

DePaul, McPier discuss new arena near McCormick Place

September 28, 2012 – Greg Hinz

(Updated 5:30 p.m.)

DePaul University is talking about moving its basketball games to a new facility that would be built for it near McCormick Place, in a deal being pushed by Mayor Rahm Emanuel.

That's what I hear from multiple inside sources, as discussions continue about DePaul's **desire to return Blue Demons games to the city** from where they're now played, in Rosemont — past O'Hare Airport, and many miles from the school's main Lincoln Park Campus.

Sources confirm that a **Sun-Times story** that the school also has been talking with Chicago Bulls owner Jerry Reinsdorf about playing in the United Center and/or sharing a practice facility.

The school is believed to be looking for a place that would hold about 12,000 fans, compared to the United Center's 22,000-person capacity.

But more serious, I'm told, are the discussions with the Metropolitan Pier and Exposition Authority, which owns and operates McCormick Place.

Though the agency, known as McPier, is not now in the sporting business, it has more than \$100 million in untapped bonding authority, funds that could be used to construct an arena. And adequate land is available within walking distance of McCormick Place and its large parking lots.

Sources say Mr. Emanuel is behind the idea because much of the Near South Side near the convention center goes dark when a big convention is not running, which is most of the time. For instance, the area lacks many good restaurants, bars and shops.

As recently as earlier today, Mr. Emanuel **emphasized a wide variety of infrastructure improvements** in the Near South area, including one new Chicago Transit Authority station and significant renovations in another.

DePaul's board has formally stated its intention to bring the Blue Demons back to town. Sports sources say it might be easier for the team to recruit top talent if they play in Chicago rather than in the relatively isolated Allstate Arena.

DePaul has been looking at sites in the Clybourn Corridor and other locals near the North Branch of the Chicago River, on the west end of Lincoln Park. But all face significant potential access and congestion problems. And putting a large stadium near a residential neighborhood could create political difficulties.

Both DePaul and Mr. Emanuel's office were informed earlier this afternoon that I was working on a story about the McPier talks. Neither had immediate comment.

Update, 5:30 p.m. — DePaul is out with a statement, and it effectively confirms the story. It says, "As noted in our strategic plan V2018, one of DePaul's goals is to seek opportunities to bring men's basketball back into the city. To that end, DePaul will consider any proposal that will help us accomplish that goal. As of now, however, nothing definitive has been forthcoming."

Mr. Emanuel's office isn't saying anything at all. No denial there.

Blue Demons suddenly finding lots of arena love

October 01, 2012 – Greg Hinz

If there's anything better than the prospect of a hot date tonight, it's having two cuties vying for your nocturnal attention.

That's exactly the situation in which DePaul University and its Blue Demons men's basketball team now find themselves.

After a couple of decades in exile in a barn in a parking lot northwest of O'Hare — aka the Allstate Arena — DePaul has rediscovered its Chicago roots. And its timing is auspicious.

As I reported Friday, DePaul has begun talking to the folks at the Metropolitan Pier and Exposition Authority, generally known as McPier, about that city/suburban agency building the team a new arena somewhere near McCormick Place. McPier most definitely is interested.

But DePaul also is talking to Jerry Reinsdorf and other owners of the United Center about playing there and using a new Chicago Bulls practice facility that's being moved from Northbrook to an unspecified location in town. And Mr. Reinsdorf et al. are interested, too.

There's one other major interested party here, too. That would be Mayor Rahm Emanuel.

My sources tell me Mr. Emanuel favors the McPier proposal, because bringing 16 basketball games and sundry other practices to the Near South Side would help attract foot traffic for restaurants, entertainment and other venues the city wants to develop near often-empty McCormick Place. And the venue could lure other events like concerts.

Asked today about that at a press conference, Mr. Emanuel would say only that, one, he would really like DePaul back in town and, two, "the ultimate location is up to them."

I took that as pretty much an indication that the race to land DePaul is on. And the mayor certainly is not denying that he favors the McCormick Place area.

