

# Real Talk About Getting Stadium Jobs, with Matt Wagner

Matt Wagner: Well, I guess we could just talk about that project. You know this is the I guess third time we've done a big restoration project at Arrowhead.

## Arrowhead Stadium

So about every 10 years we've done one starting in 98, we did a big one and I was in the field then coming into the office.

Then actually was the bid and was the project manager on the one we did in 2009. And then now we're doing this one in 19, so each one was a little bit different I guess in how it was all put together and how we got the job.

Teddy Williams: Was it different each time?

Matt: It was different each time.

Teddy: Yeah, it's a long time span so I was gonna add my first question was did it, how much did it help being the contractor that had worked on the previous job or two jobs? Did that place a big role or was it kind of helpful but not? Were you dealing with the same people I guess?

Matt: Right, so, yeah the one in 2009, I mean it was helpful. We knew from the large job we did in 98 up til that time we, after that first big project got over in 98, we started doing maintenance work for them every year and basically they would give us a chunk of money to work time material against every summer.

And so for 10 or 12 years or whatever that span was we were always in there working and if they ever had a leak or anything came up we were always there to do their work so as a project was developing in 2007 and 8 leading up to the bidding in 2009 we were able to go in there and do quite a few studies with the engineer of a record.

We did concrete coring, we did testing, we did sample installations of materials they were wanting to use and then testing their effectiveness so that did help us. It was still at that time, the stadium operations were run by the county so it was a very public, I guess, bid process.

But because we had that relationship with them we actually were able to qualify our bid and do some things to make ourselves more competitive to get that project.

Teddy: Sure sure.

## Did you have to be the low bidder?

Matt: It helped us remain their contractor of choice from then up til this year and the way that the stadium has been maintained from 2009 til now is under a different contract basically the county gave the Chiefs and the Royals the control of maintenance.

So even though it's a publicly owned facility they have a little more leeway I guess, in how they can do business. Now they still have a set of rules that they have to follow but they're I think a little loosely put together. They have the ability to negotiate to a certain degree.

So this last time around I think we were in a little better position because we have worked out there for 20 years every year and even though they did have to get bids because it was a large project, we were able to get the job even though we weren't low bid through some negotiations after the fact of bidding.

Teddy: Yeah it seems like when not in charge of the projects [inaudible 00:13:38] county or city whatever to the people, the people [inaudible 00:13:42].

Even if they weren't there at the beginning of those earlier projects they have a little more heart invested in the stadium and all that so they can maybe appreciate the history of the work a little more than maybe the city would. [crosstalk 00:14:01] oh go ahead.

## How to develop a huge advantage for stadium work

Matt: The stadiums are kinda their own animal, everything about the is different and harder to do work in and for us it's just been key to have the maintenance type jobs and contracts with them because they're gonna do every stadium out there I would imagine in every off season they're gonna be doing some kind of work.

Usually those jobs are smaller a lot of times just because of the nature of stadiums and leaks and things that are time material. And this goes for other branches too that have been successful, if they can get in there with those facility managers and a lot of times that work is negotiated or just given to a certain contractor.

If they can get in there and develop a rapport and a relationship and understand the people that they're dealing with and how work is done inside the stadium whenever the big job does come around which is typically has to be bid, it gives us a huge advantage.

Teddy: Yeah absolutely. [crosstalk 00:15:20] you obviously have to get that, or maybe not always, almost all the time you gotta get that big job to then get the maintenance work and contract so it's like almost the maintenance projects are almost more important but that's kinda maybe a spot that a new branch with stadium work could maybe overlook that's really important at the time.

You gotta make sure you're getting those smaller projects that come after the first one and maintenance work that are kinda sometimes maybe annoying. You gotta give them your full effort to maintain that relationship. Is that kinda, am I right in doing that?

Matt: Yeah I mean I would think if you're not in with the stadium now they're definitely doing work at some level. In those small areas if you could get your foot in the door then that could definitely go get you an advantage and lead for other opportunities.

Teddy: You mentioned with facility manager getting close with him, that kinda leads me into the next section and that is kinda who, with the same jobs who are you hearing about the job from first?

Is this that facility manager or does it depend on the job large or small? You said the small ones they really come from those facility managers most of the time, but is that the same case for the larger jobs or is there an engineer that you see? When there's a big job who's the first person that tells you about I guess, in your experience?

## The facility manager is the person to target

Matt: Typically in the past anyway it's been the facility manager because we're there working with them. A lot of times we're able to be involved in early on in developing of the spec and picking out the materials and then typically the engineers gonna wanna do some type of destructive testing or sampling of certain things inside the stadium and so they need contractors to do that. And because we're already there doing repairs we've always been able to be involved in that process.

So the job that we just got this year at Arrowhead the engineer wanted to use a new type of product over the sealant joints that Sika has that no body has ever used before, even Sika themselves, in this type of situation.

Before the job was even drawn up and went out to bid we were able to do a mock up so that helped us out a lot, being able to do that before the job even bid and work through some of the kinks and then understand the process and some have some idea of production.

