

Arecont Vision – Megapixel IP Cameras for New ‘Regenboogstadion’ Soccer Stadium



Until recently, soccer suffered from a severe image problem. Every week, there would be something in the sports section, in between the soccer reports, about soccer supporters rioting or stadium vandalism. However, at some point everyone had had enough, and all affected parties worked out appropriate measures. They succeeded, because soccer is fun again. Father and son can once again put on their scarf and beanie hat and go to the stadium to cheer their favorite team. Kudos also due to the soccer clubs, because the stadium has once again become a safe environment. We went to have a look at the modernized Regenboogstadion stadium, home to S.V. Zulte Waregem (Belgian professional soccer club based in Waregem, West Flanders).

Zulte Waregem (real fans still call it ‘Essevee’) is a club with ambition. A club like this deserves appropriate facilities, which will meet European licensing terms. The popular Regenboogstadion was completely demolished; only the stands next to the ponds remained standing and were renovated. However, from a practical and financial perspective – you can hardly go a few months without stands – this had to be done in stages and in accordance with a strict roadmap. Zulte Waregem’s new stand was officially opened for the game against K.A.A. Gent on 28 November 2014. A delegation of prominent people – led by Mayor Kurt Vanryckeghem and president Carl Ballière – cut the ribbon. The stand behind the goal has room for 2,150 Essevee fans, and the new visitors’ stand in the bend can accommodate around 975 supporters. The stand was built in just less than four months.

“Dissuasion is the best way to combat spectator violence and vandalism”, says Erik Oudendijk, Benelux Regional Sales Manager for Arecont Vision. “A person who knows that he will be identified will think twice before doing something stupid, and we can guarantee that the culprit will be identified. After all, he is being filmed by one of Arecont Vision’s 5-megapixel IP cameras. Eleven cameras suffice to cover every seat in the entire stadium (even allowing face recognition), including the necessary overlap between the visual fields of the cameras. Thanks to the high resolution of our cameras, we are able to record up to 700 to 1,000 spectators with each camera.”

The high resolution of the images not only makes it possible to zoom in to detect faces, but also avoids overexposure or images that are too dark, if part of the stand is in the sun light and part of it is in the shade in a single shot. Erik Oudendijk: “This also makes our cameras particularly suitable for use in buildings where the incoming people are filmed frontally. Usually, surveillance cameras are located above the door and film the back of the visitor, in order to avoid such overexposure. Our megapixel IP cameras use Wide Dynamic Range

(WDR) technology to distinguish between the background and the people in focus and automatically adjust the brightness!”

Camera surveillance in the stands is needed most from shortly before the game up to sometime after the final whistle. However, a lot can happen before and after the game too. Especially because the ambitions of the board of S.V. Zulte Waregem go much farther than just soccer with their revamped stadium. In the multifunctional stadium, there will also be room for a restaurant, modern fan shop, fitness center, hotel, bowling alley, themed café, offices, commercial space, etc. “In addition to the eleven 5-megapixel IP cameras covering the stands and the other eighteen 5-megapixel cameras scattered around the stadium, there will be around 50 to 60 more cameras of different types spread over the entire property”, said Sven Philips, Dealer Account Manager at wholesaler Optima Networks, a specialized distributor of Arecont Vision. “There will also be cameras monitoring access roads, car parks, entrances, lounges, etc. Indeed, camera surveillance will be implemented as an important part of an overall safety plan. Actually, security equipment installers can be divided into two groups: people with an analogue background, and people with an IP background. It is clear that the second group has a significant advantage, as they stand out more emphatically thanks to their technical expertise. They are in a strong position when the various parties sit around the table to work out the security policy. You really need to be able to join in the users’ thought process, which requires a certain amount of knowledge. The recordings are stored at Zulte Waregem until a few days after the game, after which they are transferred to a data center where they remain available for six months. In this way, storage space is freed up for the next event.”

To decide on camera type and quantity, Erik Oudendijk and Sven Philips met with Sam Lietaert of Campro Camerabewaking & Alarmsystemen, installation contractors with offices in Drongen and Blankenberge. This was not the first time that Zulte Waregem had worked with Campro. The two had already done so in, for example, Albertpark, the home ground of K.V. Oostende. Incidentally, there is no other part of Belgium where more stadiums will be built or modernized in the next few years as in West and East Flanders.

“Choosing the megapixel IP cameras has had a significant impact on installation costs,” said Erik Oudendijk. “The high resolution meant that we needed far fewer cameras than with analogue cameras, which meant that it was much quicker to install the cameras. We also needed less cabling, fewer brackets, less setup time, and so on. Thus, a small additional investment in high-performance cameras can ultimately lead to a saving on total installation cost. Also, keep in mind that the security cameras are usually not installed in the most easily accessible places. At Zulte Waregem, the eleven cameras are installed at the bottom of the two main stands. You can also save time because of the remote focus function that obviates the need for focusing at the camera location. It is the combination of all the advantages of our IP cameras that results in ease of installation, operational dependability and reliability.”

Mid next year, a similar new stand will be built on the opposite side of the field, where the “sfeervak X” (special stand for fanatic supporters) is currently located. Essevee also hopes to achieve this spectacular feat in only four months. The stand-side ponds will be renovated in 2016. A new grandstand will be constructed in 2017. Once the new grandstand has been completed, the stadium will count 12,000 seats, 1,400 standing places, 200 disabled spots, 900 spaces reserved for visitors and 26 skyboxes. Season ticket sales will subsequently determine whether the corners of the stadium will be completely built up as well. The renovation of the Regenboogstadion will cost 25 to 32 million euros.

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