All of this somehow fits into Mr. Reinsdorf's continuing campaign to get the mayor to renew a property-tax break he and the Wirtz family received when the United Center was built but that is due to expire in 2015. The break would clear the way for a large restaurant/retail complex next to UC that Mr. Reinsdorf recently pitched.

For the record, representatives of the UC owners say it's not a tax break but "tax stability" they're after. They also argue that the retail complex would help liven up the long-depressed Near West Side.

So far, Mr. Emanuel has not tipped his hand on the tax matter or the proposed retail complex. It's worth knowing that the UC also is in the concert business and probably would prefer not to see a shiny new competitor a couple of miles to the east.

Anyhow, I hear arguments both ways about whether the UC or McPier would be better for DePaul.

Both clearly are better for the school than building somewhere in Lincoln Park — another option if only because it wouldn't have to finance construction itself.

But UC, with capacity of 22,000, is a lot larger than the 12,000 or so seats that likely would be optimal for DePaul. And I suspect DePaul would prefer to be master in its own house rather than renting from someone else, which augurs in favor of the McCormick Place area.

In Chicago, mayors tend to get what they want. But until Mr. Emanuel shows his cards, we won't know for sure what that is. If nothing else, the competition ought to be more entertaining than the ones going on during Blue Demons games in recent years.

Meanwhile, it sure is nice to be loved. If I were DePaul right now, I'd have a big smile on my face.

DePaul Eyes South Loop Arena

Story URL: <http://depaul.scout.com/2/1226114.html>

Steve Newhouse
WeAreDePaul.com

Sep 28, 2012

Sources have confirmed a Crain's Chicago Business report that DePaul University is working closely with the Chicago Mayor's office to build a new arena at a South Loop location.

DePaul has set forth in their 2018 Strategic Plan to "Seek opportunities to bring men's basketball back into the city."

The opportunity the University is currently seeking is a eight thousand to 12 thousand seat basketball arena to be built in the South Loop.

Sources inform WeAreDePaul.com that the proposed site for the arena would be located on Cermak Road west of the McCormick Place Convention Center.

DePaul's lease with Allstate Arena in suburban Rosemont expires in 2016.

DePaul has also had past discussions with the [Chicago Bulls](#) regarding construction of a west side building that could serve as the Bulls practice facility and as a home to the Blue Demons. However, the South Loop discussions are front and center at this point in time.

The proposed location would be located close to the University's Loop campus and to the University Center housing which is in the South Loop.

The arena would be located near ample McCormick Place parking and near a new CTA station on the Green Line at Cermak Road that has been proposed by Mayor Rahm Emanuel.

Per the Crain's Chicago Business report, the arena can be funded by "more than \$100 million in untapped bonding authority" by the Metropolitan Pier and Exposition Authority, which owns and operates McCormick Place.

While no announcement by DePaul is imminent at this time, the University's leaders continue to work with the City of Chicago to build a new home for the Blue Demons.



Report: DePaul in talks for new hoops arena near McCormick Place

Staff Reports September 28, 2012 8:45PM

Updated: October 30, 2012 6:12AM

DePaul University, on the hunt for a new home for its basketball team, may have bigger plans than moving into the United Center with the Bulls and Blackhawks.

Big — as in new arena big.

Crain's Chicago Business reported on its website Friday that DePaul, the nation's largest Catholic university, is in talks with the Metropolitan Pier and Exposition Authority about building an arena near the massive convention center.

The report comes on the heels of Sun-Times columnist Michael Sneed revealing Friday that DePaul is in serious talks to move to the United Center from its current home, the Allstate Arena in Rosemont.

Crain's, quoting "multiple inside sources," said the separate McCormick Place talks are part of a deal being pushed by Mayor Rahm Emanuel. McPier's bonding authority could be used to raise the cash to build the arena.

Emanuel's spokeswoman refused to comment Friday, and McPier officials couldn't be reached.

DePaul wouldn't specifically comment on the McCormick Place report, other than to say they are indeed looking for a new city home.

"As noted in our strategic plan V2018, one of DePaul's goals is to seek opportunities to bring men's basketball back into the city," the university said in a statement. "To that end, DePaul will consider any proposal that will help us accomplish that goal. As of now, however, nothing definitive has been forthcoming."