Teddy: That helps you not only be more competitive but also be [inaudible 00:18:40] on the job.

Matt: Right, exactly.

Teddy: So I guess maybe switching gears a little bit here but what would you recommend for a branch, a project manager, a branch as a whole, or just business development person, if they had not been doing stadium work in the past, they don't have that reference like we have at Arrowhead. Do you have any insight on the how they might get started?

I don't know the other projects that you've been involved in but have you had some stadium projects in your time or we're not coming from that basically angle of having this history with the customer in the stadium?

## Getting the Cleveland Browns stadium project

Matt: So I guess we had a similar situation at Brown stadium last year. There was a job bid there that Cleveland branch got and it was a very good job for them.

While we weren't doing the maintenance work at the time but we had a project manager who had worked for the company that was doing the maintenance work and who's dad was a foreman on that crew and so we had a lot of good inside information through him that helped us out on the job.

I guess I would say to get the larger job, if you can get your foot in the door to do that the smaller maintenance type work. I think that's a huge benefit and understanding how they contract that work is important too because I think every stadium may have a little different process.

But just because it's a city owned or county or public facility, we shouldn't assume necessarily that that type of work is always bid because a lot of times it isn't.

Teddy: Yeah that public work kinda comes with a negative stereotype here. You're saying that it might be a little bit of a stereotype on our part?

## Knowing the facility manager's project \$ limit

Matt: Right. I mean sometimes it is and they're gonna bid every single \$2,000 silly little repair everywhere because that's their policy and then you're just wasting your time.

But in some situations, or a lot, they have up to \$25,000 or whatever that they can give the contractors and not have to bid it out. There are some opportunities there if that's the case.

Teddy: Yeah. That seems kinda like the theme of the conversation here is that especially with stadiums those \$2,500 or \$25,000 little jobs are really worth it more than your average office building or property.

They're more important with the stadium because that's seems to be the, with the relationship hinges on almost.

Matt: Yeah. And once you get your foot in the door and they see you as a resource to solve their problems, because those people are always just very very busy people. So if they can find a resource that gives them the solution they usually go back to them again again again.

Teddy: Yeah and that's kinda, I feel like if you don't have a relationship, if you're a branch and you don't have the relationship with a stadium, that's throwing those tiny little jobs that are under his threshold that he can prove.

That's really good grounds for building relationship because then you get to spend that time together and it's a lot more personable amongst them. A huge job they could spit out and have all these bids to go through.

Matt: Right, yep, absolutely.

Teddy: I feel like if we were to kinda narrow it down to a couple specific tips, it seems like almost if a person was trying to get stadium jobs and not having luck, I feel like it might be a pretty good move to maybe stop focusing on finding the huge stadium jobs and start looking for these, somehow a way to get in with these smaller jobs and start focusing on how you can just get in the door and land one.

Or get in the conversation first with these facility managers with the big jobs because once a Western person has a relationship with the customer a common theme is talking about those \$2,500 jobs here and there but you don't hear about that when you're watching people searching those out. You know what I mean?

Matt: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Right.

Teddy: I don't know, I feel like that's, if you're struggling to find stadium maybe that's a little stadium work. Maybe someone could switch it up and see it.

Matt: Stadium jobs are usually pretty intimidating because they're always, its a difficult place to work and they're always on very tight time frames in the off seasons to deal with. So there's a

lot of risk in them. That unfortunately comes with the territory and also it tells us to be successful at it.

Teddy: For sure. The area to entry is high for contractors. I was down in Dallas for that high school football stadium where you could mask. It was some \$16 million high school football stadium and it then rained for 3 month straight and it was all over the news, not we were all over the news, but the whole project was just an absolute nightmare.

Matt: Oh really?

Teddy: Yeah. So it sounds like the facility manager is the person to focus on as well, is that, I don't know if you know the answer to this. But if you were finding out who, if I'm going to a college or I guess NFL stadium in our city but do you just go online and can you figure out who the facility manager is at the stadium? Or how do you, do you know, any idea on how to just identify who the right person is to talk to?

Matt: Well that's a good question. I know that especially at a big facility those people are probably pretty difficult to get in touch with.

Teddy: Yeah.

Matt: So I don't know, I know that we do spend a lot of time with the stadium managers meetings. So I don't know if somehow through that and our involvement in that association if we have contact lists available to us or ways we can get in touch with those people.

But I think that can be tough especially at the bigger facilities. I guess that's what our marketing people are good at. I don't have a good answer for that but yeah I think that can be tough. There's a lot of door keepers.

## College stadiums vs. the pros

Teddy: Have you gone, what would the ratio in your career of stadium has been professional teams, almost kinda where it's usually done by the city or state or whatever versus college

teams where maybe its a private college. Have you done both? Are there differences in how you'd approach winning those jobs or getting them or even finding out about them?

## **Just because it's a public university doesn't mean it's "public work"**

Matt: Yeah. It depends. We've done both the colleges and professional. Some of the colleges, the stadiums are actually run and managed by the athletic association.

