

CEDAR RAPIDS, PPD.

City's baseball stadium, ice arena severely hit

By Jeff Johnson, The Gazette

CEDAR RAPIDS—The conjoined street signs for Rockford Road and Veterans Memorial Drive SW were flat as a pancake on the ground Wednesday afternoon.

You couldn't get a better visual metaphor than that, unfortunately. Veterans Memorial Stadium and the ImOn Ice Arena did not escape without significant damage during Monday afternoon's derecho that has devastated the city.

The stadium, home of baseball's Cedar Rapids Kernels, had its outfield fence from center to right field flattened by winds estimated as high as 150 miles per hour. The advertising ribbon board in right-center also was felled, as was a huge light pole in right-center.

Keep in mind, all that stuff was anchored by concrete.

"I cannot even begin to describe what happened at the stadium. It was just insane," said Kernels General Manager Scott Wilson. "I had been crazy to think about... 2020 just keeps coming."

Wilson and Andrea Brommekamp, the club's Senior Director of Tickets and Group Sales, were at the ballpark when the derecho hit, specifically on the souvenir shop entrance.

"We were trying to load onto a grill and some tables and stuff right in front of the



The back wall of the outfield at Veterans Memorial Stadium is seen collapsed Tuesday in Cedar Rapids. (Andy Aheya photo/The Gazette)

souvenir shop," Wilson said. "Andrea had stepped outside of the store, and I yelled at her to come back. The outfield wall went first, then the wind speed picked up because the wall wasn't blocking half of it. The ribbon board then went down, but I didn't really see it because it was raining so hard. I have no idea when the light pole fell. I didn't see a thing there."

"I could just not believe the winds went that long the sustained winds, 90 miles per hour plus for 25 minutes. You usually get five to 10 minutes in a thunderstorm."

The derecho also did a number on the city's ice



A downed light pole is seen having fallen along with the back outfield wall Tuesday at Veterans Memorial Stadium in Cedar Rapids.

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Damage/Kernels' future fluid

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arena, blowing a huge hole from ground to ceiling at the back end of the Olympic ice sheet. Volunteers from VenuWorks, which operates the arena for the city, were cut front of the sheet metal building Wednesday afternoon sweeping up yellow insulation that was strewn everywhere.

The Cedar Rapids RoughRiders are the main tenant of ImOn Ice. VenuWorks deferred to the city for comment on the building's damage.

"There is a lot there, and we are in the process of assessing it to see what we are going to need to do to bring it back (to operation)," said city Finance Director Casey Drew.

The cruel irony is crews were coming down the final stretch of a scheduled upgrade at the 30-year-old arena that included replacement of the original HVAC system and ice surface brine pumps, as well as LED lighting upgrades and the installation of party decks on the NHL side of the arena that the RoughRiders use.

That side appears to have received minimal damage. The United States Hockey League has not announced its intentions for a 2020-21 season, though it is widely believed it will get pushed back from its normal early October start.

"We are just trying to make sure we get everything with the arena assessed as soon as possible," Drew said. "It is going to take time to know what the full impact is going to be."

Wilson couldn't give a dollar amount damage estimate at Veterans Memorial Stadium, only saying he guessed it will



Severe damage is seen to the corner of the ImOn Ice Arena in Cedar Rapids on Tuesday. (Andy Aheya photo/The Gazette)



Damage is seen to the Bob Brooks Memorial Press Box at Kings Ice Stadium on Tuesday in Cedar Rapids.

reach seven figures. The Kernels did not have a Midwest League season because of the COVID-19 pandemic and laid off half of their front-office staff as a result.

The working agreement between Minor League Baseball and Major League Baseball expires later this month, and multiple MLB franchises are assumed to be on the chopping block. That list reportedly has been fluid during negotiations for a new agreement, and Cedar Rapids had been expected to survive thanks largely to a very solid working relationship with the parent Minnesota Twins, though improvements to the facility, such as larger clubhouses and additional batting cages have been requested.

Now there is this, too. "We've cleaned up all the debris that we could, put away all the tables and chairs that are still usable," Wilson said.

"From our perspective, we just need an outfield wall and a light pole to play ball next year ... From a baseball standpoint, it's going to be minimal. It's not going to be a dollars-and-cents standpoint."

Kings Ice Stadium, which borders both Veterans Memorial Stadium and ImOn Ice Arena, appeared to come through Monday's storm comparatively unscathed, other than what appeared to be some roof damage to the Bob Brooks Memorial Press Box.

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