

Atlanta's New Falcons and Braves Stadiums

High-Performance Doors for High-Performance Venues

By Jeff Wherry

As the sports fans out there are already aware, there has been a lot of chatter about stadiums in the last several months. The Minnesota Vikings have recently opened their new \$1.1 billion U.S. Bank Stadium in Minneapolis. Los Angeles now has not one, but two NFL teams, the Chargers and Rams, and construction is finally underway on what will become their shared \$2.6 billion stadium. The Oakland Raiders will soon become the Las Vegas Raiders and have released plans for a new stadium projected to cost \$1.9 billion. But Atlanta, Ga. has been the focus of much of the attention with their two new stadiums for the Braves and Falcons.

The Atlanta Braves' stadium, SunTrust Park, is a 41,500-seat baseball stadium that officially opened this past April. At a cost of \$672 million, it is significantly less expensive than many of the other new stadium projects, including the Falcons' \$1.5 billion Mercedes-Benz Stadium, which seats 71,000 and is scheduled to open next month.

While the two stadiums may share the same city, they have dramatically different designs. Located in the northern Atlanta suburbs, the Braves stadium has a classic ballpark feel with modern features such as a rooftop lounge and 1,300 television screens to ensure fans can explore the stadium without missing the action on the field. Its brick exterior allows it to blend seamlessly with the larger mixed-use development area that surrounds it.

By contrast, the Falcons stadium sits in the heart of downtown Atlanta and features some modern design elements that set it apart from the landscape. Among the most striking is the roof, which is divided into eight petals that open and close to create what architects have described as a "camera lens-like" effect. Even more impressive, though less noticeable, are the many green features that have been added, from a 13-acre green space to over 4,000 solar panels that will allow the facility to use seventy percent less energy. It is projected to be the first stadium to receive LEED



Platinum certification and is the first sports facility to pursue several LEED v4 credit strategies, including the Materials and Resources category.

Despite their differences, one key feature both stadiums have in common is their steel doors and frames. With a few exceptions, the doors and frames at both stadiums were manufactured by members of the Steel Door Institute (SDI) and supplied by Southern Door and Plywood.

"We delivered 1,000 frames for the Braves stadium and 1,500 for the Falcons," says Johnny Jones, Vice President/Owner of Southern Door and Plywood. "They specified aluminum doors and frames for the storefront, wood for the high-end suites, and steel for everything else."

Ultra high-use facilities like stadiums have unique design considerations. When it comes to managing hordes of rowdy fans, it's essential to use high-quality building materials that will last. With hundreds or even thousands of openings to secure, stadiums

rely on steel doors and frames to withstand the inevitable abuse from each game's fans – especially when their team loses!

"They went with steel because it's cost effective and durable," says Jones. "The doors installed in places like this have to withstand a lot of abuse, and steel is ideal for that type of environment." Unlike wood, when steel doors get damaged, they can often just be repaired onsite with basic equipment and a little expertise.

In addition to their longevity, steel doors and frames are also playing a key role in efforts to obtain Materials and Resources category credits and achieve LEED Platinum certification for the Falcons stadium. The requirements in this section encourage the use of sustainable building materials and reducing waste on site. Because U.S.-produced steel contains 93.3 percent recycled steel scrap, it has come to be recognized as one of the most sustainable building materials in the world.

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Recognizing the vital role steel is playing in the growing sustainability movement, SDI recently partnered with Underwriters Laboratories Environment to develop the first Product Category Rules for steel doors and frames. These Product Category Rules enable manufacturers to conduct accurate Life Cycle Assessments of their products, which can then be used in the development of the Environmental Product Declarations that may be necessary for building projects like the Falcons stadium to comply with the new LEED v4 requirements.

Of course, using a high quality, sustainable material like steel does not necessarily guarantee a high quality product. Jones says that's why Southern Door and Plywood partners with SDI member manufacturers. "We know what kind of product they'll

produce," he says. "We've dealt with several of them for many years and have a good working relationship because those companies provide a consistent, quality product."

Because of SDI's reputation, it was not uncommon for non-member companies to state that their products met SDI standards and, until recently, there was no easy way to verify their claims. However, to help architects and specifiers ensure these products consistently meet quality standards, the Steel Door Institute has developed a new industry certification—*SDI Certified*. Manufacturers who hold this certification are regularly audited to ensure they meet SDI's manufacturing, performance, and quality standards. By specifying SDI Certified, design professionals can be confident their products will be true to spec and built to last.

By choosing SDI Certified products, stadium owners and managers are assured that the steel doors and frames in their facilities will perform flawlessly at every game, even if the teams on the field do not. And while we don't yet know the details on the new Raiders stadium in Las Vegas, it's a safe bet that people will be using steel doors when they get there.

For more information on SDI Certified, door selection, or other resources for commercial steel doors and frames, visit steeldoor.org. ■



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