



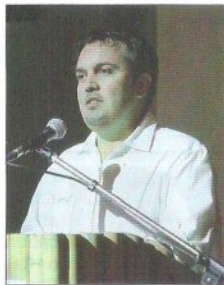
Debbie Dionysius



Paul Poole



Bill Barnett



Duncan Worthington



Nicholas Seaver Photos: Marc Mulloy

# Sports tourism 'scores big'

An expert panel fosters dialogue about marketing "Brand Phuket" to sports tourists

DEFINING and developing "Brand Phuket" as a world class sports tourism destination was top of the agenda at a recent meeting in Thalung.

Organized in collaboration with the Phuket PR Network and the Greater Phuket Chapter of the American Chamber of Commerce (AMCHAM), the meeting was held at the Thanayaphura Sports and Leisure Club (TSLC) on May 24.

Discussions for the evening were fueled by presentations from four keynote speakers: Debbie Dionysius, Paul Poole, Duncan Worthington and Nicholas Seaver.

The opening address was given by *Gazette* property columnist and Managing Director of Phuket-based firm C9 Hotelworks, Bill Barnett.

Begging the question about the implications of sports tourism for "Phuket's stakeholders", Bill emphasized the lure of Phuket. "People who've moved to the island in the past few years [did so because they] were driven by the lifestyle, education and sporting opportunities available here."

Following Bill's signature rhetoric, Natasha Eldred of Phuket PR Network introduced the evening's panel.

"When brand guru David Keen at a recent AMCHAM meeting [on November 30, 2011] asked the question 'What is Phuket?', no one was able to answer. The room fell completely silent," she recalled.

"This silence reinforces the fact that no one has yet come up with a distinct brand image for Phuket. . . In this meeting, the first of a planned five-part series, we will further explore and identify "Brand Phuket," she said.

In the opening presentation, Debbie, who is the Assistant Vice President of Destination Marketing at Laguna Phuket, highlighted benchmark sporting events such

as the Laguna Phuket Triathlon, Marathon and Ironman 70.3.

Debbie argued that we should continue to build on and nurture the island's reputation as a sports tourism destination, emphasizing the international reach and exposure that events have fostered.

"We want to push forward the brand of Phuket for being a major sports tourism destination . . . We started the Laguna Phuket Triathlon in 1994 and we've come from a small race, where some triathlon athletes showed up from surrounding countries, to [being] one of the biggest triathlon competitions for athletes from across the world [to] attend.

"I believe we are on the right track to promote the Phuket brand as being the sport tourism destination," she said.

By continuing to support and promote these kind of events, sports tourism and the island's destination brand will become synonymous, she argued.

The "bottom line" certainly speaks for itself. Last year, for example, independent surveys found that participants and spectators of the island's world-renown Kings Cup Regatta spent over 40 million baht on accommodations, food and beverages during the week of the prestigious sailing competition, according to Duncan Worthington, Media and Communications Director for the event.

Although sailing regattas serve a niche market, last year's numbers support the no-

tion that Phuket's Kings Cup is an increasingly valuable asset in terms of annual tourism income, Mr Worthington noted.

"The Phuket King's Cup Regatta is known around the world as 'the race to win', attracting over 2,000 people from more than 30 countries joining the event. The top participating countries include Australia, the UK,

Russia and Japan," said Mr Worthington.

Going on to highlight the potential of the domestic market, Duncan named golf, Muay Thai and even football as sports that we can expect to see and hear more of in Phuket's future.

While more athletes and spectators equates to increased cash flow in the economy, meals, tick-

ets and reservations are not the primary source of sports revenue.

A marketing veteran backed with nearly two decades of experience, Paul Poole focused his speech on the need to successfully integrate sponsorship into destination events. Mr Poole's company, The Sponsorship Experts, currently coordinates sponsorship for dozens of events and agencies in Phuket.

"Sporting events get the most sponsorship throughout the world," he said, adding that organizations should focus on segmentation for particular kinds of sponsorship using tier levels, and that events must offer clear and tangible incentives to companies.

The closing speaker was Nicholas Seaver, CEO of TSLC.

A Harvard graduate who has worked

with former US Vice President Al Gore on climate-change, Mr Seaver said he moved to Phuket in order to pursue the vision of his club TSLC, which integrates the appeal of a luxurious resort destination with the facilities needed for world-class athletes to train.

"I've learned that the new trend in tourism aims towards health and wellness activities. That is why we provide a retreat center, an integrative health center and mind center. . . [this is] to attract new groups of tourists," said Mr Seaver.

Nick highlighted how efforts to brand the TSLC facility as the most desirable sports center in Southeast Asia will benefit Phuket and help further the island's brand positioning as a quality sports destination.

"We have a complete sports facility that is able to support all kinds of sports activities. The TSLC has a fitness center, aquatics academy, tennis academy, triathlon academy, rugby academy and football academy.

"We have hosted many important sports events, such as an ITF tennis tournament, the Phuket International Soccer 7s and the IronKids Triathlon. We've welcomed athletes to use our venue as a place to train—including the Netherlands' National Triathlon Team and the Canadian National Synchronized Swimming Team," said Mr Seaver.

But the TSLC's efforts are not restricted to targeting professional athletes, he added.

"The TSLC also wants to promote the center not only as a home for athletes and members, but also to tourists as a holistic wellness center," he concluded.

*The Phuket PR Network plans to continue its Brand Phuket series of seminars. For more info visit: [phuketprnetwork.com](http://phuketprnetwork.com)*

— Phuket Gazette



**SPLASHING SUCCESS:** Phuket is an ideal place to stage large and lucrative sporting events.