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Penguins Use Digital Ice Projection

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By Andrew Lippe

In an effort to give fans a more entertaining pregame show, the American Hockey League's Wilkes-Barre/Scranton, PA, Penguins are following in the footsteps of their NHL affiliate, the Pittsburgh Penguins, and have added a Westbury National Show Systems on-ice video-projection system that will put team videos and graphics directly on the ice surface. Sports teams are always looking for ways to improve in-game presentation, and the Penguins are excited about the possibilities the system offers.

"We are only scratching the surface on what we can do. We have only three games under our belt," says Wilkes-Barre/Scranton Penguins President Rich Hixon. "If you come back at the end of the season, there will be a lot of new things on the ice."

The on-ice video-projection system is actually two separate systems merged on the ice. All graphics to be projected are created in-house using Final Cut Pro. All Penguins games can be watched online on AHLLive.com, which is powered through Neulion.

The ice projection system is being used by many NHL franchises, including the Anaheim Ducks, Calgary Flames, Montreal Canadiens, Ottawa Senators, and Pittsburgh Penguins, which used the on-ice projection system during their Stanley Cup run last summer. Hixon adds that, after seeing what some of the NHL teams were doing with pregame presentations, he became really interested in acquiring an on-ice projection system. This year is also the Penguins' 10th anniversary, and he really wanted to do something special for the fans to celebrate it.

Hixon points out that, in NHL arenas, the ice projection can span the full the length of the ice surface, which is not the case in the Wachovia Arena at Casey Plaza, the Penguins' home arena.

"In our building, [the projection] is a little bit smaller just because the ceiling of the roof is a lot lower and the areas where they do the rigging are a lot lower," says Hixon. The Wachovia Arena at Casey Plaza has a Daktronics scoreboard but is otherwise not as technically enhanced as most professional-sports venues. "Obviously, we can't afford a lot of the things the bigger buildings do," says Hixon.

The on-ice video-projection system was launched on Oct. 8 and has received positive reviews to date. Says Hixon, "We are still working through the kinks of what looks good on the ice."

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