

# HORSEY HEAVEN



Striking night view of the stadium at KHP from the lake.

IMAGE: CHRIS PHEBUS

Kentucky Horse Park in Lexington added a stadium and arena to host the first Alltech FEI World Equestrian Games held outside Europe. Feature writer, Steve Traiman, discusses the project with the principals involved.

**"T**he Kentucky Horse Park (KHP) was conceived in the late 1960's because most of the beautiful Kentucky horse farms had closed their gates to tourists," said KHP General Manager, John Nicholson. "The idea was to create a 'peoples horse farm' with plans started at that time. A firm decision to proceed came in 1971, and the Park opened in 1978.

"Since then, KHP has evolved into not only an outstanding tourist attraction, but also a world class, first-class equestrian competition facility, as evidenced by our selection to host the first ever non-European [Alltech FEI] World Equestrian Games this fall [autumn]. Additionally, the KHP is home to 35 national equine organizations, which is among the reasons that Lexington lays claim to being the 'Horse Capital of the World.'"

KHP is the venue for more than 75 equine competitions annually, with the Rolex Kentucky Three Day Event having the highest profile. Other notable competitions include the spring and fall/autumn Classic Saddlebred Shows, the Egyptian Event, The Kentucky Summer Hunter-Jumper Show, The North American Junior & Young Riders Championship, the Intercollegiate National Championships, and many more.

Nicholson noted: "Total Park attendance in 2009 was about 870,000 and the WEG will have 600,000 available tickets at \$25 to \$150 for the eight championship events from September 25 to October 10. Competition is held in Show Jumping, Dressage, Eventing, Vaulting Individual, Vaulting Group Members, Driving, Reining and Endurance, plus Para Equestrian competition, with forty-eight

medals in total, including sixteen Gold Medals, to be awarded.”

The 2006 Alltech FEI World Equestrian Games (WEG) took place from August 20 to September 3 in Aachen, Germany and drew 576,000 spectators from 61 countries — about 80,000 more than projected. The event saw 773 competitors and 852 horses, with its main venue being the 40,000-capacity Soers Stadium.

The event had a budget of €39.3m, with a much sought-after financial breakeven achieved, according to the Aachen organising committee.

Nicholson continued: “Because of the urgency created by hosting the 2010 Alltech FEI World Equestrian Games, the KHP had to accelerate a ten-year masterplan into just two or three years. As a consequence, the Park has seen approximately \$115m in construction projects, funded by both the private and public sector, with key projects: a new 6,000-seat indoor arena and a 7,400-seat outdoor stadium, with 23,000 temporary seats to expand capacity to 30,400 for the WEG.

“Construction of a new vehicle entrance and upgrades to roads, pathways and visitor gathering points throughout the Park are completed. In addition to the permanent construction, the World Games 2010 Foundation is busy designing temporary structures, which include the Main Hospitality Structure and Chalets, Media Center, Ariat Volunteer Center, Grooms Village, Equine Village, Trade Show Village, Sponsor Showrooms, Alltech Experience and Kentucky Experience.”

### Key Roles & Four-Star Event

As Chairman of the Louisville Arena Authority and Founding Chairman of the 2010 Alltech FEI World Equestrian Games, Jim Host has played several key roles in the development of KHP and acquiring the WEG. He was Commissioner of Public Information under Governor Louie Nunn’s administration when, in 1968 the horse farms, which attracted over 125,000 visitors annually, decided to close their doors to tourism due to a rising number of troublesome incidents.

Host commented: “Through my connections with several of the leading horse farm owners, including

Gainesway Horse Farm, I was able to convince the Governor to support a ‘Kentucky all-breed horse farm’ that would become a top tourist attraction to promote the Kentucky horse industry. The State Legislature approved the project in the 1970 session, with an initial \$44m bond issue to cover construction on the former Harkness Edwards land. Through Governor Nunn’s key relationship with former Massachusetts Governor John Volpe — who had become President Nixon’s Secretary of Transportation — we got approval for a much-needed exit spur to the horse park property off Interstate 75.”

Host went on to become the first Chairman of the Horse Park Commission, and a total masterplan was developed. As he outlined: “We hired the original architects and contractor, and new Governor Wendell Ford continued the project. The official opening in 1978 had Prince Philip of England — a noted horseman — come over to open what is now our prime annual event, the Rolex Kentucky Three Day Event. It was the first equine ‘world championship’ to be held in the U.S., and to this day is the only ‘four-star’ event held in America.

“Since 1977 we’ve added a museum, training track and model horse farm including shoeing, and over thirty-plus years KHP has grown to attract as many as one million visitors a year. A KHP Foundation established by Nina Bonnie, who led the charge for the project, has raised many millions to fund expansion. A road is named for her in the Park, which is still under State Park Authority.”

