

The making of the Amsterdam Arena

1983-1986

The Netherlands have put themselves forward as a candidate for organising the Olympic Games. To be considered for this nomination, there needs to be a stadium that meets all requirements of the Olympic Committee. The choice of location for the stadium to be built will be the grounds to the south-east of Amsterdam, the so-called Strandvliet location. This is a preferred location, as the grounds are available almost immediately, this is a central location and there are different forms of public transport present. A first design was created for a stadium and an events hall at the Strandvliet location. The particulars of the design were as follows:

- An open stadium, with 50% of the seating covered;
- Grounds that are in an area that falls within the municipalities of both Amsterdam and Ouder-Amstel;
- A stadium linked to a multi-purpose hall;
- The configuration of an Olympic stadium with an athletics track. In October 1986 the final organisation of the Olympic Games came to an end, and with it the immediate urgency for a new stadium.

1987-1990

In 1987 the 'Stichting Amsterdam Sportstad' [Amsterdam Sports City Foundation] was established with the aim to promote top-class sport in the Amsterdam region. This foundation commissioned a plan for the development of a new stadium located above the Burgemeester Stramanweg [address] in Amsterdam Zuidoost. This was a design for a stadium that included:

- Room for 55,000 spectators;
- Two parking levels for the stadium and m hall, and further public use (offices);
- It to be built at 8 metres 40 above ground level, this concept is not new but was applied earlier in the Monaco stadium (Louis II);
- Only seating capacity, all covered.

Because of its location above the Burgemeester Stramanweg the current traffic situation needed to be changed by building a tunnel. Problems that were raised during its design concerned among other things accessibility, management and separation of traffic flows. In 1988 the Sportcomplex Amsterdam BV was founded. Sport complex Amsterdam BV commissioned McKinsey to draw up a 'business plan'.

This plan needed to meet a number of requirements. These are, among other things, that the design of the stadium must be of high quality ('state of the art'), a large portion of equity capital is required to set up the financing and then comfort for the spectators needs to be an important consideration. The existing plan from May of that year was adjusted to accommodate the change from a city location to a 'panoramic' location (Strandvliet).

May 1990

The general concept of the design was made and the stadium is then built according to this design. This design included a multi-purpose hall (between the Bijlmer station and the Strandvliet station) and was based on the design of the Olympic Stadium from 1986 and on the Stichting Amsterdam Sportstad design, which included the following features:

- It was an Olympic design, with an athletics track;
- The location of the stadium is at a right angle and adjacent to the Burgemeester Stramanweg;
- The stadium is completely covered;
- The stadium is state of the art (skyboxes, restaurants, finish, etc.);
- There is a main building (with restaurants, halls, a museum, etc.).

The plan for a separate multi-purpose hall next to the stadium, linked by a viaduct over the Burgemeester Stramanweg, remains. Ajax wanted a speedy decision concerning the future of the new stadium as their own stadium no longer meets their requirements and future expansion is imperative. Because of the configuration of the stadium (state of the art) and the expected problems concerning the financing of both the stadium and the multi-purpose hall, it is decided to carry out the project without building the multi-purpose hall. In order to increase the usability of the stadium, a sliding roof is included. After all, other (sporting) events will also be staged at the stadium. The short sides can be used for an amphitheatre. The expected level of investment at that time amounted to 239 million Dutch guilders. The municipality of Amsterdam, Ajax and the ABN AMRO bank act as investors/financers for the foundation for the stadium. The council's contribution of 60 million Dutch guilders is very important. The idea is to issue shares to attract a large part of the remaining financing that was required.

On 14 December 1990 the shares are issued. But then the Gulf War started and the shares issue did not have the desired result. For this reason the following cost-savings were introduced:

- The stadium would not be given an athletics track, and the perimeter would be reduced;
- A modified main load bearing structure (with four vertical load bearing structures) would be used;
- The sliding roof would be optimised and would open in a longitudinal direction instead of cross wise;
- 600 parking places were to be built under the stadium;
- The stadium would have 50,000 seats (bucket seats).

