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UD Arena: Where We Fly Together

Eric F. Spina
University of Dayton, efspina@udayton.edu

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UD Arena: Where We Fly Together

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Thursday October 10, 2019

By Eric F. Spina

Stepping over cables and sidestepping ladders, I toured the University of Dayton Arena this week with Athletic Director Neil Sullivan, who predicts a victorious finish for the three-year, \$76.2 million transformation.

At just about 50 years old, the iconic UD Arena is hitting its stride. I'd call it a fast break.

The Arena, affectionately dubbed “the Dayton Decibel Dungeon,” is legendary for its raucous ambiance. And for how hard it is to leave with a victory.

Its electric atmosphere — what we all know as its heart and soul — hasn't changed as UD Arena ups its game with a bold makeover and a bit of well-deserved swagger.

Starting with the women's exhibition tip-off on Nov. 1, fans will be treated to a completely refurbished facility that's long held a reputation as one of the best venues for college basketball in the land. It's so popular that it has hosted more NCAA tournament games than any other arena.

As light streamed through a bank of new floor-to-ceiling windows outside the Flight Deck, more than 130 construction workers fanned out across the west side, painting, welding, and hauling in boxes of seats for the upper reaches of the Arena.

I was being treated to a rare, behind-the-scenes glimpse of the largest construction project in UD history — and it was a sight to see. Neil pointed out a wall that will soon sport a massive winged “D” logo, new locker rooms, a players’ tunnel that will be painted with runway markings, a media room, and a wider concourse that now encircles the entire Arena. Improved LED lights flooded the floor with high-quality light as one long-awaited improvement — air conditioning — kept the walking tour comfortable.

Last month, workers installed new, highly visible University of Dayton Arena signs on the top of the facility on the north and south sides. This week, they added trim siding.

“We’ve been watching parts of a movie over the last few years,” Neil observed, “and now we can see the whole thing.” The UD Arena transformation will receive its official “premiere” at the Nov. 9 men’s season opener against Indiana State with a pre-game ceremony (complete with a surprise or two) and a blessing.

Against the din of construction, I could almost hear the echo of “This is our house!” — the student-led chant when the Flyers begin to pull away for a victory.

But UD Arena is home for much more. I’ve felt the sense of joy and accomplishment when I shake the hands of thousands of graduates every year at commencement ceremonies. I’m always stirred by the liturgies at special Masses celebrating the arrival of new students and honoring the departure of the graduating class. And I’ll never forget my own presidential installation filled with such soaring song and dance.

This is a place of hopes and dreams, where we fly together.