

Canam has built a reputation as a champion . . . one stadium at a time

In early August, Canam Group Inc. was awarded a \$60-million contract to help design, produce and assemble components for the retractable roof of the new Florida Marlins 37,000-seat ballpark scheduled to open in 2012.

In mid-2006, the Saint-Georges, Quebec-based company, was awarded a \$70-million contract to help build the New York Met's CiTi Field. Two months later, it won a \$40-million contract to help erect the new Yankee Stadium.

And six months after that, Canam Group was awarded a \$100-million contract for the New York Giants and Jets Meadowlands Stadium in New Jersey.

Throw in the Ottawa Senator's Scotiabank Place and Toronto Maple Leafs Air Canada Center arenas and you get the idea. These guys are becoming recognized as being specialists at building major sports complexes. Canam's most recent contract—awarded in October and valued at \$100 million,—is for the design-assist, project management, fabrication and erection of the structural steel and cables for a new retractable roof for Vancouver's BC Place Stadium.

In the last 20 years, Canam has been involved in the construction of structural steel skeletons for 52 stadiums and arenas, 19 of which are home to Major League teams, ranking it among the top builders of professional sports complexes in North America.

But the Florida Marlins' stadium project is an engineering marvel, as the retractable roof's three panels containing more than 8,000 tons of steel will be stored on rails 130 feet above the ground outside the park. It is also the first retractable roof Canam has ever worked on with wide-flange and plate steel making up 90 percent of the structure mainly fabricated in Canam Group's Jacksonville, Fla., Point of Rocks, Md., and St. Gédéon de Beauce, Quebec plants. Deliveries are expected to begin in July 2010 and end in May 2011. The erection work will be completed in August 2011.

The rails that support the roof panels and house the sliding mechanisms will be erected and two platforms will be built between them like a bridge. Then each section of the roof will be assembled and pushed from the platform onto the rails in a controlled movement.

Canam got its start in the arena and stadium business when it was tapped to supply and erect the structural steel bowl of the new TD Banknorth Garden in Boston.

"We've been very active in the Boston area for a number of years, going back to 1994 with the completion of the new TD Banknorth Garden which was our first

major project in the arena area,” explained Luc Pelland, president, Canam Structural Steel.



“Since then, we’ve built a reputation of completing projects on time and on budget. That’s important, because opening day is opening day which can’t be delayed.”

Todd Sutton, senior vice president, of Carteret, N.J.-based Skanska Koch Inc., a major project development and construction firm, seconds that notion. “The reason for Canam’s success is twofold,” Sutton said. “First of all, they use the latest in BIM (Building Information Modeling) technology to get the project modeled, detailed and fabricated according to the client’s needs. Second and most important is they have extremely dedicated and talented people who are intimately involved in the project and constantly strive for perfection.

It’s no wonder that when you look at the number of stadiums and arenas built in this country that their name is at the top of the list.”

Skanska has been involved with Canam on two new stadium projects in the New York/New Jersey area. “The company was our structural steel fabricator on both projects and fabricated over 40,000 tons of steel on time that allowed us to complete the projects safely and on budget,” Sutton said.

Canam deals mostly with mills and not service centers. About 95 percent of its steel comes from the North American operations of Gerdau Ameristeel, Nucor and Severstal.

“We used to import higher grades of steel from Europe, but now it’s available from Nucor in the U.S.,” said Pelland.

With a total of 12 plants in Canada and the U.S., Canam has never had any serious procurement problems, except when there was a steel shortage during the Iraq war.

“We were responsible for the fabrication and erection of the structural steel components for the (28-storey) Cira Center in Philadelphia. We

had to find steel outside of North America, but we still delivered on time," Pelland noted.

Despite the number of stadium and arena contracts the company has won over the years, the sector only accounts for roughly 10 percent of the company's \$850 million in annual revenue, according to Pelland.

And Canam has not escaped the recession, reporting net earnings for the first nine months of 2009 of Canadian \$15 million, compared with C\$34.7 million during the corresponding period in 2008.

Consolidated sales for the first nine months dropped 15.8 percent to C\$476.2 million, from C\$565.2 million a year ago.

But with the recently added BC Place Stadium contract, Canam has a healthy order backlog amounting to close to C\$400 million.

Brian Dunn