All this would amount to cost-savings of approximately 40 million Dutch guilders. The Bouwcombinatie [Construction Combination] (Ballast Nedam Utiliteitsbouw and BAM Bredero Bouw) indicated that with these modifications the stadium could be built for 202 million Dutch Guilders..

End of 1991

Concerning the Strandvliet location, problems arose between the municipalities of Ouder-Amstel and Amsterdam. The stadium was to be built exactly on the border of both councils and Ouder-Amstel did not want to ratify the construction of the stadium in advance, without seeing the results of a number of reports (especially the MER report). In the meantime, partly due to the opinions concerning accessibility to the town centre of Amsterdam, a clearly modified transport policy had been evolving in Amsterdam. The revenues of the historic design process of the stadium (see period 1987-1990) were exploited, resulting in the stadium being relocated to the location at the Burgemeester Stramanweg (twice as much use of the grounds). The concept of a Transferium is then raised, a high-quality transfer location from cars to other various forms of public transport.

February 1992

The Supervisory Board of the Stadion Amsterdam NV approved the construction of the stadium. The financing was more or less completed. The construction costs of 202 million Dutch guilders were reconfirmed by the combination of contractors, consisting of Ballast Nedam Utiliteitsbouw and BAM Bredero Bouw (merged into Bouwcombinatie Stadion Amsterdam).

April 1992

The city council approved the plans for a stadium with a Transferium above it at the Burgemeester Stramanweg and based on the investment costs for the stadium of 202 million Dutch guilders and investment costs for the Transferium of 63 million Dutch guilders.

June 1992 A study by urban developers followed, into the results of a structure to be built over the Burgemeester Stramanweg. This study resulted in the stadium being built directly over the road at 8 metres 40 above ground level with two parking levels below the stadium with in total approximately 2,000 spaces. During construction attention needed to be paid to:

- Traffic flows and accessibility;
- Stair wells;
- Controllability;
- Safety;
- Load bearing structure and urban environment;
- Linking plinth constructions (and link to stair wells).

March 1993

The Supervisory Board approved the construction of the stadium on the basis of the fixed price agreements with the Bouwcombinatie and the agreed financing. On March 10th 1993 the municipality of Amsterdam took the final decision concerning the construction of the stadium and the Transferium, under the condition that the preconditions that were set, would be met and not exceeded.

June 1993

The city council approved the provisional zoning plan.

August 1993

On August 27th, 1993 the building notice was issued by the municipality of Amsterdam.

October 1993

On October 20th 1993 the Council of State rejected the submitted appeals against the building notice. Then an agreement was reached with the Bouwcombinatie Stadion Amsterdam concerning the contract and building costs.

November 1993

In preparation of the laying of the foundation stone on 26th November 1993 the founder contracts were signed at the ABN AMRO headquarters in Amsterdam Zuidoost, between Stadion Amsterdam NV and the Grolsche Bierbrouwerij Nederland B.V., Philips Nederland B.V., PTT Telecom BV (currently KPN Telecom) and Bouwcombinatie Stadion Amsterdam v.o.f., consisting of Ballast Nedam Utiliteitsbouw and BAM Beredero Bouw. Councillor Louis Genet (Amsterdam city council) laid the foundation stone of the stadium and adjacent Transferium. In the information centre on the building site the scale models, drawings and drafts of the stadium, the Transferium and the area around the stadium could be viewed.

February 1995

On February 24th 1995 the highest point of the stadium was reached when the 2,400 ton main load bearing structure for the roof was lifted onto the stadium (approximately 75 metres above ground level). Because of the dangerous nature of this job, all construction workers who were not directly involved in the job, were given a day off. On the 27th February 1995 the Supervisory Board announced that Mr. Jan Gaasterland would be joining the Stadion Amsterdam NV management as their chairman.