In 1980, the Blue Demons, in need of more space during legendary Coach Ray Meyer's reign, moved most of their basketball games away from Alumni Hall on its Lincoln Park campus to the then-Rosemont Horizon next to O'Hare Airport.

But DePaul officials have been longing to bring games back to Chicago, in part, to boost its ability to recruit talent. Sneed reported Friday that the university checked out the A. Finkl & Sons Co. steel factory site on the North Side as well as other properties close to the campus this summer.

A switch to the United Center would put the Blue Demons smack dab into an emerging new United Center-area complex that could include a Bulls practice facility. The Bulls in June announced they were leaving their Berto Center practice facility in Deerfield for a Chicago site, possibly in the UC parking lots.

That's where a planned \$95 million entertainment complex is in the works. Bulls Chairman Jerry Reinsdorf and Blackhawks owner Rocky Wirtz — an investor in Wrapports LLC, which owns the Chicago Sun-Times — want to create a 263,000-square-foot retail-and-entertainment center on the east side of the United Center that would add four restaurants, four bars, a team store, an event space, team offices, parking, a terrace, an atrium and a green roof, according to Metropolitan Planning Council documents.

United Center offers DePaul free rent for Blue Demons games

November 19, 2012 – Greg Hinz



The owners of the United Center have offered DePaul University 10 years free rent and a court-full of other perks if they'll move Blue Demons basketball games to the United Center, according to sources close to the matter.

But DePaul reportedly still is leaning toward an alternate location, a new arena that would be built for it near McCormick Place, even though the school would have to come up with a reported \$75 million toward construction costs.

That's the latest in the fast-moving story about the all-out competition to lure the Blue Demons from where they now play in Rosemont — a competition in which Gov. Pat Quinn has joined Mayor Rahm Emanuel in playing a key behind-the-scenes role.

Here's what's going on.

As I reported a few weeks ago, DePaul has made it obvious it would like to play its 16 men's games each year at a site closer to its Lincoln Park campus. And, fortunately for DePaul, it has two deep-pocketed champions vying for its favor.

One is the Metropolitan Pier & Exposition Authority, the government agency that runs the McCormick Place convention center on the Near South Side. As I previously reported, McPier is highly interested in building an arena near McCormick Place that would be the Blue Demons' new home as well as available for convention gatherings. Mr. Emanuel has been pushing that plan, insiders say, hoping to bring more people to the Near South Side and spark development of nearby bars, restaurants and other nightlife.

But United Center ownership — Blackhawks owner Rocky Wirtz and, particularly, Bulls owner Jerry Reinsdorf — are making an extraordinarily vigorous push themselves, perhaps out of fear that a new McPier arena would pull away some of the United Center concert and other nonbasketball business.

According to multiple sources, the offer centers on 10 years of free rent. But it gets better than that.

A copy of the PowerPoint presentation United Center ownership made to DePaul says that the United Center "would redesign its basketball floor to allow the two 'end zones' to be removable. For DePaul games, they would be replaced with 'DePaul,' 'Big East' or whatever is desired," with a large DePaul logo decal going over the Bulls' one at center court.

DePaul also would be allowed to hang its championship banners from the rafters, use the owners' and marketing suites, use the Bulls' locker room, install a Blue Demons store and have dedicated restaurant and other staff. And the Bulls would help DePaul sell tickets to its games, give Blue Demons season-ticket holders an early crack at concert tickets and let the team use the facility one night a year for free for "fundraising or other purposes."

Howard Pizer, Bulls executive vice president, was not available for comment today, but told the Chicago Sun-Times last week that its offer to DePaul was "very lucrative." Now we know how lucrative.

Details of the offer also were related to Mr. Quinn in a previously unreported meeting with school officials earlier in November in his Chicago office, I'm told. Mr. Quinn did not commit himself, but hinted that he might prefer a privately financed option at a time when the state is cash-short.

