

LED signs to line court at BNP Paribas Showdown

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The BNP Paribas Showdown next Monday at Madison Square Garden will be the country's first pro tennis event to showcase digital technology at courtside.

The LED signs, owned and operated by ANC Sports, will frame the entire playing surface for the John McEnroe vs. Ivan Lendl and Pete Sampras vs. Andre Agassi matches. The six structures in total measure 324 square feet.

For event producer StarGames, the technology provides an upsell for the Showdown's bigger sponsors and affordable opportunities for new partners to flash their messages at courtside, said Jerry Solomon, StarGames' president and CEO.

Bowlmor Lanes, a nightclub-style bowling facility with three New York locations; video game manufacturer 2K Sports; and Nespresso, Nestle's line of gourmet coffee making machines, are three new Showdown sponsors. As part of their deals, all three brands get exposure during changeovers in the matches, new inventory made possible through the technology. 2K Sports is using the event signage to promote its new "Top Spin 4" tennis video game hitting the market March 15.

"We have been able to sign sponsorships with companies that we otherwise wouldn't have room for," Solomon said. "For our [major] sponsors, there are certain times when the entire court will be BNP signs, full domination."

Solomon declined to disclose the value of those deals.

StarGames first used ANC Sports' system at ice level for the Caesars Tribute skating event in December at Boardwalk Hall in Atlantic City.

"That was also the first time it was used in figure skating, and we knew it would be revolutionary there," he said. "It worked perfectly and I told [ANC Sports President Jerry Cifarelli] we gotta use this in tennis. If nothing else, it upgrades the look of the court."

In addition to the advertising, the LED signs have the ability to produce full animation for flashy displays when the competitors enter the court, Solomon said.

The Showdown will be a good test for the event-level LED signs, which have already been in use for NBA, NHL and MLS games, ESPN's X Games and the Dew Tour, Cifarelli said. For tennis, ANC Sports is taking a conservative approach to the event and will not activate the signs during play.

Cifarelli would not say how much ANC Sports is charging StarGames to install the signs and provide the graphics.

The Showdown will be televised on ESPN2 and ESPN3.