

# 3x3 Hustle Games: LED's Re-Create Live Audiences



CREATIVE  
TECHNOLOGY

NEP Live Events



**EVENT:** 3x3 Hustle Games  
**LOCATION:** Australia

**DATE:** May 2020  
**VIDEO:** <https://vimeo.com/424747389>

As sporting events begin to take place behind closed doors, the Australian National Basketball League (NBL), NEP Broadcast and NEP Live Events devised an innovative concept utilising existing assets that had been side-lined due to Covid-19.

Made up of multiple companies across the globe, NEP Live Events worked together as one to share resources and create a bespoke solution for the NBL - a virtual basketball stadium where, instead of fans being seated in bleachers to watch the game, they would appear in rows on LED screens watching from home via video conferencing platforms. The engaging event environment - which is the brainchild of Manny Papas, sales director, NEP Asia Pacific, NEP Australia, with content designed and controlled by Toby Harding of Mediatec - allows players to feed off fan reactions and for fans to see each other, which in turn lifts the atmosphere of the game.

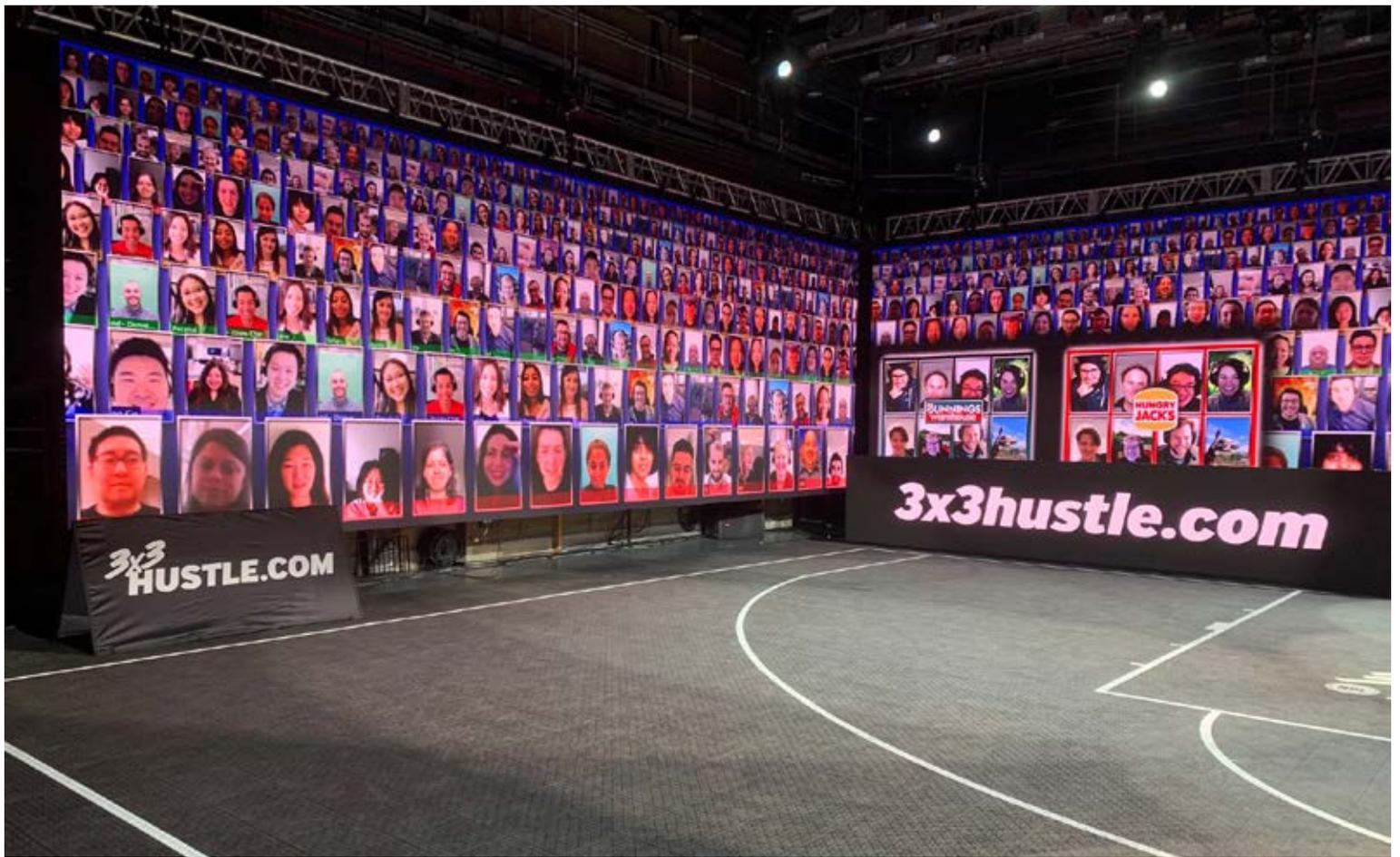
There is also scope for one-on-one fan interactions, virtual corporate boxes and other engagement, while the LED screens provide an opportunity for match graphics, stings,

player information, team branding and sponsorship to be displayed.

