



# WNBA IN TULSA

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## Group has deal with BOK Center

• WNBA schedule works well for Tulsa arena.

BY MIKE STRAIN  
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The BOK Center and a group trying to bring a WNBA franchise to Tulsa "have in principle agreed to a deal," BOK Center General Manager John Bolton said in an interview Wednesday.

An investment group led by two Oklahoma City businessmen hopes to bring a WNBA franchise to Tulsa for the 2010 season.

The BOK Center has been in negotiations for about "two or three months," said Bolton, who didn't reveal terms of the deal but said it was comparable to agreements with two other professional sports teams that play home games in the arena.

Bolton said his biggest concern during negotiations was the 17 dates a WNBA franchise would require, and whether those dates would affect scheduling concerts. The BOK Center has attracted big-name acts like Billy Joel and Elton John, Bruce Springsteen and the upcoming Paul McCartney show. Those shows have been a strong source of income for the arena.

One factor that helped ease Bolton's concern was the WNBA's season, which runs from late May through mid-September. Bolton



Police direct traffic outside the BOK Center last year. JAMES GIBBARD/Tulsa World

said major concert tours often play outdoor shows in summer and, "traditionally for arenas, that is our slowest time of year" for them.

The BOK Center pays labor and utility costs when it hosts events. Bolton said a WNBA team would need an average attendance of 5,000 fans per game for the arena to cover its costs on 17 WNBA home dates.

Two minor league professional sports teams are tenants in the BOK Center — the arenafootball2's Tulsa Talons and the Central Hockey League's Tulsa Oilers. The Talons

pay \$15,000 per game in a facility fee to the BOK Center and play almost all their home games on Saturday. The Oilers pay between \$10,000 and \$15,000 per game, depending on the day of the week.

A WNBA team would pay a similar fee, Bolton said.

"It's certainly in that range," he said. "We really couldn't do it for much less than that."

"We didn't want to put the building in position where we negatively affected its financial integrity."

The leaders of the investment

group trying to bring a WNBA team to Tulsa are Oklahoma City businessmen Bill Cameron and David Box. Both became part of the Talons' ownership group before the start of this season.

The potential exists for a conflict of dates between a WNBA team and the Talons. Paul Ross, another member of the Talons ownership group, said Saturday dates are critical to his team.

"We've proven Saturdays are days we definitely need," said Ross, citing attendance of 5,800 per game. "Tell me a minor league sports team (in Tulsa) that pulls fans like we do."

Members of the WNBA investment group are in the process of trying to build a season-ticket base and have Tulsa Mayor Kathy Taylor's help. Last week, the mayor sent an e-mail to BOK Center premium seat holders urging them to support a WNBA franchise; and on Wednesday, she hosted an event at her home trying to gain that support.

The drive to build community support — whether for ownership investors, ticket sales, or corporate sponsorships — could be perceived as a challenge in a sagging economy.

But, Bolton said, the BOK Center hasn't seen a slowdown. "We certainly haven't seen a decline of ticket sales or interest in our shows."

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