola Hardwood Series has evolved from the reputation of the community, the venues, the attractions and the quality experiences we have to offer in Escambia County," said **Pensacola Bay Center, Legends Global General Manager, Michael Capps**. "Pensacola is known for being the City of Champions in sports and we look forward to the opportunity to showcase the next level of hosting sporting events at the arena from the Pensacola Ice Flyers, the Sun Belt Conference, the Pensacola Invitational, Island Fights MMA promotions and more."

Ticket Information:

Tickets will go on sale to the general public at 10am CT on Friday, August 28 at www.pensacolabaycenter.com. Game times and broadcast information for the *Pensacola Hardwood Series* will be announced in the coming weeks. For updates visit www.pensacolabaycenter.com, or follow @russpottsproductionsinc on social media.

ABOUT RUSS POTTS PRODUCTIONS, INC.

RPPI, a Virginia based sports and entertainment company, has organized over 900 major college and professional sporting events in over 40 years in the industry. For the 2026-27 season, RPPI is organizing over a dozen high-profile events featuring 40+ men's college basketball programs across the country. RPPI specializes in the organization and promotion of live sports and entertainment content including college basketball, college football and college hockey as well as concerts. For more info: www.rppi.net

ABOUT THE PENSACOLA BAY CENTER

The Pensacola Bay Center is a versatile, multi-use event facility located in Pensacola, Florida, serving as a central hub for a wide range of entertainment, sports, and community events. Opened in 1985, this indoor arena is operated by Legends Global and is one of the Gulf Coast's premier venues. The Pensacola Bay Center has taken its place as the number one entertainment and sports venue in the region and the home of the Pensacola Ice Flyers, a professional ice hockey team competing in the Southern Professional Hockey League (SPHL). The Ice Flyers have won multiple SPHL championships, making them a key part of the Pensacola sports scene.