March 1995

Construction workers went on a strike for an indefinite period of time. On March 15th 1995 the builders and plasterers laid down their work. All other activities continued. On Saturday 18 March 1995 there were the official celebrations for reaching the highest point which were held for the shareholders, representatives of the founders and other guests. Also, Mr. F.G.H. de Grave, in his capacity of vice chairman of the Supervisory Board of Stadion Amsterdam NV, and the chairman of AFC Ajax, Mr. Michael van Praag, revealed the new stadium's name: Amsterdam ArenA.

April 1995

After a strike that lasted five weeks, the builders went back to work. This meant the end of the builders' strike. To make up for lost time, the builders and plasterers worked twice as hard.

May 1995

All 1300 share certificates B (business seats) were sold. As a result of the stadium's new name, the Amsterdamse Village Company B.V. (Arena Sleepin Amsterdam) applied for a temporary injunction against use of the name Amsterdam ArenA by Stadion Amsterdam NV.

June 1995

The judgement pronounced in the Arena Sleepin - Amsterdam ArenA case on Thursday 29 June 1995 was in favour of the Amsterdam ArenA. The stadium was allowed to continue using the new name. Because of a lack of space in the stadium's Main Building it was decided to build an Entrance building onto the Main Building.

July 1995

On 5 July 1995 four new founder contracts were signed at the building site of the Amsterdam ArenA between the ABN AMRO, Amsterdam RAI BV, Coca-Cola Nederland B.V. and the Stichting Exploitatie Nederlandse Staatsloterij (SENS). On the same day a loan agreement with a bank syndicate (ABN AMRO, Westland/Utrecht Hypotheekbank N.V., Credit Lyonnais Bank Nederland N.V. and De Nationale Investeringsbank N.V.) was signed for a total of 72 million Dutch Guilders (55 million for the stadium and 17 million for the Entrance Building). Mr. Tilmans announced his resignation as managing director of the Amsterdam ArenA as from 1 November 1995 to set up his own sports advice agency.

September 1995

On Saturday 16 September 1995 an open day was held at the stadium site for all shareholders. Approximately 2,000 people witnessed the progress of the construction. On this occasion it was announced that the Amsterdam ArenA would be able to deploy a mobile grass pitch. This added an extra dimension to the concept of multifunctional. The roles were now reversed: here we had a stadium without a grass pitch, except if there was an event that required a grass pitch. The grass could then be taken in or out using containers of three by twelve metres. This would allow the grass to grow outside while an event was taking place inside.

October 1995

The decision on appeal in the Arena Sleepin - Amsterdam ArenA case was made in favour of the Amsterdam ArenA. On 9 October 1995 the announcement was made that Mr. Henk Markerink would succeed Mr. Jan Tilmans as from 1 November 1995 as the Managing Director of the Amsterdam ArenA.

January 1996

The final decision concerning the grass pitch was made. Contrary to earlier announcements there would not be a mobile grass pitch. It was decided to go for the so-called PAT system: Prescription Athletic Turf, imported from America and designed specifically for intensive use of a grass pitch. It is a fixed grass strip with a system of pipes and detection devices beneath it. The condition of the grass can be controlled continuously using computers.

During large scale events, vacuum is applied to the grass and it is covered with terraplas which means it can remain covered without any harm being done for approximately five days. This allows for events that last several days. At the beginning of the month a start was made with the installation of the roof, which was made up of two parts. One single part was 40 x 118 metres and weighed 520 tons. Two cranes with a lifting capacity of 400 tons and a height of 100 metres lifted the parts to a height of approximately 70 metres. This took a lot of expertise, as the installation is sensitive to weather circumstances. The temperature must be above zero degrees Celsius with a maximum wind force of five. By the end of January all parts were in place and the builders could continue with assembling the rest. By the beginning of March the roof was to be closed for the first time.

