

This Week's News

Lerners put millions into ballpark video

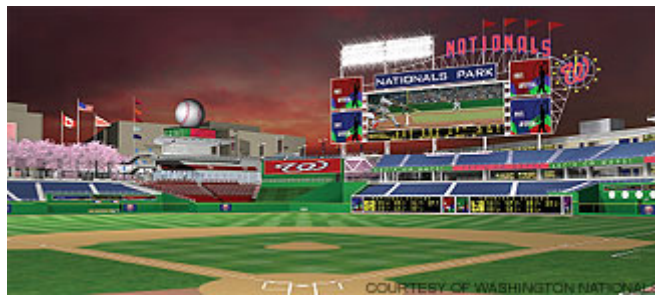
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The Washington Nationals are committed to spending \$12 million to upgrade the scoreboard and video system at their new ballpark, and are developing a graphics package that could include a baseball-shaped video screen atop a 360-degree "sports ticker" in left-center field.

The Nats selected **ANC Sports** and that firm's hardware supplier, Mitsubishi Diamond Vision, to build a system with a 47-by-101-foot-high high-def video screen within the main scoreboard, more than 700 feet of ribbon board space and two side-by-side 51-foot-long LED screens built into the right-center-field wall.



The Nationals foresee a giant baseball-shaped video screen in left-center field.

The team continues to work with ANC and Mitsubishi officials to develop what could be a 5-foot-high spherical screen and a circular message board resting on a platform above and to the right of the cherry trees planned for left field.

The estimate for the ball-shaped structure and ticker alone is \$7 million to \$8 million, said Mark Lerner, a principal team owner along with his father and two brothers-in-law.

"It's 40 to 60 feet in diameter, a superstructure in its own right," he said. "It will be in the main outfield plaza, something fans will see as they walk into the ballpark."

Team President Stan Kasten serves on the ANC board of directors. Rival Daktronics also submitted a bid, company spokesman Mark Steinkamp confirmed.

The latest developments push the Nats' contribution to \$50 million for facility

upgrades, and that number is expected to grow after the publicly financed ballpark opens in 2008, Lerner said.

The club decided to spend its own money for a state-of-the-art video system to stay current in a category where "technology changes every five minutes," Lerner said.

The city of Washington, D.C., is paying for the bulk of the \$611 million project, but the team has reached into its own pockets to pay for features beyond what was originally budgeted.

The city and the construction team of Clark, Hunt and Smoot set a guaranteed maximum price for Nationals Park that had "no incentive for the contractor to put in current technology; it was going to be the cheapest thing possible," Lerner said.

"It's been an ongoing thing with the city, and we did not want to accept that for what it was," he said. "Our family decided to make a major investment for the fans to enjoy something special."

The D.C. Sports and Entertainment Commission, the ballpark's landlord, is managing project costs. To make the upgrades possible, the Nationals post a line of credit with the group before work is done, commission spokesman Tony Robinson said.

The D.C. Council must approve the upgrades. To date, \$8.4 million worth have been OK'd, including \$2.8 million for scoreboard and video embellishments, Robinson said. "The sports commission is building the finest ballpark with or without the Lerner add-ons," he said.