



LAUREN STIEGLITZ

I WANNA RIDE THE ZAMBONI The Drake is in need of some new technology, like seats with backs attached to them.

Aging rink in need of facelift

Clare Drake Arena's 48 years old with aging equipment, but renos are coming

ANDREW RENFREE
Sports Staff

Flo Macapagal, Guy Crosswhite and Monty Wood work miracles with the resources they have at their disposal. These three make up the facilities team at Clare Drake Arena, and they use aging technology—some built in the 1960s—to keep the University of Alberta's only hockey rink operating.

"We don't have proper systems here; we're still back in the early '60s in terms of some of our technology," Crosswhite said. "You always hear about these guys comparing our arena to Rexall, saying Rexall has the best ice—they do because they have all the best equipment. You could take the best guy from Rexall and bring him over here, and I'll make you a deal—it'll be no better if he uses our equipment."

Considering the amount of activity in the building, the Drake is likely one of the most used arenas in Edmonton. Recreational skating, figure skating, hockey classes, Bears and Pandas games and practises are all part of a regular week. Compared to most city arenas, or even Rexall Place, which sits unused all day with the Oilers on the road, the Drake's ice is constantly taking a beating, so it's a challenge to keep it in good condition at all times. The work of the facilities crew is often a thankless job, but throughout their 60 years of combined ice-making experience at Clare Drake, they've heard it all, from compliments to criticism.

"I think who it is depends on what they think of the ice. You could go into the Bears dressing room, and you'd

get half saying good and half saying bad. You'll get one guy that says it's terrible and the next guy the best ice he's seen all year," said Wood. "You can't please everybody, so you try and find that middle ground and run with it and hopefully you make everybody happy."

Pandas hockey head coach Howie Draper noted that while Clare Drake isn't perfect, he feels it's one of the better arenas in Canada West.

"The ice is a little soft because it's a warmer arena, but I think that works out to be an advantage for us because you get used to it, and teams come in and play on your ice surface; it may be a bit of a shock and slow them down a bit," Draper said, adding that the playing conditions may have contributed a bit to Alberta's success over the years in this building.

"History is the first thing that pops into my mind when I think of Clare Drake Arena," Draper added. "Success is another key word. You look around the building and see all the pictures and banners, and the history of success is evident."

The facilities guys take pride in that strong tradition of hockey programs that Clare Drake Arena has housed over the years. It's one of the reasons they love their jobs despite the challenges of working with an older building.

"People always say to me how come you've stayed here 19 years?" Crosswhite said. "It's because I love the program—I'm one of the biggest fans of the Bears and the Pandas; I watch every game."

About a year ago, students voted against plebiscite question that asked

students to partially fund a new Physical Activity Complex (PAC) with a new student fee. The plan called for either a complete renovation Clare Drake Arena or a brand new 3500 seat arena built at a cost of \$25–\$30 million. More concerned with recreational skating and intramural hockey, students opposed an additional \$40 fee, which would have funded the new arena and other new facilities. The implication is that if a new arena does become a reality at some point, funding will have to come from private donations or sponsorships.

John Barry, Director of Capital projects at U of A, said the No PAC vote was a letdown for the Athletics Department, and the focus is now on renovating the Drake.

"What Clare Drake is going to get is a little bit of rouge and lipstick," Barry said. "The plan now is to upgrade Clare Drake Arena until we can get a new one. We have replaced the floor, boards and glass already, but the ice plant was built in 1960 so we need a new one. We also need new amenities: locker rooms, bathrooms, concession areas and also replace the seating with actual seats with backrests."

Admittedly, minor renovations are only a Band-Aid solution, so for now the facilities crew must wait and make due with what they have.

"We always say, until we can walk into it, make some ice in it or drive a Zamboni around it, it's all just pipe dreams," Wood said. "We've heard a lot of rumours over our 18 years about what may or may not be done around here, so we don't get our hopes up."

DECONSTRUCTING THE DRAKE

- The U of A Varsity Arena was built in 1959 and it was renamed Clare Drake Arena on 1 June, 1990 in honour of Alberta's most prolific coach.
- The rink was renovated in 2003 and the boards and slab under the ice were redone.
- It currently seats 2700 people.
- Clare Drake is one of the few CIS arenas to still use paint for the logos and

lines on the ice, as most have switched to paper, which is more convenient but doesn't look as sharp. The Bear and Panda logo take half a day to paint and the lines take a full day.

- The quickest the facilities crew can get full ice coverage from concrete is 48 hours. This would be round-the-clock work with no sleeping, but they have done it before when necessary. Typically, the process takes about a fortnight to be completed.

• The rink is more rectangular than rounded in the corners. A decision was made when the rink was renovated that if it was modified to be like an arena with a normal radius in the corners, that it wouldn't be unique anymore.

- The penalty box cuts into the visitor's bench, making it shorter. Some players on the visiting team have to sit in a second row back with the coaches. The Bears and Pandas have room to sit on one bench, though.

will see the two do battle not on the streets of the University, but the ice of Clare Drake Arena.

The two squads will compete in their annual charity hockey game, with the proceeds going to the Mayerthorpe Fallen Four Memorial Society. The game starts at 8pm, and tickets are \$3. They hope to raise \$1000 for the cause, with the majority of that being raised through admission sales.

Curling

The U of A men's curling team came back from the Canadian University Curling Championships in Winnipeg from 21–25 March with a silver medal. The soon-to-be Golden Bears lost to Manitoba in extra ends. The strong finish bodes well for the team as they become a varsity squad next season. One of the necessities is to be competitive, and the men's curling squad is certainly that.

SPORTS VERY SHORTS

by Paul Owen

Hockey

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