Anytime a team builds a new home it generates buzz within the fanbase. What makes the New York Islanders different is that for as long as I can remember their home ice was a talking point for all the wrong reasons. Throughout my grade school years and into college the Isles called the Nassau Veterans Memorial Coliseum home, which was their original home since their 1972 inception. The issue was, in 1997 a new ownership group acquired the much maligned franchise and part of the sale was re-upping an arena lease that expired in 2015 and the arena was already in disrepair. Many attempts were made to build a new venue that was actually habitable, but Nassau County is where those dreams went to die despite some proposals that wouldn’t have cost the taxpayers a cent.

Finally, the end of the 2014-15 season arrived and the Isles were free of the ball and chain that was the Mausoleum lease. The plan at the time was to pack up and move to the brand new Barclays Center in Brooklyn, but that marriage was doomed from the get go. For starters, the Brooklyn location on paper makes sense for a new home but anyone who’s driven from the suburbs of Long Island to trendy downtown Brooklyn knows it's no picnic. On top of that there was the whole debacle about Barclays not being built for hockey with their obstructed view seats, scoreboard over the blue line, seats at a strange angle and the oddly placed white SUV in one of the corners.

Neither the Islanders nor Brooklyn Sports and Entertainment were happy with their relationship so when the option in the lease came up both sides agreed to a divorce, sort of. The team needed a temporary set up while their new digs were getting built. The temporary set up involved splitting home games between Barclays, which the fans hated, and a renovated Nassau Coliseum, which the league hated due to its capacity of 13,917 being below their standards. The split home rinks came to an end after the 2020 season and they were able to have one last run in their ancestral home in 2021 before the new place opened its doors during the current season.

This season hasn’t gone as hoped for the blue and orange army. After back to back final four trips they were dealt a tricky hand with an early season Covid outbreak on top of an extended road trip to open the season. By the time they found their groove the hill to the playoff picture became too steep to climb. When it comes to how their team is built I have questions about their age, offensive firepower, and how their team is constructed under the cap. But one thing that will not be questioned anymore is the stability and viability of their home ice.

A mere seven miles west of the Coliseum on Hempstead Turnpike on the border of Queens and Nassau County is where UBS Arena was constructed adjacent to Belmont Park. The first thing that struck me about the place is how it's relatively easy to get to. My friend and I drove and it’s immediately off the Cross Island Parkway without having to go down any heavily trafficked main street roads. Additionally, if I was coming from New York City it’s a simple train ride to the place which was much more complicated at the old barn and while you could take the train to Brooklyn, the traffic and the lack of parking made driving a non starter.

There’s a lot to like about the new place. The facade blends in with the neighboring race track which is a nice touch. I also liked the Islanders Hall of Fame plaques on display on the main concourse for everyone to see, in the past that was near the home team locker room. They did a fantastic job of displaying the history of the franchise and trophy winners on the main concourse while upstairs they paid tribute to the many notable people that hail from Long Island. The small detail that’s underrated but also important that I like about UBS is how they designed the concession queues so that it doesn’t impede the flow of foot traffic on the concourses.

With that being said, nothing is without its drawbacks. The biggest of which is the fact that Elmont/Floral Park is a residential area and there are very limited options to dine at before or after the game. Even in Uniondale you could find a few bars or pizza joints to get a good meal, but at the new place you’re pretty much locked into stadium food and paying $17 for a beer. An offshoot of that is Islander fans used to tailgate in the parking lot of the Coliseum, which was part of the whole experience, but it’s prohibited at Belmont.

The current situation with the Arizona Coyotes in a lot of ways is similar to what the Islanders were for many years. Years of unstable ownership combined with less than ideal home ice situations and just being a never ending soap opera can cripple a franchise for decades. John Ledecky and Scott Malkin were the right guys in the right place at the right time and the patience from the fans has finally paid off with a very nice new home and a team that made two unlikely playoff runs in a row. It’s been a while since the Isles had a place they could call their very own, that’s alright now because UBS Arena is their home.