

TAILGATE GUIDE

Ross-Ade Stadium: More money, more projects

BY ANDY CRAIG
Sports Editor

Photo renderings showing the vision for a revamped Ross-Ade Stadium were released Wednesday.

Purdue Athletics said they took into account the opinions of more than 12,000 survey respondents and multiple focus group meetings to deliver “what fans want to see in an enhanced facility.”

The allocation of \$45.4 million in donated funds for the first phase of renovations at Ross-Ade were approved at a board of trustees meet-

ing in April. Construction is slated to begin as soon as the 2022 season ends and should be completed by the start of the 2023 season.

The plans feature a south end zone addition that will add 4,500 seats, completing the bowl and serving as the new home for both the Ross-Ade Brigade and the All-American Marching Band on game days.

The student section will be moved from its current location in the northeast end of the stadium to the new southern end zone area and parts of the southeast stands.

Mike Bobinski, director of intercollegiate athletics, said in April’s board of trustees meeting he was very hopeful that component of the renovations would come to fruition.

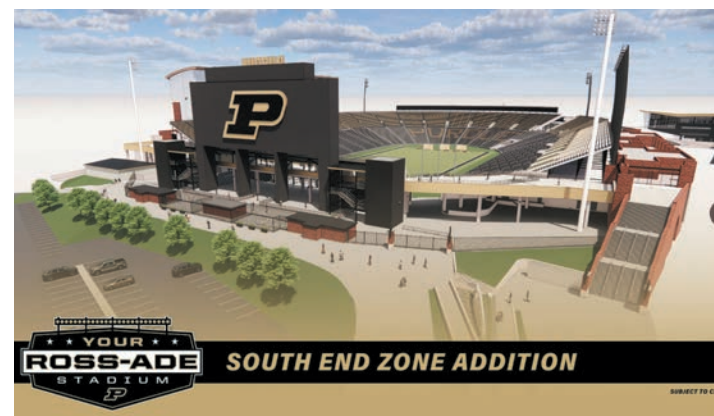
“That would be a really attractive opportunity for our students to really own part of the stadium and create an appropriately hostile environment for our opponent,” he said.

A dining facility for student-athletes will replace the Purdue Team Store on the west side of the stadium and will include a full-production kitchen and

both indoor and outdoor patio seating, according to Purdue Athletics.

An underground pedestrian tunnel will run from the Kozuch Performance Complex to Rohrman Field beneath John R. Wooden Drive. The new structure will improve player safety on game days and provide an unspecified recruiting component.

There will be new premium seating options available, which Purdue Athletics said it would share more information about soon.



Purdue released the graphics and CAD renderings for renovations that were approved in April.

SCREENSHOT

The other side of the lens



TODD MCKECHNIE | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Kyle Jenich, technical director for the studio team, demonstrates how his control console, “the switcher,” works. Jenich programs the console each week to fit the needs of each individual production.

Meet the team you’ll never see at football games

BY ANDY CRAIG
Sports Editor

Purdue’s home opener against Penn State is the first game of a 14-week college football TV production tour for the members of the Fox Sports “Big Noon” crews.

Two pairs of massive, 53-foot-long trailers flank either side of Ross-Ade Stadium, each housing its own conglomerate of sports entertainment production specialists and millions of dollars in equipment. They rolled onto campus Sunday night.

The camp alongside Northwestern Avenue, the studio side, serves as the mobile control center for the Big Noon Kickoff team responsible for the pre-game, halftime and post-show. Right outside the southwest corner of the end zone are two other production units on the game side where the Big Noon Saturday team operates.

Members of large production crews are often freelance workers like Drew Ruggles, a video engineer who spent this summer overseas working on World Cup Qualifiers. Ruggles said he got into doing full-time freelance work “on a whim.” He quit his job, called up ESPN and has been freelancing for the last 10 years without looking back.

Ruggles said at that level of the industry, a small pool of specialists is recruited by large networks to be part of various sporting event productions throughout the year.

Those positions are essential to shows like Fox’s Big Noons, and each has its own section in the trailer, including video and audio engineers, camera specialists, live video editors and technical directors.

Every member of the crew wears a headset at all times during the production and has the ability to communicate with whoever, whenever.

Andy Rostron is a communications engineer whose job, in oversimplified terms, is to make sure both the game and studio sides, as well as broadcasters and camera operators, are able to communicate with one another seamlessly.

Rostron has been a part of communications teams for a variety of sporting events including the Masters, the Daytona 500 and the World Series. Most of his work for the productions is preparatory.

“When we’re live,” Rostron said, “hopefully I’m not doing much, because that means everything’s working.”

Video engineers and directors are constantly talking to camera operators to fix lighting issues and get specific shots. The producer and technical director are always coordinating additional content to go along with the announcer’s commentary like a slow-motion clip of the last touchdown, or an instant replay of a penalty.

That kind of thing requires yet another master of a sports broadcasting niche, like Kim Tessean, a live video editor.

Tessean said she’s been working with a machine that allows for live slow motion replays, since 2004. She uses it to pre-build clips and highlight reels with in-game content for the halftime and post-game shows.

On the game side of things, the trucks are set up slightly differently, but all of the same key components and specialists remain.

Bob Goosley, referred to by the crew as “Goose,” is the technical director on the game operations side. He said he preps for games by taking a look at both teams and decides what graphics to pre-make, which of last year’s stats are relevant to the game at hand, and programs certain commands into the video board he calls “the switcher.”

