

OAKLAND ARENA STAYS BUSY POST-NBA

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DAY ON THE GREEN: *Oakland Arena, operated by ASM Global, had its highest-grossing concert year in 2022. (Courtesy venue)*

COLISEUM HAS OPTIONS SHOULD A'S LEAVE

The Oakland Athletics appear to have set their sights on relocating to Las Vegas after many years of trying to build a new ballpark in their home region, but it's not all bad news in the East Bay.

"It's been a whirlwind," says Nicole Strange, general manager at Oakland Arena and Oakland Coliseum, both operated by ASM Global. "2022 was our best financial year ever, and something to be proud of."

The year saw more than 65 events at the arena, alone, attracting more than 500,000 attendees, with a 12% increase in ticket sales over 2019, prior to the pandemic.

Strange started at the complex in 2013 as an event manager, running Golden State Warriors games before moving up to director of events, assistant general manager and, in 2021, general manager.

Over the past four years, Strange has seen the Warriors and Raiders leave town, and ASM Global weathered the pandemic shutdown. Considering those issues, Oakland Arena's busy calendar "gave everybody that pep in their step to keep going and see what we can achieve," she said. "That's the launching pad to what we're going to do here."

In 2019, the Golden State Warriors left Oakland Arena for new Chase Center in San Francisco. Strange said their exit opened other opportunities to fill dates and generate revenue streams previously under the NBA team's control.

"When they left, we took over selling premium and suites and sponsorships, and we've just recently created a private events arm. All three have taken off and are doing amazingly," Strange said. "We still have some spaces within the arena that we're looking to brand."

The Warriors' exit opens dates in the fall and spring as Oakland Arena competes for events with SAP Center in San Jose, Chase Center in San Francisco and Golden One Center in Sacramento — all having to work around dates committed for their big league sports tenants.

Oakland Arena ranked No. 30 on Pollstar's Year End Top 200 Arenas chart of 2022, with \$45 million in gross ticket sales. There's still the occasional concert at the coliseum as well. Bad Bunny sold 42,702 tickets for his Sept. 14, 2022 performance. It was reminiscent of the stadium's sellouts of yesteryear with legacy rock acts filling the venue in the 1970s.

For the arena, last year's highlights included two nights of Paul McCartney, which grossed \$7.58 million on 28,599 tickets, a record for the venue. Other blockbuster shows were Kendrick Lamar, Pearl Jam, Tyler, The Creator, New Edition, and K-pop artists, including Twice, returning for two more shows in 2023.

Strange credited senior director of booking Gretchen Claffey, who “is killing it.” Upcoming shows are Alicia Keys, Zach Bryan, Sam Smith, Erykah Badu, Greta Van Fleet, Lil Baby, and doubles from K-pop phenoms Mamamoo, Suga, and Twice. “We’ve become K-pop central,” said Strange, noting the ethnic diversity of the Bay Area and northern California as a whole.



Logistics make the arena attractive for touring productions, with a huge parking lot and easy freeway access from all directions. It's situated near the Oakland International Airport and set up for effective public transport. Strange says her experienced staff and back-of-house amenities also make the building attractive to touring productions.

“(Load-in and loadout) is faster, cheaper and we take care of shows and promoters,” she said.

The Warriors' old locker room has been converted to green room space for artists and crews, with a cafe, video games and ping pong tables, “where people can chill out and take a breather.”

Renovations to the arena roof and the plaza between the arena and coliseum are in the works. The Warriors' old team store has been converted to a plaza bar, where fans will be able to enjoy drinks outside before events. It opens in the coming weeks.

"That's going to be a huge perk, and we're going to start showing it to sponsors. That's one thing we're very excited about," Strange said.

The arena was awarded LEED Silver certification in 2021.

The news that the A's have pretty much given up on Oakland stings for local baseball fans and anyone who enjoys rooting for a team that for most of its existence been the underdog in the Bay Area. But local government officials see the coliseum footprint as ripe for redevelopment.

In February, the African American Sports and Entertainment Group, a local developer, entered into an exclusive negotiating agreement with the city of Oakland to acquire the city's 50% interest in the complex. The group plans to bring affordable housing, restaurants, office space and other entertainment to the 200-acre complex, which it feels is underserved. The group has two years to come up with a plan, for what could potentially be a \$5 billion development, local media reported.

The A's own the remaining 50% of the Coliseum site, purchased in 2019, and the prospective buyer has told local media it is interested in pursuing a buyout of the team's share as well.

Strange says the USL Championship's Oakland Roots are interested in building a temporary modular soccer stadium in a space within the parking lots, which could lead to a more permanent venue in the future. The soccer team relocated home matches to Cal State Hayward after moving from a community college where it experienced turf problems.

The coliseum could also host international cricket matches. Originally designed for both baseball and football, the stadium's extensive foul territory makes it one of few existing facilities that could host cricket. "Now, that's cool," Strange said.

In addition, a WNBA expansion team could find a home at the arena as well, according to Strange.

"There's tons of potential," she said. "Our property is bigger than Disneyland; that kind of puts it into perspective. There's so many things you could do and build here, so many jobs you could create."

Strange said the A's have been an "amazing partner" with ASM Global over the years and the company will continue to support the team long as they're on the property.

The A's manage their own games, but ASM Global provide stagehands, sound technicians, engineers and other staff for baseball.

Strange, raised in southern California, played basketball for the University of Oregon before coming to the East Bay. She says the coliseum and arena history are not lost on her.

"There are so many stories here from everyone, from people's great-grandparents all the way down," she said. "What game did you see? What show did you see? It's such a historic, nostalgic place for so many people."