While running his thriving Host Communications sports marketing firm — which was eventually sold to IMG — Host became involved in a local group in Lexington in 2000 that included Nicholson, which aimed to secure the rights to host the 2006 Alltech FEI World Equestrian Games. Losing that first bid to Aachen for the 2006 Games made the group even more determined.

“It was a dream of ours to bring the world’s greatest equestrian event to the KHP,” advised Host. “And we got the full support of the State behind our proposal for the 2010 WEG. We got Michael Stone, Secretary-General of WEG, and his staff, to come for a ‘red carpet’ visit, and they were very impressed. John [Nicholson] made our presentation in 2005 in Lucerne, Switzerland and we got WEG Board approval to host the first non-Europe event.”

Host is the Founding Chairman of the 2010 WEG, with Jamie Link as CEO and John Long (head of U.S. Equestrian) as Board Chairman.

*Right: The arena at KHP set up for a show jumping event, with some of nine box/suites in view, with WEG ribbon signage below.*

IMAGE: GBBN



“For the vital infrastructure we secured a bond issue for about \$40m, approved in the 2006 Legislature session, for the arena; another \$30m for the stadium came from a separate State Parks budget; and about \$10m for all upgrades was included in the Transportation Secretary’s 2006 budget.

“We’re also excited to have signed on noted artist LeRoy Neiman, soon to be 90 years young, to design all the WEG graphics, including the official 2010 poster and other graphic merchandise that will be available for the Games,” Host added.

### EOP Architects & Stadium

After KHP secured the 2010 Alltech FEI World Equestrian Games, one of the challenges was designing a 30,000-plus-seat outdoor stadium for the event, which also had to function as a 7,000-plus-seat all-weather venue for the ongoing 250-plus annual legacy events before and after the Games. Chosen for this task was EOP Architects of Lexington, which was awarded the design contract in May 2007.

Principal and Project Architect, Paul Ochenkoski advised: “Architecturally, we felt it important to have the new stadium identify with the aesthetic language of the KHP and the surrounding horse farms. We felt the functional significance of the stadium warranted an iconic presence, yet we also knew to be sensitive to the large visual impact that a facility of this scale could potentially impose. We chose to address these challenges through the combination of details, massing rhythm, and expressing the steel structure.

“To help solve the numerous seating and sightline challenges, we brought in Philadelphia-based Ewing Cole. KHP gave us the parameters that included about 7,400 permanent covered seats, expandable to 30,000-plus for major events like the WEG with portable risers and temporary seating. The temporary seating was sited to fit on risers around the permanent 65-degree arc seating that is all under roof. We were given a tight timeline as the stadium had to be ready for the Rolex [Kentucky Three Day] event in April 2009, and with Messer Construction as our contractor partner, got the job done.

“Key features include an approximate 7,000sqft, two-level hospitality suite, and areas for both hospitality tents and training adjacent to the stadium, as well as a Daktronics pole-mounted video display measuring about 31ft wide by 18ft high. The concourse is below the seating, with three banks of permanent concessions and three banks of restrooms. All seating is fully ADA accessible as the companion first Para-Equestrian event will run alongside the WEG.

“The stadium was sited to emphasise the lake beyond the show field, with the temporary seating positioned to back up to the lake during the WEG. The official Games group brought in OTTO Sport from Germany to provide the synthetic surface, not only for the stadium but also for other show venues in the Park.”

### Sound Footing

After its success at the 2006 WEG, which was marred only by the rain during much of the two-week event, OTTO Sport and Reitplatz GmbH of Altdorf in Germany, was contracted as the ‘official footing supplier’ of the 2010 Alltech FEI World Equestrian Games. The Bavarian family-run company and the World Games 2010 Foundation, Inc. signed an official agreement that allows OTTO Sport to use this designation.

In addition to the surfaces on the new outdoor stadium and the adjacent warm-up rings installed by the German arena specialists, about 70% of all KHP show areas are now equipped with an OTTO Sport surface, a total of about 355,000sqft. And company founder, Werner Otto, was very happy to hear that the arenas have received rave reviews.

“It’s the best vaulting footing in the world,” commented 2006 WEG Vaulting Gold Medallist Megan Benjamin. Hugh Kincannon, Kentucky Horse Shows LLC Manager, is also very satisfied about the KHP arenas surface, with the outstanding drainage features of the OTTO Sport system especially convincing for him, as he advised: “Even the heaviest rain activity could not damage the footing. While other venues had to stop their shows due to bad weather conditions, events on the OTTO Sport surfaces could be continued without any problems.”

Left: KHP's indoor arena opened in July 2009 — it offers a fixed seating capacity of 5,517 that is expandable to 8,831 for concerts.

IMAGE: GBBN

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Earlier this year, the Associated General Contractors of Kentucky presented the 'Build Kentucky Award for the \$16-\$25m Category' to Messer Construction for KHP's 2010 WEG outdoor stadium.

