

WSU's turf field in works; possible end zone plaza in planning

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Sun, 05/01/2011 - 8:45pm

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OGDEN -- Weber State's athletic department hopes its new artificial turf football field will be the starting point for another expansion project that will reinvent the Stewart Stadium experience for fans and athletes.

The target date for installation of the field and the surrounding track at Stewart Stadium is July 1, but WSU athletic director Jerry Bovee has another target in mind: Completing a north end zone plaza that will provide a major college football atmosphere along with needed ticketing, concessions, souvenirs and restrooms facilities -- a significant upgrade to the temporary concessions trailers that now surround the field on game day.

"I don't want to lose the momentum," Bovee said. "I'm hoping to get the funds in place in the next six to eight months. I would hope that within two years (by the start of the 2013 football season), we're ready to go on the next phase. More than anything, we want to create an environment that when you come here, you have a great experience."

Crews from Hellas Construction have torn out and hauled off the existing field down to a bare, graded surface that will be the foundation for a green artificial turf surface with the words "Weber State" in purple at midfield. In both end zones, a white "Wildcats" font against a purple background will be flanked by an offset Wildcat head, similar to what is now on the stadium scoreboard. The football field will be framed by a purple border and the entire area will be encircled by a charcoal-colored running track.

Wildcats fans can follow the progress of the field installation by watching a Stewart Stadium webcam online at www.weberstatesports.com.

Bovee hopes the renovations and the next phase -- the north entrance plaza -- will improve the athletic department's curb appeal.

"Our football program, our athletics program, we're like the front porch (for the university) -- you've heard that before," he said. "We need to spruce up the front porch."

Choosing artificial turf over a grass surface allows Stewart Stadium to become a multiuse facility that can accommodate high school games and other events that draw the community to Weber State University, Bovee said.

The plaza will be named after longtime Weber State boosters Robert L. and Annette Marquardt, whose \$1 million donation made possible the artificial turf and track being installed now, along with improved academic resources for WSU's student-athletes.

Weber State has also completed recent renovations in the locker rooms at Stewart Stadium and the team rooms at the Dee Events Center.

The current phase of upgrades came about from a conversation between Bovee, WSU football coach Ron McBride and Robert Marquardt. All the changes are aimed at enhancing recruiting of athletes and improving Weber State's ability to connect with its fan base as well as potential fans, Bovee said.

The Marquardts' gift is just the first step in that process, he believes.

"I had a discussion with a group when I first got the job here about what we could do to get some more exposure and get some more assistance," Bovee said. "I've told this story a lot, but one of the comments I got back was, 'People will take you serious

when you start to take yourselves serious.' We've been in an effort here to start taking ourselves serious. I think we always have, but I really believe that the community will begin to think about Weber State differently. It had to start within -- we had to have a vision for what we wanted the program to be."