

Hitting the Showers . . . in Style

Say goodbye to gang showers and endless rows of cubbies — today's locker rooms have gotten an extreme makeover.

by Amy Milshtein, staff writer

When the Ducks, the University of Oregon's football team, unveiled their new locker rooms in 1993, they were greeted by a media onslaught. Yet, who can be surprised. The room comes with three 60-in. plasma TVs — two

of which are Xbox-ready — and lockers that are individually ventilated, wired for both video games and the Internet, and secured by a James Bondian system that includes the player's uniform number and

thumbprint scan. Is this the future of locker rooms?

"Yes, varsity teams for Division One, revenue-generating sports expect the best locker rooms," explains Jim Swords, principal, HOK Sport + Venue + Event. "In most cases, pro locker rooms are not as nice." Don't shed too many tears for the pros as they make up for less plush digs with huge paychecks and endorsements. Sweet lockers, therefore, become one way to recruit and retain unpaid college jocks. The U of O price tag, \$26,667 per locker or \$3.2 million overall, still had jaws dropping. But when one considers the Ducks new football stadium cost upwards of \$100 million, lockers are just a small slice of the budget. "We have it in high gear all the time," says Bill Moos, the schools' athletic director,

as reported in a 2003 *The Seattle Times* article. "Our vision is to stay ahead of everybody, and young people today look at the bells and whistles."

Aside from attracting talent, locker rooms are great ways to keep tabs on star student athletes. "If they are not in class, eating, sleeping or training, then they are in the locker room," continues Swords, who estimates students spend an average of six hours a day there. "Athletes hang out, study and socialize in a safe, supervised area."

What goes into a locker room of this caliber? "Large suites divide into

Photos courtesy Moody • Nolan, Inc.



At Ohio State, the locker rooms are modern, colorful and upbeat. Above is the locker room for women's basketball. To the right is the hockey team's locker room.



lockers, wet areas and lounges," says Mark Bodine, project manager, Moody Nolan, Inc. "All of the components have become really upscale." This means showers have given way from gang areas to private cubicles. Tile and solid surfacing are de rigeur and, for the basketball team, higher mounted plumbing provides a sensitive touch.

Student athletes stick with one locker for their four-year career. Crafted from a hardwood veneer, these large, open cubicles have locked boxes for valuables and room for lots of gear. Individual ventilation may seem excessive until you consider what is going into these lockers. "Lots of air changes are key," says Swords, "particularly for hockey. Wet leather and plastic really starts to smell after a while." Materials in these areas are also on the plush side yet still stand up to cleats, body fluids and cleaning supplies. Ceilings are finished and lighting remains indirect.

For real bells and whistles, look to the lounge

Photo courtesy HOK Sport + Venue + Event.



Shown here: The World Arena in Colorado Springs.

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Above is the football training facility at Penn State, complete with lounge area.

areas. Soft, comfortable seating, video equipment, refrigerators, data and power lines or wireless access prove to be must-haves. Tools of the game like theaters to screen videos or white boards to plan plays are positioned here. Sports medicine and strength training rooms are also found near the lounge areas. Sometimes, coach lockers and offices are off of the lounge areas. These spaces, as one may guess, are designed as nicely as the ones for students.

Locker areas are also growing in size. "A Division One football team has about 100 players," says Swords. "Sometimes coaches want to meet with all of them at once, so we need to provide some space."

Opinions remain divided about how to treat the away team's space. "The stories about pink locker rooms with bare bulbs and gang showers are true," says Bodine with a laugh. "Away teams are treated to some really stark spaces. Sword sees a different

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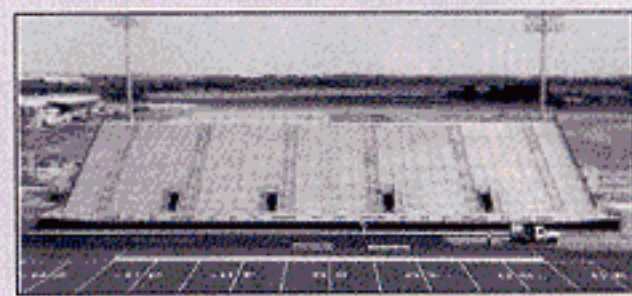
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trend. "The away team lockers are decent," he says. "They are clean and roomy enough for road boxes." He suggests outfitting these areas with lots of hooks so players can easily see if they left any gear behind.

Fortunately for the rest of the student population, luxuries are beginning to trickle down to rec centers and general use facilities. "Back when PE was required, schools needed huge gang showers and rows and rows of lockers to accommodate everyone changing at once," says Bodine. "Today, most students come to the school gym already dressed in sweats."

As a result, locker areas are shrinking. "Twelve by 12 is a good-sized room," reports Swords. "Seventy-five percent of the students exercising don't use the lockers anyway. They prefer cubbies in the gym room so they can keep an eye on their stuff while they work out."

Still, no one is advocating giving up the locker all together. In fact, lockers, if nice enough, can generate revenue. "We installed some rentable lockers for West Virginia University's rec center," remembers Bodine, "and they sold out immediately. Now the school wishes that they had installed more."

Successful lockers of this caliber are plastic or aluminum, and they can last a long time, "A heavy-gauge steel, powder-coated locker can last 10 to 15 years, maybe longer," says Ricardo Alva, outside sales manager, Salsbury Industries. "There are not that many mechanisms involved." Yet schools may want to replace them if they turn ugly.

"It's refreshing to see facility managers and architects paying more attention to these rooms," says Steve Zingheim, vice president, Bradley Corporation. This means that concrete floors give way to carpeting or some

other slip-resistant, easy-to-maintain material. School colors and logos may be incorporated into the design of the room. Soft lighting and finished ceilings help create a country club feel.

"While gang showers may pop up here and there, they are a lot smaller now, about 1/3 of their size from a decade ago," reports Zingheim, private stalls are now expected. For energy and water savings, many facilities are turning to infrared faucets which turn on and off automatically. "These are helpful for schools trying to get LEEDS certification," says Bradley.

Safety is another concern for the general use locker room. Balancing privacy with security is usually achieved by limiting entry into the gym. "Old facilities might have had 20 entrances into the building," remembers Bodine. "Paring that down to one controlled egress keeps the area safe."

And luxury lockers keep students feeling pampered, even after a tough workout. **CPM**

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