At KU the KU Athletic Association manages and maintains the football stadium so there's private money involved and they have a little more latitude there with what work is done as well. But that's not always the case.

We been pretty successful at KU Memorial Stadium, their football stadium too, and been able to negotiate work because of that.

Teddy: I think colleges are a pretty good opportunity in the stadium specific market if you're really focusing in that. Just because we have so many other buildings on the campus, you have so many more opportunities to get in the door and then work your way to a stadium project whereas with an NFL stadium it's not like it's just a stadium.

At TCU, one of the Dallas branches that customers, we probably touched on every building on that campus and it took, we did probably 40 projects before we even looked at a stadium project for them.

But then you've got that relationship, kinda like what you said, a lot of the small jobs and then when their stadium work came, it was like hey we do that too and the job went really well and worked on all their other sports stadiums as well. Its always football that we touch, but baseball, and soccer, every kinda building there. I feel like and there's obviously a lot more colleges than pro stadiums.

Matt: Yeah and a lot of times those facilities are older too, it seems like. The NFL and major leagues the stadium gets 20 30 years old, they seem like they knock them down and build a

new one just because the trends are different and they want new facilities and they have the money. A lot of college facilities out there are old.

Teddy: I guess our last two questions here, they're at the bottom here, it said for any of your stadium projects was there anything that you would have done differently that you didn't do at the time? I'm not sure about that one, if something pops in your head then let's definitely hear it but I feel like we've covered a lot.

This last question, kinda what marketing material, what has been helpful in the past and what would be helpful going in the future? Like you said, you mentioned that stadium work is a lot different than other work and kinda getting these jobs. Also there's a uniqueness there as well. So is there, is that the marketing material needs to kinda be more unique and specific for stadiums? Or what are your thoughts on that?

## What kind of marketing material would you like to see from stadiums?

Matt: Yeah I think that would be very helpful if we did have stadium specific marketing information and reference list to show how many different stadiums that we have worked in across the country would be very helpful.

Teddy: Yeah that portfolio would be very impressive and cool. That is something they're working on. Right now [inaudible 00:31:54] but what specific, you say specific stadium marketing materials would be helpful?

What kinda areas should marketing touch on in terms of, do you think it needs to be kinda like a standard inspection checklist and visual guide? We do a lot of those and we can definitely make those stadium specific, is there anything, I guess that's sort of the obvious marketing materials, is there any nuances or tweaks for different types of marketing materials that you think would be useful?

I guess what I'm saying is we are making a stadium checklist with the concrete, we're kinda modeling it off of our old one and updating it, so this app updated marketing material is

coming. I guess driving to see if we can think of anything else, or if you think of any specific additions for stadium inspection guide that we don't usually include. I'm looking at the old one right now.

## The problems all stadiums face

Matt: Oh okay. Yeah it's been a long time since I've seen that one.

I think probably the majority of the stadiums anymore except for your older ones are all precast and they're all built very similar and they all have the same kinds of problems.

So that might be something we can focus on. The older ones usually are cast in place and they're usually built the same way so they kinda have the same problems too but the newer ones, at least every other newer type stadium I've seen have all been precast and they kinda all after about 8 or 10 years, they all start having the same problems and leaks that is standard across the board.

Teddy: That's kind of [inaudible 00:34:15]. That was kinda something I was thinking about is almost like what do you think a marketing team could be helpful in terms of maybe educating them on some of these types of materials and their typical life expectancy and that sort of thing?

Matt: Yeah. That would be good.

Teddy: Using that, combining that with their history and creating a schedule for when they need to be inspecting these, inspecting them closer then almost anticipating hey we'll probably have to send somebody on this in 5 years or 3 years or whatever it is.

## Caulking and expansion joints are where problems start

Matt: Right. Yeah I think that would be good. Those precast stadiums they all have a lot of caulking and they're big structures so they always have a lot of expansion joints too. And those

are the two areas where they start having problems at first and those materials and expansion joints systems usually are gonna start failing in that 8 to 10 year time period, if not sooner.

Teddy: I think that a lot of the time stadiums are maybe mixing the warning signs with the [inaudible 00:35:36] and not realizing there's problems until the concrete starts showing signs of deterioration. I think it obviously benefits from catching those as early as you can.

Matt: Oh yeah, absolutely. Because concrete repair in a stadium is expensive. It's always access issues and it's a pain. So usually you see unit prices double or more on what you see in a garage. Definitely in their best interest to not let it get to that point.

Teddy: Alright well anything else? Any other tips or advice you have on porting spots or the person listening that is striking out on stadiums right now? Or do you think we covered it mostly?

Matt: Uh no I don't think so. There's quite a few people in the company that have done a lot of stadium work so if they have a [crosstalk 00:36:35]

Teddy: If you are striking out there are definitely resources to reach out to.

Matt: Right, or if they have one that they're looking at, there's some help out there.

Teddy: Well cool. Well thanks Matt.