

The Rebirth *of* BC PLACE

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The unexpected collapse of BC Place's emblematic roof on January 5, 2007 depressed moods throughout Vancouver at a time of year when sodden, sun-deprived West Coasters are generally already pretty miserable. It wasn't just that the deflation literally changed the skyline of the city—what was most disheartening was the fact that the venerable stadium was due to host the opening and closing ceremonies of the upcoming Winter Olympics, just three years away.





Debate raged about the stadium's health in the days and weeks following the roof's failure. Word came out that the roof's fabric had already outlived its life expectancy, so why hadn't government officials already been planning to replace it? And if they had to replace it now, would there be enough time to do so before the Olympics?

Of course, we all know now that the roof was repaired and the Olympic ceremonies held there were all great successes—well, except for the glitch with the torch arm that failed to rise from the floor of the stadium, but you can't blame the roof for that.

Now, less than five years after the roof's failure, there is a striking new landmark on Vancouver's skyline: BC Place Stadium has been reborn, thanks to an estimated \$563-million retrofit. Once the world's largest air-supported roof, the new BC Place now boasts the world's largest cable-supported roof. The towering support masts encircling the stadium give the building an entirely different look, almost as if Vancouver has a brand-new stadium.

BC Pavilion Corporation CEO Warren Buckley agrees with that assessment. On a hard-hat tour he gave me 30 days before the stadium was due to open with a BC

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Lions football game, Buckley stressed that so many changes and improvements have been made to the entire facility—not just the roof—that it is effectively a new stadium, but at about half the price of what a new facility would cost to build from scratch today. And that is bolstered by the fact that the cost of the new roof, pegged at \$240 million, represents less than half of the entire renovation budget.

Although much of the public's attention has been focused on the new roof, it became clear during my tour that Buckley



▲ PHOTO: 18,000 TONS OF STEEL AND 76,000 SQUARE METERS OF FABRIC WERE USED IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE NEW RETRACTABLE ROOF.



▲ PHOTO: MANY CHANGES AND IMPROVEMENTS HAVE GONE INTO THE ENTIRE FACILITY - NOT JUST THE ROOF.

wasn't kidding—BC Place is different, right from the ground up.

First off, as you enter, there are no air locks any more, so walking into the bright, open lobby is a breeze. Climbing an access ramp, you notice that the previously bare concrete walls have been

opened up with windows all around, adding life and movement to the building both for those attending an event and for people walking by outside.

If you take a closer look at one of the 54 columns ringing the concourse, you will see that they have been re-

inforced with rebar and concrete to nearly double their original size—all to carry the added weight of the new roof.

The first time you enter the seating bowl of the new BC Place, you won't believe it is the same facility. Bright, airy, comfortable and intimate, it feels completely different from the oppressive, dimly lit echo chamber it once was. (OK, the KingDome in Seattle was even worse, but they imploded that place years ago...)

Ringling the stadium just above the upper level of seats is a 36-foot-tall row of louvered windows that can be opened to allow airflow in and out, as well as light. Above that is a circle of permanent roof fabric covering the seating area to protect it from the elements. Though currently beige, Buckley says sunlight will naturally bleach it to a uniform white.

The inner circle of the roof itself is the retractable portion, which actually pulls into the centre cowling—"what the engineers call the garage," according to Buckley. It can be opened or closed in 20 minutes. Hanging from the cowling is an enormous new scoreboard, featuring 68 by 38 foot HD screens on its long sides, and weighing in at 100,000 pounds.

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Also on the list of improvements for the fan experience are wider seats throughout, improved concession and washroom facilities and expanded access for people with disabilities.

