

VISITORS WILL BE COURTED WITH HOOPLA



Rendering courtesy of ESI Design

The National Collegiate Basketball Hall of Fame aims to get visitors involved by shooting a few “buzzer-beating shots” or trying a slam dunk.

Roundball site shoots for realism

By KEVIN COLLISION
The Kansas City Star

Forget about gawking at trophies and retired jerseys — the college basketball hall of fame planned for downtown should be a place you’ll want to bring your game.

The exhibits and attractions inside the \$20 million National Collegiate Basketball Hall of Fame, scheduled to start construction in August

next to the Sprint Center, are being designed to appeal to “college-age, male basketball fans,” according to a representative from the New York firm in charge of their preparation.

“If it rings true for them, it will ring true for everybody else,” said Matthew Moore, an official with ESI Design.

Moore was in town recently to outline the final design plan for exhibits in the two-level, 41,000-square-foot facility.

A basketball experience

- The National Collegiate Basketball Hall of Fame next to the Sprint Center will be a two-level, 41,000-square-foot facility.
- A 19,000-square-foot exhibit area will be about three times the floor space of Municipal Auditorium.
- That space includes a three-quarter length basketball court where games and exhibitions will be held every hour.

Visitors will be cajoled by the voices of coaches as they start their tour by filing into elevators from the lobby that will be shared by the hall of fame and the Sprint Center. They will then enter the cavernous second floor of exhibits by way of a tunnel intended to re-create the feel of a player entering an arena.

Once inside, they will be encouraged to fire a few "buzzer-beating shots" or try a slam dunk between checking out coaches' kiosks scattered around the 19,000-square-foot exhibit area — about three times the floor space of Municipal Auditorium. The space includes a three-quarter-length basketball court where games and exhibitions will be held every hour.

Downstairs they will find activities such as dribbling drills and the chance to call games from a mock media booth.

All of this will be accompanied by vibrant graphics, film clips and audio from the game's greatest moments and opportunities to participate in basketball clinics or attend special events such as induction ceremonies to the hall of fame.

"This is not a museum," said Kevin Henderson, associate executive director of the National Association of Basketball Coaches. "This is a highly interactive and highly participatory venue for entertainment and enjoyment."

Development Strategies Inc., a St. Louis-based planning firm, estimated annual attendance at 400,000.

The facility will focus on men's college basketball. A women's college basketball hall of fame is in Atlanta.

The organizers also plan outreach programs, such as coaching seminars, tournaments and basketball camps.

Every year, a hall of fame induction ceremony for college players and coaches will be held in November to coincide with the Guardians Classic basketball tournament.

Rick Hughes, president of the Kansas City Convention & Visitors Bureau, said the facility will be drawing its visitors from a geographic region known for its love of sports.

"Take that and marry it with the fact that Kansas City has some rich basketball history, and we have a real winner," Hughes said. "We think it will be a big plus, and fits into everything going on downtown."

The basketball coaches association, led by Jim Haney, its executive director, is spearheading the effort to build the hall of fame. Almost \$8 million has been raised toward the \$10 million private fundraising goal.

The city will provide the remaining \$10 million as part of the overall Sprint Center budget.

The Hall Family Foundation has contributed \$2 million to the project.

Other major donors included the Sprint Foundation, the NCAA, the Gary Dickinson Family Charitable Foundation and Great Plains Energy.

Nike and ESPN have been involved with the design of the facility. Other marquee organizations involved are the NCAA and Sprint Nextel.

"There won't be anything in the world like it," Haney told the civic leaders. "It will be unique. Kansas City will be the home of college basketball."

To emphasize his point, Haney said \$700,000 has been donated by college coaches for an exhibit being called the "mentor circle." Coaches will contribute audiovisual testimonials about their own mentors in the game, and visitors can do the same.

The planned facility has established a cordial relationship with the original Basketball Hall of Fame in Springfield, Mass., the city where basketball was invented by James Naismith in 1892. Six years later, Naismith brought his game to Lawrence, where he founded the program at the University of Kansas.

The marriage of college basketball to the area was cemented when Phog Allen, the KU coach who counted Naismith as his mentor, founded the National Association of Basketball Coaches in Kansas City in 1927.

Over the years, a dozen NCAA championships have been played here, as well as numerous NAIA championships.

"We're looking to put an exclamation point that college basketball has its roots in Kansas City," Haney said.