Mr. Quinn's office confirmed that the meeting occurred, adding only that it would review proposals as they come up. Mr. Quinn appoints some members to the McPier board and, while they constitute a minority, they could make approval difficult if they object to plans backed by the board majority, who are appointed by the mayor.

Meanwhile, multiple insiders report, talks between DePaul and McPier are continuing. I'm told the school is leaning in favor of the McPier plan, because it would be in its own building rather than a tenant in someone else's, and because it would have a clear shot at scheduling games without having to work around the Bulls' and Blackhawks' schedules.

But there are two problems.

One, DePaul would have to come up with around \$75 million to pay about half of the cost of construction of the 10,000- to 12,000-seat arena. But the school would get naming rights, and reportedly already has a major donor expressing significant interest.

Probably the bigger obstacle is control of the property on which the arena would go, just northwest of McCormick Place buildings.

As my colleagues at Crain's **have reported**, the property now is in bankruptcy and it's uncertain who will end up holding the title. Until that's clear, it will be difficult to negotiate a sale price or acquire the land through condemnation, though insiders are confident that matter is being resolved.

DePaul spokeswoman Cindy Lawson told me this morning that the school is "still exploring all options presented to us." All she would add is that "no decision has been made at this time."

But things finally may be turning up for a school that hasn't had much luck on the basketball court lately. Stay tuned.

DePaul University Doesn't Need a New Arena

By Charles W. Johnson, November 19, 2012 at 5:07 pm



As a DePaul alum (class of '99), and former men's basketball ticket holder, let me give you the low down on my beloved alma maters basketball program.

Nothing, because the team got beat last week by lowly Gardner Webb and they play in a barn next to an airport 18 miles out of town.

For years I had driven to that barn (Allstate Arena, nice for minor league hockey though), to watch abysmal DePaul basketball. Last year was the first year I had missed attending at least one home game during the season in over a decade.

Today I read in Crain's that the United Center (where DePaul at least once a year versus their bigger opponents last decade), had offered ten years worth of free rent and incentives for season ticket holders. I can tell you first hand, season ticket holders never got jack from Allstate Arena.

But it seems DePaul has their sights set on a new area near McCormick Place (controlled by McPier), and even several politicians are involved.

First off, DePaul needs to play better basketball to be worthy of a new gym.

Second, undergraduate tuition at DePaul is over \$ 30,000 a year, I think they can afford to buy their own place to play.

Third, there is a nice existing gym on the Lincoln Park campus (McGrath Arena, inside Sullivan Athletic Center), that holds around 3,500 fans and the men's basketball team just played two exhibition games there.

This on campus facility is good enough for the more talented and NCAA post season perennial women's basketball team, why can't the men try it out for a year? Trust me, people aren't knocking each other over for men's basketball tickets. They are not cheap either.

I have to go Rick Pitino here and say, Ray Meyer is not walking through that door, Tyrone Corbin is not walking through that door and neither is Mark Aquirre.

Big time basketball has passed by DePaul a long time ago; they are a team in a large market that is run like a small time school. The Big East Conference is too big and too east for them.

DePaul did very well in the old Conference USA (including a tie for the regular season league championship in 2003-2004), which was of mid level, Midwestern schools. At this point they would fit in somewhere like the Horizon League, Mid America Conference or even the Missouri Valley.

I know some people believe athletics starts with facilities but it also starts with having the right people, players and administration in place and they don't. Academically DePaul stands alone in this town, no doubt, their education is premier but the athletics by and large aren't on that level.

They are not Notre Dame or Marquette athletically, honestly, they are slightly better than Loyola Chicago at this point, who built the beautiful Joe Gentile Center a few years back on their own Rogers Park campus with fundraised dollars.

DePaul has done a tremendous job transforming the Lincoln Park campus from an El train stop school to a destination of higher learning. My mother (class of '74), was witness to the early days from the transformation of the old St Joseph seminary to the sprawling campus within a neighborhood it is today.

But athletics is different; yes we alums are proud of our Blue Demons and the history that basketball teams carries. But times are different and do they really want to build a place that lacks that campus feel and access?

If it's all about a nice place to play, then just go to the United Center for free.