

IT'S SHOWTIME AT A GOLDEN KNIGHTS HOME GAME

By Bruce Penton, March 12, 2018

Fans showing up for Vegas Golden Knights games at T-Mobile Arena get more than just a hockey game. They get a show. Hey, it's Vegas. Showtime!

Expansion teams are usually cellar dwellers for a couple of seasons, so the Vegas brainchild made sure fans would be treated to an unforgettable night out at the brand new arena, even if the hockey was forgettable and the losses piled up.

But something strange has happened. Wins, not losses, have piled up. In what might arguably be called the greatest surprising success story in sports — in the NHL at least, for sure — the Golden Knights have molded their crew of castoffs, rejects, third-liners and prospects into an NHL power, which speaks volumes for the brainpower of GM George McPhee, his assistant Kelly McCrimmon, and the coaching staff led by Gerard Gallant.

Whether the home team wins or loses, though, a Golden Knights home game is three hours of solid entertainment — some of which happens on the ice. It starts with well-oiled and enthusiastic fans gathering on the plaza in front of the arena, follows with constant clips and messages from a variety of stars on the KnightTron scoreboard video system, a full-throated screaming of “KNIGHTS!” when the national anthem gets to “... gave proof through the KNIGHTS,” and more. Lots more. Videos of fans whooping it up are a staple on the giant screen, because a pre-game message implores fans to “act like you’ve just won the jackpot” if they get their five seconds of big-screen fame.

A five-man drum band keeps the beat flowing through the game — there are many bone-shaking vibrations, but no lulls — and the overly enthusiastic public address announcer turns it over to the crowd to yell the words ‘POWER PLAY!’ at the end of a commercial message at the start of a home-team extra-man situation.

This is Vegas, so intermission provides opportunity for more entertainment. On this night, when the Knights were playing LA, a Cirque du Soleil team from the Mirage show ‘Love’ performed a variety of acrobatic moves right on the ice. Later, a fan sitting with the Zamboni driver unfurled a sign proposing marriage to his girlfriend, all caught up close and personal on the giant KnightTron screen, which then zeroed in on the woman. Luckily, the Knights’ mascot had the engagement ring and presented it to the teary-eyed woman. She said yes!

It's easy to see why Vegas has the best home-ice record in the league. The noisy fans, the atmosphere, the musical distractions and the overall constant, drum-beat action give Gallant's team a definite seventh-man edge. The starry-eyed opponents probably need a period or two to find their focus.

In Vegas, plunk down your \$90 for the action. And stay for the game.

- **RJ Currie** of sportsdeke.com: “**Charles Barkley** told **Jimmy Kimmel** he once played a game while completely intoxicated. His stats from the game included three jumpers, two layups and one slam drunk.”
- **Mike Lupica** of the New York Daily News, on the power-packed Yankee lineup featuring **Giancarlo Stanton** and **Aaron Judge**: “They’re not built to break records. They’re built to break windows.”
- **RJ Currie** again: “This Olympics marked the first time ever no Canadian men's or women's curling teams made the podium. In case you were wondering why flags in Canada are at half-mast.”
- Comedy writer **Jim Barach**: “Former 49ers linebacker **Gary Plummer** says he suffered 2,500 concussions in his NFL career. The good news is that now makes him eligible to become the league’s commissioner.”
- **Greg Cote** of the Miami Herald, on the morning of the fourth round of the Honda Classic, where **Tiger Woods** was in semi-contention: “Somebody named ‘**Luke List**’ is the Honda Classic leader at 7-under par entering today's final round at PGA National in Palm Beach Gardens, but nobody cares except Mrs. List.”
- From **Bob Molinaro** of pilotonline.com (Hampton, Va.): “The New York Post asked its readers for nickname suggestions for the power-laden 2018 Yankees. Their Final Four: Judge and Fury, Legion of Boone, Mount Crushmore and Slam Central Station.”
- **Randy Turner** of the Winnipeg Free Press, on Twitter: “**Connor McDavid** playing for the Oilers is like if **Jimi Hendrix** was the lead guitarist for Nickelback.”
- Comedy writer **Alex Kaseberg**: “Oprah said she asked god if she should run for president, and god has not answered back. ‘Hey, it’s the off-season, give me a break,’ said **Tom Brady**.”
- **Dwight Perry** of the Seattle Times: “Canadian cross-country skier **David Duncan** was arrested in South Korea for commandeering an idling car and driving it back to the Olympic Village while drunk. And he might have totally gotten away with it, witnesses say, if he hadn’t stopped to wax his tires.”
- **Randy Turner** again, on the local citizenry going gaga over the rejuvenated NHL Jets: “I haven’t seen this much optimism in Winnipeg since they invented the snowblower.”

Care to comment? Email brucepenton2003@yahoo.ca