“I think it’s really neat,” Goose said, “when you’ve done a good job and people are watching it on TV — it’s nice to know you were a part of it.”

On game day, Goose sits to the right of producer Chuck McDonald and director Rich Dewey, from whom the team gets its name — “the McDew Crew” — complete with a custom flag hanging on the back of the trailer.

McDonald says every week, especially in college football, is like a new puzzle. He and Dewey coordinate camera placements that vary from

stadium to stadium and nail down story lines and themes to keep in mind throughout the game.

“If you go into a game with a plan,” McDonald said, “you have to be ready to adjust, because the game decides the direction (of the production).”

The producers and directors have 16 camera operators around the stadium to choose from throughout the game. Video engineers like Darin Peterson ensure that as the broadcast switches between video feeds, factors like color and exposure appear seamless.

Ruggles and Trevor MacHalick, both video engineers on the studio side, oversee much of the same thing during production. Steve Leotta, another video engineer on the team, said MacHalick and Ruggles are “seriously, two of the best in the business.”

Ruggles said he’s worked with many members of the team before the Big Noon Kickoff schedule, as a result of freelance specialists typically following seasonal trends in sports.

While most of the work stays the same no matter what sport they’re dealing with, MacHalick noted weather is one of the more disruptive variables, given much of the setup takes place outside the truck.

“I remember working on NHL games,” MacHalick said, “being up north in the winter and having to chip ice off the (fiber optic) cables in the morning.”

“Another time,” he said, “we were in Tokyo for the Olympics and I was working underneath (the trailer), wearing this exact shirt and at the time we still had to wear masks. It was 100 degrees outside, and my whole shirt was drenched in sweat but this one spot in the center of my chest.”

MacHalick said one of the challenges of full-time freelance sports production is the uncertainty involved with the next job.

“When you don’t know exactly what you’ll be doing three months from now,” MacHalick said, “it can be hard to plan out the big things in life.”

Other team members echoed similar sentiments, such as Tessean who said she missed Thanksgiving the last 17 years and Christmas the last eight. Rob Mikulicka, director of remote studio operations for Fox, said he’d missed quite a few holidays and family events, too.



TODD MCKECHNIE | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

The replay desk is used by both production teams to control clips during the studio segments as well as create highlight reels for halftime.

“If everyone’s at home on Thanksgiving watching the game,” Mikulicka said, “somebody has to be there putting it all on.”

Brian Obert, a technical director on the game side of the production, said he sees the bonds everyone has formed while working together under the same high-energy, committed conditions and long hours.

“Nobody would probably tell you this,” Obert said, “but everyone here sees each other as family.”

Could it be another blackout upset?

Opener is 1st blackout game since 2018 victory vs. OSU

BY EMMA FINER
Staff Reporter

Under the bright lights of Ross-Ade Stadium with a sea of black, the Purdue football team is confident it will kick this season off to a strong start.

The Boilermakers open their season at home with conference play hosting Big Ten rival Penn State Thursday night.

Purdue enters the game as 3.5-point underdogs, according to USA Today, and trails in the overall series record. Penn State holds a dominant lead of 15-3-1. Purdue’s last win against Penn State was in 2004, when it came away with a 20-13 win at State College, Pennsylvania.

The game also marks the return of the blackout game, where fans are encouraged to wear black attire from black T-shirts to body paint, for the first time since 2018 when Purdue pulled off one of the biggest upset wins in school history, beating No. 2 Ohio State at home 49-20.

Senior defensive tackle Branson Deen talked about his excitement to once again play in an environment with the loud blackout crowd.



ANDY CRAIG | SPORTS EDITOR

Clouds hang over Ross-Ade Stadium on the eve of its season opener.

“Hopefully we can make this one that special, too,” Deen said.

Senior linebacker Jalen Graham, who played against the Nittany Lions his freshman year, talked about how playing against them his senior year gives him extra motivation to want to start the season in the win column.

“As a team, we’re all going in (with) that (mentality), if we’re able to do what we’re capable of doing, we’re going to like the outcome,” Graham said.

One of the more interesting matchups for this game is the sixth-year quarterback battle between Purdue’s Aiden O’Connell and Penn State’s Sean Clifford.

Last season, Clifford passed for over 3,000 yards with 21 touchdowns and 8 interceptions to lead the Nittany Lions to a 7-6 record.

Purdue defensive coordinator Ron English discussed the defensive strategy to disrupt Clifford’s passing rhythm after watching him play in previous years.

“To play that many games at a place like Penn State speaks a lot to who he is,” English said. “He’s really smart, he’s really poised and he’s a very accurate passer.”

A big question heading into this game is how the Boilermakers will accommodate for the big production losses on defense with defensive end George Karlaftis being drafted by the Kansas City Chiefs and on offense with wide receiver David Bell being drafted by the Cleveland Browns.

Purdue junior wide receiver T.J. Sheffield outlined the experience now on the team with senior wide receiver Tyrone Tracy, who transferred from Iowa, expected to make a big impact for the Boilermakers in the receiving category.

“He came from Iowa and had a lot of experience there,” Sheffield said. “He’s really coming along.”

O’Connell also said training camp with newer receivers has been translating to building chemistry.

“We trust our timing and we trust our technique,” O’Connell said. “Doing reps over and over again, you trust that guys are going to be in the right spots.”

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