February 1996

All tours of the construction site organised by the organisation centre were fully booked. It was decided to create some extra space in the planning. By mid February the additional tours are also fully booked. Every day the requests for tours were pouring in, the interest was overwhelming. Because of the severe and continuous frost the work was reduced to a minimum, but where possible the construction activities went ahead. This demonstrated the construction workers' total devotion. Where normally the absence due to illness in the construction sector was 6 to 7 percent, at the Amsterdam ArenA it was not even 2 percent.

March 1996

On March 13th 240 previous Olympic participants, among them Hein Vergeer, Fanny Blankers-Koen, Marjolein Eijsvogel and Ada Kok, symbolically opened the fly-over during their annual meeting. The fly-over is the link between the through-road and the ArenA deck, the parking deck at level 2 with 600 parking spaces. This fly-over allows lorries, ambulances and other vehicles to reach the pitch. The planting of the greenery started along the avenue around the stadium. Approximately twenty lime trees originating from the Museumplein in Amsterdam were planted on the site around the Amsterdam ArenA. And a further large amount of new trees were planted. In April 1996 the concrete bowl that the playing fields were to be placed in, was ready. This meant the delivery of sand could start up together with the construction of the PAT system. The necessary pipes were laid on a layer of plastic. Under this layer of plastic there was a layer of sand and another layer of sand was put over the pipes. On April 12th there was a press conference to announce part of the programme for the official opening of the stadium. Amid interest from 100 visitors a CDI presentation was used to explain what to expect between 14th and 25th of August 1996. On 27 April the sliding roof was opened and closed for the first time. This occasion was attended by a minimum number of visitors due to the safety measures that were in place. The roof closed silently and perfectly using the emergency controls. The regular devices which would be used to open and close the roof in the future, were not yet installed. Because of the continuous and tremendous interest in the tours, it was decided to plan some additional tours in the evenings. Once again, within a few days these tours were fully booked. There was a last run for the shares certificates E which meant they were sold out in no time at all.

May 1996

At the beginning of May a start was made with sowing the grass. For this a special mix of sand and grass seed was used to achieve a beautifully green grass mat. On 15 May the 100,000th paying visitor was welcomed into the stadium. On 25 May there was an open day for certificate holders. Approximately 7,000 people were given the opportunity to see the last stages of the construction before the stadium was officially opened in August.

June 1996

On 28 June 1996 there was the last press conference, announcing the final state of affairs concerning the construction. By the end of June the final tours for the public at the construction site of the Amsterdam ArenA took place, as the stadium was to be closed to press and public as from 1 July. By now 180,000 people had visited the building site. The builders continued working on a successful completion of the Amsterdam ArenA.

August 1996

By mid August the new stadium was operational. It is a unique stadium because it is the first stadium in Europe to have a transparent sliding roof that can be opened or closed in 20 minutes. The slogan used is: "Amsterdam ArenA ... the stadium where the weather is always beautiful". Because of the sliding roof the options are innumerable. It is a multifunctional palace suitable for a variety of sports, concerts, TV shows, congresses, exhibitions, parties and gatherings. The stadium is equipped with 50,000 seats, 750 toilets, 30 catering points and 60 entrances and exits. Below the stadium there are two parking levels with approximately 2,000 parking spaces. In the surrounding area of the stadium there are an additional 9,000 parking spaces. Accessibility to public transport is also excellent. The stadium will be hosting more than 60 events per year. Half of these events will be football matches both national and international matches. Even the Amsterdam Admirals, the American football club, will play their home games at the ArenA. A three year contract has been agreed with Mojo concerts to organise 7 major pop concerts a year. Also there will be many large scale events that are guaranteed to be crowd-pullers. In the neighbourhood of the stadium a super multi-purpose centre will be built. Mojo concerts will be building a pop complex for 5,000 visitors for smaller concerts. Joop van de Ende Theaterproducties is building a musical theatre with two halls for long-running productions, and a hotel. The French Pathé Cinemas (previously MGM) will be building a mega cinema. There will also be large scale facilities for shops, hotels and restaurants and offices.

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