HAYWARD'S LAST STRETCH.

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The $8 million renovation of historic Hayward Field is nearing the finish line.

The eight-lane track has been topped with a fresh layer of high-quality polyurethane. The infield was leveled to remove a 3-foot crown and a new drainage system installed. Fresh sod was laid, so grass remains the dominant feature.

The infield layout was reconfigured for side-by-side runways in the pole vault and horizontal jumps. Dual event stations for the high jump and shot put were added to create identical competitive conditions. There's a new hammer cage, a state-of-the-art sound system and a refurbished press area.

Most of the improvements at Hayward Field were deemed necessary to meet the criteria for staging the 2008 U.S. Olympic Track & Field Trials. The 10-day meet begins June 27 and runs through July 6. Only one piece to the puzzle remains - the completion of a futuristic video scoreboard.

Designed by former UO track star Tinker Hatfield, who graduated from Oregon with a degree in architecture and now works for Nike Inc., the eight individual panels that make up the "videoboard" are scheduled to be installed today.

"This is the last major installment to Hayward Field," said Michael Reilly, assistant athletic director at the University of Oregon. "We'll do some other cosmetic things in the spring, but in terms of what people will notice, this is the last big piece."

Once positioned and welded into place, the videoboard will rise five stories into the sky on the south end of the track. It was moved back and angled slightly from where the old scoreboard stood to better face the finish line.

The videoboard - built by Daktronics, a company based in South Dakota - will be supported by two lightning-yellow steel columns, with the screen measuring 30 feet long and 17 feet wide.

"There is no other structure out there that ushers in the new era of Hayward Field like the videoboard," Reilly said.

And that's where the excitement kicks in.

The videoboard and sound system, funded by a $1.5 million donation from Nike, will allow Oregon the opportunity to be creative in presenting track and field in new ways.

Multiple split screens. High-definition video. Live replays during televised meets.

All of those features will be available to augment the usual static information such as lane assignments, event results and running clock. Pre-produced documentaries, focusing on athlete profiles and memorable past moments, will be able to tell the many stories of Hayward Field.

Imagine introductions for the men's 10,000 meters at the Olympic Trials. When UO standout Galen Rupp is announced, his image can be shown on the videoboard with up-to-date information and video highlights from prior races, similar to DuckVision at Autzen Stadium.

"You can really rethink how track and field is presented," Reilly said.

"The key element at Hayward Field will always be the people in the stands and the athletes that are performing there, and the connection that exists between the two. That's the signature piece of Hayward Field, and this, the new videoboard, will be an enhancement to that piece."

One of the bigger challenges for Oregon will be figuring out how to get real-time data from the field into the video pipeline quickly.

"They do it in every other sport," Reilly said. "This videoboard has the capability to do that, and I think we have the people in this community to think creatively about how to do those types of things."

The videoboard is set to make its debut at the UO Preview meet on March 22.

Due to the absence of television, there most likely will be no live camera shots, but Reilly promised more than just results and times. He said the UO production crew would attempt to add video elements with each successive meet.

"This year, our focus is on the Olympic Trials," he said. "So we're working backwards from that. We'll use the videoboard at our home meets, figuring out what makes sense, and then add to each meet as we build up to the Trials."