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A home run: O's, fans christen new-look Ed Smith Stadium

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SARASOTA -- The Baltimore Orioles celebrated their new look spring training home the way any good baseball team would want.

The Birds smacked three homers in the bottom of first inning and finished with five in the first two innings of their inaugural spring game Tuesday at the newly renovated Ed Smith Stadium.

Baltimore defeated the Tampa Bay Rays 12-6, but to the announced crowd of 7,497 this was more than just a game. It marked a victory for all those who fought to have the old Ed Smith get a face-lift and look like a modern stadium.

The renovated park is more than twice as large, covering 163,246 square feet compared to the old 81,246 square feet. It offers a new left field pavilion, which includes bistro-style tables and drink rails with bar-like seating and three new climate-controlled suites accommodating 20 people each. An air-conditioned Third Base Lounge has been added on the ballpark's second level, providing fans an exclusive climate-controlled interior bar and exterior seating.

"This is great for Sarasota County and the entire surrounding area," Orioles Chairman of the Board/Chief Executive Peter Angelos said.

"I am delighted with the way the project has turned out. We had great expectations and I believe those expectations were lived up to," Angelos said. "We had a great plan, which was to make it worthy of Sarasota, which is a wonderful city. It is very pleasant and very welcoming and I think that the contractors and architects did a wonderful job."

One of the many unique features of the renovated stadium is green seats, which are actually refurbished seats from Camden Yards, the Orioles' major league stadium in Baltimore. They are part of a plan that now allows the stadium to accommodate 8,500 fans.

"We brought in some seats from Camden Yards because we thought that would tie the two together," Angelos said. "We have a lovely ballpark in Baltimore, which is hailed as one of the top baseball parks in the country, and it looks like we might have a winner here also."

The ballpark was designed with Sarasota's unique architectural history in mind, according to Angelos and people involved in the construction.

The thinking behind the design was to make the stadium feel like a neat Florida experience where you could spend the whole day, according to architect David Schwarz, a member of the stadium design team.

"I like the architecture and columns and all the interesting components that are part of the entire structure and reflect Sarasota," Angelos said. "This is a very big day for the entire Baltimore Orioles organization. We are delighted to be here. We couldn't have a better place to locate for spring training."

One of the features inside the ballpark is an Integrated 17-foot-high, 30-foot-wide LED Video, Scoring and Audio System screen that features wide-angle visibility.

The video board can operate as an independent display showing single large images or be divided in multiple zones (windows) to show a wide variety of statistics, information graphics, animations and live recorded video.

The homers on opening day should not be considered just good fortune, Angelos' said.

"With our hitting lineup and team that has been put together, we can expect to have many days like this with all those homers," he said.