The Lambeau Leap

Creating a Real Ice Surface on the 'Frozen Tundra,' Lambeau Field

Mike Clayton is the general manager of Ice Rink Events, a Texas-based company that specializes in constructing temporary rinks in venues around the world.

He thought they had heard of everything, until the day a call came in from Green Bay, Wisconsin. The person on the other end of the line represented the NFL's Green Bay Packers. The caller was interested in having an outdoor hockey game at Lambeau Field, and wanted to know if Rink Events could freeze the Frozen Tundra.

What's next…growing ivy at Wrigley Field? Maybe some masonry work at the Brickyard prior to the Indianapolis 500?

OK, so maybe it wasn't that daunting a task given Ice Rink Events' impressive history. Still, when someone inquires about putting together a project at Lambeau Field like the Frozen Tundra

• By Mike Eidelbes •

• *Photos by Larry Radloff* •

Hockey Classic pitting Ohio State against Wisconsin, there is a bit of shiver-down-the-spine factor.

"This," said Clayton from the floor of the stadium days before the Feb. 11 event was to face off, "is certainly on the top of the list as far as venue is concerned."

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Cold temperatures weren't a problem during set-up. High winds, sometimes gusting to more than 30 miles per hour, wreaked havoc with the crew's attempt to put down plywood flooring and 20-by-100-foot sections of plastic sheeting that will serve as a buffer between the turf and the rink. It would also create a level base for making ice — Lambeau Field is slightly crowned for drainage purposes.

"The floor prep has us behind about one and a half to two days," Clayton explained six days prior to faceoff. "We've used a lot of manpower chasing plastic and plywood that has blown away, and weighting it down once we finally get it in place."

Naturally, weather is the biggest variable in the process. Clayton and the rest of the management team monitor the current and future conditions constantly, and they adjust the plan of attack for the 15-member Ice Rink Events crew and the 40 locals hired as laborers for the project twice a day.

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It's been a relatively mild winter thus far, at least by Green Bay standards, but Mother Nature would atone for the high winds by blessing the area with conditions conducive to ice-making — overcast skies with high temperatures in the mid- to upper-20s and overnight lows in the teens.

"Temperature can be a benefit and a negative," said Clayton. "There is a lot less strain on the cooling system to cool the ice from 25 degrees to 10 degrees as opposed to an indoor rink, where you're cooling it from 68 degrees to 10 degrees. Converting indoor conditions to outdoor conditions is the real challenge."