

The Virginian-Pilot

Upgraded Admirals' scoreboard generating excitement

By Paul White
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Oh, and it keeps score, too.

That fact can get lost among all the bells and whistles packed into Scope's new \$2.1 million dollar video scoreboard system that's to be unveiled today.

You've seen Norfolk Admirals hockey games?

Scope wants you to get ready for the Admirals hockey experience.

"The best word that comes to mind is, 'wow!' " Admirals vice president Joe Gregory said. "Our fans will finally get to see what they've been missing all these years."

Now, it won't help the Admirals score more goals or win games - the players are still on their own for that. And no one's predicting that a new scoreboard, by itself, will lure more fans.

But city and team officials are confident that they've greatly enhanced 37-year-old Scope with one glitzy multi-million dollar purchase, and they can't wait to show their new toy off.

"I really believe people are going to be blown away," said Steve Harper, Norfolk's acting director of the department of cultural facilities, arts and entertainment.

Scope's old scoreboard, which went up in 1994, was fine for serving up basic information and quaint graphics. But for fans eager for another look at a big play during an Admirals game, their best hope was that the highlight turned up on one of the local TV sportscasts.

Now, Admirals fans can not only watch instant replays but also the live game will be playing on the center-hung scoreboard that features four 13-by-7-1/2-foot HD-quality screens. A 3-foot deep display atop the big screens will provide the score and other key stats. And a 2-1/2-foot ring at the bottom will provide additional details.

End boards similar in size to the center big screens - and about five times larger than the ones formerly at Scope - will also crank out video, in addition to real-time statistics, event animation and promotional information.

In addition, the fan contests conjured up for breaks in the action will now be shown on the big screens, too. Three cameras - up from the one they used to employ - will capture everything from game action to fan interaction.

"It'll make the fans like cast members in a movie," Gregory said.

Chris Mascatello of ANC Sports said Scope now has essentially the same system his company installed at the Rose Garden for the NBA's Portland Trail Blazers.

"I'd be shocked if there's anything in the AHL that's even close to this quality," said Mascatello, whose company has installed 40 or 50 of these type scoreboards, but none in any AHL arenas.

Harper expects hockey games at Scope to become "continuous audio and visual engagement," where at each whistle or horn fans' eyes will shift directly from the ice to the video screen, anticipating what might happen next.

But how much is too much? Long-time Admirals fan Tony Bruner said that while he's thrilled to have a new scoreboard, he hopes the operators don't get carried away.

"I've seen these scoreboards that tell people when to applaud and everything," Bruner said. "It's like they're trying to turn fans into sheep."

Harper said the operators will be mindful of avoiding "sensory overload" at Admirals games. But it may not be easy. Scope's scoreboard is now packed with features the building never had before, and video producer Jody Cox plans to test drive them as the season begins to see how they play with the crowd.

Cox, himself, sounds like a man who won the lottery when he talks about taking the controls.

"With the capabilities we have now, the sky's the limit," Cox said.