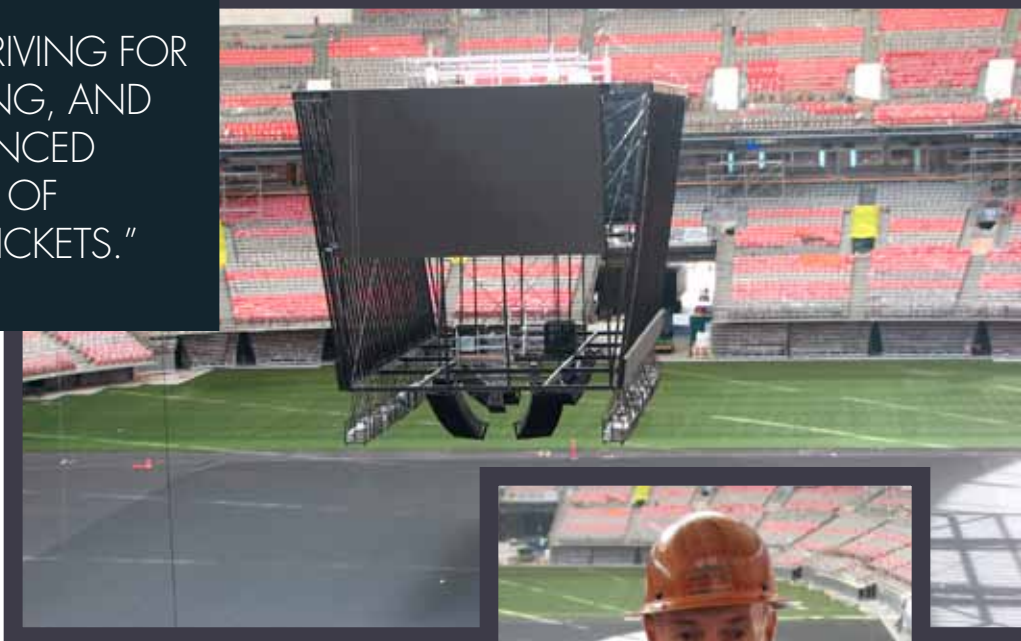
The BC Lions and Vancouver Whitecaps FC, the building’s primary tenants, are thrilled about the changes. The Lions have long suffered poorer-than-usual attendance on sunny summer evenings because many people simply did not want to waste a warm evening under the dome, while the Whitecaps, who play even more of their games in the spring and summer than the Lions do, might have suffered even more.

And speaking of the Lions and Whitecaps, the stadium will seem radically different depending on whether it is hosting a CFL football game or a soccer match.

Buckley explains, “The Whitecaps are striving for intimacy in the building, and that needs to be balanced with the Lions’ hopes of selling 30 to 40,000 tickets.”

The main way this will be accomplished is with a curtain system that can roll out to close off the entire upper bowl, leaving seating for about 26,000 in the lower half. With the upper bowl open, the stadium has a maximum capacity of about 54,500, down from 60,000 because of the wider seats.

The other aspect of team personalization occurs through lighting. All of the louver and roof panels ringing the stadium can be individually and dynamically lit, so an orange theme will prevail for the Lions and green and blue will be the norm for the Whitecaps. A video ribbon board also rings the upper seating level just like the one at Rogers Arena. Touchdowns and goals will be celebrated with dramatic



▲ PHOTO: THE ENORMOUS NEW SCOREBOARD WEIGHS IN AT 100,000 POUNDS.

lighting effects that are promised to be nearly as thrilling as the action on the field below.

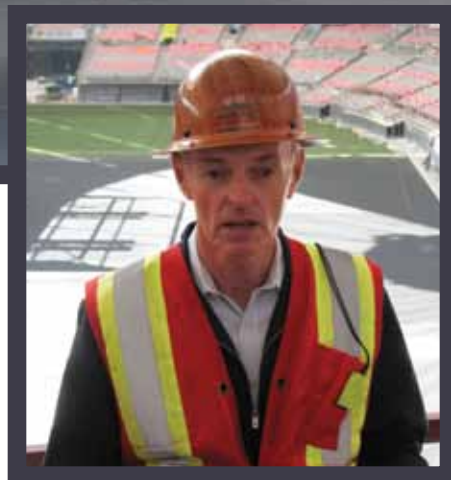
The playing field is brand new, too. The concrete floor had to be torn up and replaced to allow for added drainage, since the new roof will occasionally let some wet weather in. Over that, a brand new artificial turf field has been laid—the same style as the one at Empire Field, where the Lions and Whitecaps have been playing throughout the renovations.

The locker rooms and luxury suites have all been improved. Although the 55 suites were refurbished prior to the Olympics, they have been improved yet again with brand new technology.

Buckley firmly believes the new stadium will be a vast improvement for fans and by opening it up to the outside world more, it will make them feel more connected to the downtown experience.

“I think what you’ll see, particularly for soccer,” he says, “is the same experience they have in Seattle, where you have all these people that come down and go to the restaurants and bars beforehand and then make the march into the stadium there. There’s a pre- and post-experience to go along with the game experience.”

Looking back, then, maybe the roof’s collapse early in 2007 was a good thing—after all, it has led to the rebirth of BC Place stadium!



▲ PHOTO: BC PAVILION CORPORATION CEO WARREN BUCKLEY PROVIDED THE TOUR OF NEWLY RENOVATED BC PLACE STADIUM.

FACTS & FIGURES

- 18,000 tons of steel used in the construction of the retractable roof
- 76,000 square metres of fabric used to cover the roof
- each support mast is approximately 50 metres tall and weighs 120 tons
- cables between masts are 90 mm in diameter
- total cable length is 35 km
- roof can support 7,000,000 kg of snow
- about 4,000 people from around the world worked on this renovation project, including 120 cable riggers, many of whom were climbers from Squamish, Whistler or Australia
- baseball is still possible in the stadium, but it is not set up for it right now—some minor work would need to be done to accommodate it 