

Drillers - Special section Fan friendly at ONEOK Field

There's something for everyone, from the baseball fanatic to the casual fan.
Jim Myers Morgan

If you're one of the thousands of fans who regularly enjoyed Tulsa Drillers baseball at the old Drillers Stadium, you are in for a surprise or two when you first set foot in the Drillers' new downtown home, ONEOK Field.

Mike Melega, general manager for the Drillers, is confident that those surprises will all be pleasant.

"First and foremost, one of the things fans are really going to notice is the fact that we have a wraparound concourse that will allow them to circulate 360 degrees around the stadium," he says.

The concourse is covered between first and third base because of the suite level above, so fans will also be protected from the often-unforgiving summertime sun while buying concessions. Such was not the case at Drillers Stadium. And because both concessions and restrooms are located on the concourse level, fans need not lose track of the game.

"At the old facility, when you left to go to the concessions, or to go to the restroom, you really disengaged from the game of baseball," Melega says. "If you were gone for any length of time, you did not know what was going on because your view was obstructed. At ONEOK Field, the 360-degree concourse allows a sightline to the field every step of the way, so you'll always stay engaged in the game."

Parents will be relieved to hear that there are two play areas: the Kids Zone and Hornsby's Hangout. Located in right field, the free Kids Zone was sponsored by T.D. Williamson Inc. and designed by Terra Pad Recreation Solutions of Tulsa to accommodate up to 50 antsy youngsters, ages 2 to 12. Terra Pad President Brandon Riggs helped ensure that a specially designed shade system will protect little ones against the sun. Over in left field, Hornsby's Hangout features "pay to play" attractions such as a two-story slide and Jupiter Jump.



Because no trip to the ballpark is complete without food and beverages, an expanded concessions operation will ensure everyone's tastes are met. According to Melega, ONEOK Field features 41 fixed points of sale, 10 more than at the old stadium. In addition, a cart program will provide up to 25 extra points of sale.

Professional Sports Catering is handling food and beverage services, and Melega is especially excited that new offerings will include a Mexican cart serving up custom burritos and a sausage cart offering freshly grilled foot-long Driller Dogs and bratwurst, as well as Polish and Italian sausages. An expanded drink menu is also in place.

"We have a liquor license for the first time, so we can offer real margaritas instead of margarita wine coolers," Melega says. "And we can offer wine and mixed drinks for fans who enjoy an alcoholic beverage other than beer."

By Melega's estimation, however, the single biggest innovation ONEOK Field can offer fans is the 900-square-foot scoreboard in the outfield. It is triple the size of the scoreboard at the old stadium and the largest in the Texas League. It features an 18-foot-by-48-foot LED screen, plus a 4-foot-by-48-foot ribbon board the ballpark plans to use to share out-of-town scores, contest details and other information that in years past would have been announced over a public address system.

"We want to do less talking on the PA," Melega says. "We want to do more visuals on the scoreboard and really drive the entertainment that way."

A dedicated video production coordinator has been brought on board to oversee scoreboard entertainment, which includes video feeds from the playing field and stands, animated graphics and even the occasional ironic movie clip. Instant replay was never part of the Drillers' repertoire before, but thanks to enhanced video capabilities, it will also be a staple at ONEOK Field.

"We have 70 shows to put on, not 70 games," Melega stresses. "Many people aren't coming for the game; they're coming for the show. It's imperative that we make it different and entertaining every single night."

This article appears in the April 2010 issue of TulsaPeople