

On Frozen Blog

The Washington Capitals - Behind the Screens

By *OrderedChaos (Mike Rucki) Monday, March 10, 2008*

Much has been written of the Capitals' strategies, players, and playoffs prospects—all intriguing topics, worthy of vehement debate.



But what of those who work tirelessly behind the scenes every game? The ones who work the cameras, the sound board, the in-game entertainment. The ones (like most of us) for whom the NHL's league *minimum* salary of \$475,000 per year would be a pretty impressive pay raise. It's true that their efforts may not directly affect the Caps' tee times, but they are an integral part of the gameday experience.

So in the spirit of the great Canadian show [How It's Made](#)—or perhaps *Behind the Music*?—I spent a game with the Capitals' production crew to see how they created the in-game experience. The idea was initially inspired by the [“pre-release” excitement](#) about the True-HD screens, then bolstered by my [first look](#) at the new system from the stands. But while the new technology is itself impressive, delving into how everything, and everyone, works together each game was the motivation for this day spent with the production crew.

Little did I know that my Behind the Screens introduction would coincide with a frenetic 10-2 Capitals victory, and a whirlwind of activity that surpassed a typical night's work.

The New Guy

The Washington Capitals' Director of Game Production and Entertainment Scott Brooks was my guide for the evening. Brooks is new to the Caps; in fact, he was hired the same day as Capitals Head Coach Bruce Boudreau, a mere three months ago. His first day on the job was much like Boudreau's—a game to run the day he arrived (in Brooks' case, a home game on November 24 vs. Carolina). Also like Boudreau, Brooks had to hit the ground running despite not knowing most of his staff's names, let alone the ins and outs of the organization. But he quickly warmed to both the Capitals and the broad array of talented people handling the in-game entertainment.

It may have helped Brooks' acclimation that his roommate in corporate housing was another recent addition to the team: Quintin Laing. He even lived there for a while after Laing's wife and child moved to town. Brooks didn't expect to be living with a hockey player, but he said it was a great experience and helped him immediately feel connected to the Capitals.

Up High and Down Low

“It's our job to try and get the crowd going,” he said. “The game for us is like a ramp. Fans walk in with hot dogs and drinks, they're pretty mellow. We try to build energy with music, videos, and lights during pregame and ramp up to the opening video, then to the early high-point of the player introductions. Then it resets, calms down, and we try to ramp up the energy again.”

To that end, everyone involved in the operation is connected via wireless headsets. And the “everyone” is a much larger group than you might think, as Brooks was about to show me.



We first went up to 600 level to meet some of the sky-high team members. We stopped in to meet Bruce Anderson, the long-time Capitals organist. Yes, the organist has headphones too, so Brooks and Anderson can synchronize musical cues to the announcements or other events during stoppages in play.

We also stopped in to the booth where employees of [ANC Sports](#) operate the LEDs around the arena, including the ribbon screens, the LED screens above and below the main HD screens, and the out-of-town scoreboards. ANC, the same company bringing HD to the Washington Nationals' new ballpark, develops the content in New York and has on-site personnel (again, with headsets) to queue and execute the ads, designs, and stats that scroll around the arena.