The NBL is now looking at using the innovative technology to host 3x3 Hustle games - basketball games featuring three players a side instead of five - for an event ahead of its regular season starting later in the year.

"We were looking for a solution in the event that we were unable to play a regular home and away season without crowds," says Andy Crook, chief operating officer, NBL. "The 3x3 Hustle, with a limited number of players in a Covid-19 environment, was the perfect product to test the technology and what is possible."

One of the other main drivers was to get NEP's team back and working on a project that brings live sport back to audiences around the globe. "The synergies between NEP Broadcast Services and NEP Live Events (Mediatec Asia) under the one group made the planning and resourcing easy. As the Covid-19 situation meant a lot of equipment and personnel were available, we were able to get the project off the ground in a short period of time," says Papas.



## Creating the crowd

The LED display brief was fairly similar to the digital perimeter signage projects NEP Live Events works on for the Australian Open in so far as it involved a seamless wrap of LED 360-degree around the court. In this case it was a half basketball court rather than a tennis court.

The installation of eight ROE Carbon 3 LED screens and Magic Cube 3 panels was overseen by Mediatec head of special projects Tom Hogan and project managed by Mike Judges. The set-up also comprised Brompton Technology processing, disguise gx 2c media servers to drive the screens and Lightware and Ross Ultrix routing, with the outputs mapped over two 4K canvases.

“Achieving fan engagement involved feeding video conference calls into the server as a 3x3 or 3x4 grid which are mapped in turn around the screens in the 3D space,” says Owen Davison, executive director, Mediatec Asia Pacific.

Incorporating live streamed video into as well as out of the system for the fan engagement made the project unique but it also presented challenges early in the development process whilst introducing the video conferencing platform into the environment.

“Initially Zoom was tested, but we found the standard Zoom operation didn’t fit the requirements we needed to manage the callers and implement them into our displays,” says Davison. “We are currently working with developers perfecting a custom solution that gives us more control over how the software platforms behaves.”  
“At the heart of it all though is the sport itself and our job is also to not distract too much from the game, as that is what people want to watch,” adds Papas.

Although NBL has not announced whether the event will run in this way, they would like it to, should circumstances dictate a season behind closed doors. “We certainly are planning on having a full home and away season once the local football seasons are finished. However, we feel we have developed a suitable solution in the event that circumstances don’t allow for a home and away season,” says NBL’s Crook.

“When this option presented itself through our partners NEP, we decided to fully explore it. It’s a great solution that looks good on TV, allows for interaction with crowds and keeps fans and sponsors engaged in the NBL experience as well as providing a quality broadcast experience. If the 3x3Hustle trials work well, it may also provide a long-term solution for the 3x3 Pro Hustle as we seek to establish a place in the market for one of the Olympics newest sports.”



### Adding the energy

While sporting events is an obvious application, the solution has been created for any live event where an audience cannot be present but engagement is essential, meaning it could easily be applied to music or corporate events.

A lot of excitement has already been shown around the possibility of the bespoke creation becoming a platform to allow live sport to occur alongside a live and present audience and planning is in place to apply the concept to a full court concept for either basketball, netball or other sports in a larger studio space.

“Over and above the technical aspects there is a lot for the sporting codes to work out in regard to how a season might work under these conditions, especially operating under the remaining travel restrictions. Visually, the displays add to the energy of the game and it has been very well received by everyone who has seen it,” says Papas.

Dave Crump, CEO, Creative Technology, an NEP Live Events Company, agrees events utilising technology in an inventive way to increase interaction and engagement by creating a virtual audience will have a significant part to play. “As long as there are restrictions on mass gatherings and concern about travel, AV will become an even more essential part of the communication process at events than it already is,” he says.

“And undoubtedly hybrid events will have a significant part to play, enabling smaller groups to congregate on a more

local basis but with dynamic interaction with other groups in other locations achieves many of the objectives whilst minimising travel and making social distancing easier.

Papas and Davison admit that however well the virtual production technology performs it will never be as good as a live event and they both look forward to restrictions being loosened and live events returning. “That said, some aspects of our virtual lives are here to stay and the future is likely to be a hybrid of these virtual and live production elements,” adds Davison. “AR and in-camera video effects currently evolving in film and television are likely to become the norm in live events too.”