### GBBN Architects & The Arena

"We were very pleased to receive the KHP arena award," advised Joe Turley, Principal and Project Manager for GBBN Architects. "We brought in 360 Architecture as Design Architect, for their extensive experience with major league arena projects, and DW Wilburn as contractor, with Pat Wise as Project Manager and Bill Stakelin as Project Supervisor. Combined teamwork by all parties kept the project moving on a tight schedule for the July 2009 opening."

The arena footprint is about 226,000sqft-gross, with two storeys plus a mezzanine. The event floor is

## KHP Equestrian Event Stadium & Arena Facts

- LOCATION: Lexington, KY
- OPENING DATE: Stadium — March 2009; Arena — July 2009
- CONSTRUCTION COST: Stadium US\$25m; Arena US\$40m
- OWNER: State of Kentucky
- OPERATOR: Kentucky Horse Park
- ARCHITECT: Arena: GBBN Inc. and 360 Architecture; Stadium: EOP Architects and Ewing Cole
- F&B CONCESSIONAIRE: KHP
- CAPACITY: Arena 5,517 to 8,831; Stadium 7,400 to 30,400,
- CONTRACTOR: D.W. Wilburn (Arena); Messer Construction (Stadium)
- MAJOR TENANTS: 2010 Alltech FEI World Equestrian Games, 75 equine events annually including world class horse shows such as the Rolex Kentucky Three Day Event (the only four-star event currently held in America)
- AMENITIES: Indoor arena is a multipurpose facility with 206,000sqft including 5,517 fixed seats up to 8,831 for concerts, nine suites, concourse food service, 9,400sqft event floor Exhibition Hall and a 20,000sqft concourse Exhibit Hall; new Outdoor Stadium with 7,400 permanent seats, plus 23,000 temporary for WEG; 7,000sqft, two-level hospitality suite; catering kitchen; 31ft by 18ft Daktronics video display; warm-up barn

US Olympic jumping medallist  
Beezie Madden with official  
WEG Banner.

IMAGE: WORLD GAMES 2010 FOUNDATION

The new Kentucky Horse Park  
7,400-seat outdoor stadium  
opened in March 2009 for the  
Rolex event.

IMAGE: KHP



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150ft by 250ft with 5,517 fixed seats, including 222 in nine suites and 54 ADA seats, with a maximum capacity of 8,833 for concerts. In addition to an approximately 9,460sqft event floor Exhibit Hall, there is a 20,000sqft concourse Exhibit Hall.

Other amenities include six concession stands and a commercial kitchen, extensive restrooms, a loading dock, and a 12,718sqft warm-up barn. There is initial parking for 568 vehicles, to be doubled in the near future.

“The clear truss span is 205ft, the midspan is 200ft and the height at arena centre is 50ft,” confirmed Turley. “Truss in tension pulling up at the tails of the super trusses allowed for the midspan to be tapered for better sightlines, and the rock anchors around the columns are about 40ft deep. We used about 775 tons of steel in the project. Energy-saving measures include a white roof that reflects the sun, and 1,200 tons of cooling with six air handlers that have low returns for better dust handling.”

In addition to the architects and contractor, the project team included Equine Consultant, PBA; Landscape Architect, Vivian Iambi; Civil Engineer, HDR; National Structural Engineer, Thornton Tomasetti; Local Structural Engineer, Brown & Kubican; Mechanical/Electrical/ Plumbing, Staggs & Fisher; Acoustical Engineer, Acoustical Designers; Cost Estimating, Robert Pass & Associates; and Food Service, Eric Hamilton.

## Major Economic Impact

Kentucky could realise a \$167m economic benefit from the 2010 Alltech FEI World Equestrian Games, a significant increase from early projections of \$150m, said the organisers.

The recent March study conducted by Dr Paul Coomes, Professor of Economics at the University of Louisville, shows a direct impact to State and Local Government through payroll taxes and taxed purchases by spectators in regional hotels, restaurants, retailers, and car rentals.

Current ticket sale projections estimate that more than 85% of the WEG spectators will come from outside Kentucky, bringing new dollars into the region's economy. Current ticket purchasers are averaging five days of attendance, and the lodging that comes with those visits could account for more than \$20m in spending on accommodations alone. In addition, the Study estimates significant employment opportunities, bringing employees and payroll taxes into the State and local economies.

“An event such as the Alltech FEI World Equestrian Games is extremely rare for a destination because the Games represent a huge economic engine fuelled by out-of-state and international visitors and exposure, yet are fully accessible and affordable for State and local residents,” advised Hank Phillips, Deputy Commissioner of the Kentucky Department of Travel. “The combination of high economic impact and affordability for the State and local community is indeed rare.” ★

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*KHP's stadium and other show areas, use the OTTO Sport system surface for enhanced footing due to its outstanding drainage features.*

IMAGE: OTTO SPORT



*An aerial view of the KHP stadium showing temporary structures for major events like Rolex, shown here, with many more planned for the World Equestrian Games.*

IMAGE: KHP

