

Motorsports

Daytona’s offseason overhaul ready for debut

By MARK LONG
AP Sports Writer

DAYTONA BEACH, Fla. — The project was such a massive undertaking that architects had to account for the curvature of the Earth.

It included 31 million pounds of steel, 101,000 new seats, 40 escalators, 17 elevators and stretched nearly a mile. It took 2 1/2 years to complete and even had its own nickname: Daytona Rising.

It was a mammoth, \$400 million makeover to NASCAR’s most famous track, a ground-up restoration that turned some old, rickety grandstands into the world’s finest motorsports stadium.

The Daytona International Speedway renovation is complete and ready for its official debut — at the season-opening Daytona 500 on Sunday.

“We want people to be blown away when they come to this property,” track president Joie Chitwood III said. “You think about the history and the heritage, the legends of our sport made their name here, and now this property really matches that.”

Daytona Rising has turned heads and left visitors in awe since its completion last month. It boasts vibrant colors, grandiose displays and unique exhibits — and that’s just outside the stadium walls.

Inside, the finished product is home to more than 100,000 square feet of fan engagement space.



In this Feb. 13, 2016 photo, a box suite is shown in the grandstands near the finish line of the at Daytona International Speedway in Daytona Beach, Fla.

AP Photo/Phelan M. Ebenhack

“It’s like a football stadium, but taken to the next level and magnified 20 times,” former Daytona 500 champion Jamie McMurray said.

Daytona Rising was designed to meet the ever-increasing demand to improve the fan experience. Twenty-year-old stadiums are considered outdated. Burgers, hot dogs, pretzels and beer are no longer enough at sporting events.

High-definition televisions have made it even tougher to convince people to get off their couches and pay for expensive tickets.

International Speedway Corp., NASCAR’s sister company that owns a dozen tracks including Daytona, took all of those factors into account when it started planning the redesign.

“It doesn’t make sense in this day and age to sell a subpar experience. And if you sell a subpar experience, you would expect the fan to not come back,” Chitwood said.

“When you look at what it takes for a customer to come to Daytona — airfare, hotel, gas — they’re making a big investment. I think we have a property now that justifies that investment. I think you can make a case we probably weren’t making a good case for that investment in years past.”

The centerpieces of the redesign are the injectors, five fan entrances that showcase sponsors and include more than 20,000 square feet of educational and entertainment space. The injectors also include bigger and more bathroom locations and countless dining choices. Throw in more than 1,200 televisions, and fans can leave their seats without missing any of the live, on-track action.

Toyota got in first and appears to have spent the most money on its displays, which include an off-road ride-along experience, its entire lineup of current models and even a replica of the nose of

the Space Shuttle Endeavor that a Toyota Tundra pulled across a California overpass in 2012.

It has race cars hanging from the ceiling, interactive video games, personal stories about key employees and even a free Ferris wheel out front.

“We started developing long before anybody else, and because of the way we always worked, we always do things looking in our rear-view mirror, worried about what everybody else is doing and we try to do things better — only we had no benchmarks,” said Keith Dahl, general manager for motorsports and asset management for Toyota Motor Sales, U.S.A.

Chevrolet filled its space mostly with cars, even bringing in a refurbished 1970 Camaro and a 1971 Corvette.

But since seeing Toyota’s injector, the American automaker decided to add a surprise addition that will be unveiled Thursday.

The center injector remains without a sponsor. Some believe Daytona will give naming rights to NASCAR’s next primary sponsor, which will replace Sprint at the end of this season. Chitwood insisted that’s not the case.

“After 50 years, Daytona deserved this re-imagining,” Chitwood said. “We all want to have the brightest and the shiniest, with all the bells and whistles. Now, when fans drive down International Speedway Boulevard, I want them to catch their breath and say, ‘I get why people are all worked up about Daytona and what this place means.’”

Olympics

Los Angeles vows privately financed Olympics in 2024 bid

By BETH HARRIS
AP Sports Writer

LOS ANGELES — With 97 percent of the venues in existence or already planned by private investors, organizers of Los Angeles’ bid for the 2024 Olympics are promising a prudent and responsible approach to running the games that would be entirely privately financed.

“That is the definition of sustainability in terms of legacy and cost,” said Casey Wasserman, chairman of LA24. “There’s no risk involved with venues or facilities.”

On Wednesday, LA24 officials released a 64-page report submitted to the International Olympic Committee detailing their vision and concept for bringing the Olympics back to Los Angeles for a third time.

Organizers said that within three weeks of launching their bid last September, they secured \$35 million in cash commitments from private donors.

The committee is emphasizing the city won’t require any extra infrastructure beyond what is already planned for the vast, traffic-choked region over the coming years, including \$300 billion in transportation upgrades. Part of that is an expansion of several rail lines and the first direct transit link to the city’s main airport, which is currently undergoing a \$14 billion modernization.

Los Angeles is competing with Paris, Rome and Budapest, Hungary, for the games.

The IOC will announce the winner next year.

“It’s nothing but strong encouragement right now,” U.S. Olympic Committee Chairman Scott Blackmun said.

“The most expensive and technologically advanced stadium will certainly be a key part of our plans going forward,” Wasserman said.

Organizers want to include Hollywood in the planning, too, although they offered no specific details.

The L.A. games would revolve around four clusters: downtown Los Angeles, the San Fernando Valley, along the coast on the city’s west side and in the South Bay.

The renovated Los Angeles Coliseum would host track and field and opening and closing ceremonies.

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