

DASHER BOARD SYSTEMS FOR OUTDOOR RINKS

The old outdoor rink that many people are accustomed to seeing in neighborhood parks was usually built from wood posts and plywood, and often was really nothing more than a fence surrounding rink surface. These “dashers” required tremendous amounts of maintenance and painting to keep them in good condition, and often over time, and with declining support from community volunteers, the dashers deteriorated into an unsafe and often unusable condition. Changing construction methods did result in some improvements in the dashers, however it has only been recently that these community assets have started to receive the attention and funding they deserve.

The resurgence of interest for community outdoor rinks has resulted in their numbers increasing over the past few years. But with today’s busy society making it much more difficult to get community volunteers (especially volunteers with the appropriate skills and expertise), and potential liability issues with improperly built or installed product, many communities have been working with specialty dasher board companies to provide the proper and safe equipment for these venues.



Calgary Area Rink Photo Courtesy of GWS Technologies Ltd

The involvement of specialized companies has resulted in the dasher systems evolving, just like the indoor versions, into a product that has been designed, engineered, and factory built to withstand the outdoor conditions which can be far more demanding than those in an indoor arena. Outdoor systems are exposed to direct sunlight, rain, heat, cold, and extreme temperature variations. The lack of an enclosed and secure environment means the system must be designed to allow for easy replacement of materials damaged by vandalism. And they must still be attractive, and built to look and play as much like a regular indoor rink as possible.



Cape Dorset NT Photo Courtesy of Sport Systems Unlimited

Aluminum frames have been used in modern indoor arenas for several years. The forgiving yet durable design of the product allows them to perform extremely well, and the very nature of aluminum makes it ideal for the outdoor rink system. Aluminum does not rust. An anodized surface protects the metal, is self healing in the event of damage, and retains it’s quality appearance throughout the life of the product. Aluminum systems are known to be more forgiving on player impact, meaning the aluminum gives to accept some of the force of the blow and returns to it’s original shape better than any other metal.

Mechanically fastened sections and hardware (rather than welded) allow for easy on site repairs without having to bring a welder to what are often remote and isolated locations. And stainless steel hardware provides non-rusting and durable latches and hinges that remain rust free and last for years.



Chicago Midway Plaisance Photo Courtesy of Sport Systems Unlimited

Specially formulated plastic playing (some systems use FRP sheet) surfaces that are durable, UV resistant and highly tolerant of extreme weather conditions are mounted to the frames in a manner that limits the problems of material expansion and contraction. This specially sized and applied material requires smaller sheet sizing and more fasteners, as well as a middle upright post in each dasher section. Typical puck board and fastening methods used on indoor arenas does not perform well on outdoor dashers.

Outdoor dasher systems are usually topped with a heavy gauge chain link puck containment as it is highly durable and less prone to damage from vandalism. Some rinks also use acrylic or tempered glass on their dashers. Many rinks do not incorporate players and officials boxes into their outdoor system, however these can be added at a later date. Some rinks use covered outdoor box shelters to provide their users with protection from the elements. Fenced systems can also incorporate locking gates latches to control access to the surface.

Over the years, new interest in fitness and community recreation have seen these outdoor rinks host more than the typical winter ice hockey and summer ball hockey activities. Some have added roofs, and others now include heated change and concession buildings, fire pits, and community seating. The surfaces are being used for portable seasonal skate board parks, basketball, volleyball, badminton and tennis, as well as flea markets, summer daycare activity areas, and much, much more.

Perimeter lighting can be added to your rink to extend winter hours and add a more of an ambient environment for non skaters. Recently some communities, where conventional electricity has not been available to the site, have added wind and solar generated lighting and power for their rink.

As communities get even more creative, some like the City of Langford British Columbia are building splash parks that morph into winter skating rinks. This award winning concept makes for a very interesting community recreation venue that breaks from traditional uses, and involves different interest groups, and participants of all ages. Although to date we have not seen these “rinks” include dasher board systems, it is only a matter of time until some creative community takes this step as well.

The outdoor rink has come a long way in recent years. Careful planning, community and user input, and advise from recreation and construction professionals can insure that your rink becomes a destination that provides your community with a highly useable year round facility that generates community pride and year round use.



Langford Splash Park Photos Courtesy of Accent Refrigeration Systems



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