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Work begins on soccer field near COT

By MARY PICKETT
Of The Gazette Staff

Sara Gress knows better than anyone why Montana State University Billings needs a new soccer field.

Gress, co-captain of the MSU Billings women's soccer team, sprained her ankle stepping into a hole while playing on the field.

The field, located along Central Avenue at the College of Technology campus, also has a hump in the middle to improve drainage that is so pronounced that players seated on one side of the field can't see the legs of players seated on the other side of the field.

It wouldn't be so bad if the hump actually sluiced most of the water off the field, but it doesn't. "It's a marsh" when it rains, said Andrew Hernandez, who plays on the men's soccer team.



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For information about MSU Billings' new soccer field, contact



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When the field dries out, it hardens into a concretelike slab.

Next spring, things should be much better for the Yellowjackets and many other soccer players around Billings.

Under leaden November skies, ground was broken on a new soccer field on Wednesday. The field will be slightly to the east of the current one.

If the weather cooperates, the only lighted artificial-turf soccer field in the state could be finished well before March, said Don Trentham, MSU Billings' soccer director and women's soccer coach.

The 120-by-72-yard field will be the premier soccer facility in the state with an improved speaker system, windscreen fencing and polycarbonate team shelters, he said.

The field also will have bleachers for 800 fans, an improvement over the old field, which had seating for only about 150 people.

The \$750,000 cost of the field will be borrowed through a Montana Board of Investments Intercap loan and paid off with private money. About \$300,000 has been raised and fundraising continues for the rest, Trentham said.

The synthetic turf is similar to that installed at Daylis Stadium a year ago.

An extensive drainage system under the new soccer field will mean that the turf will remain nearly dry even in wet weather, said Gary Gray, MSU Billings athletic director.

soccer director Don Trentham at 657-2373 or download a [full description](#).

MSU Billings Foundation, 657-2244, is coordinating fundraising for the field.

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MSU Billings men's and women's NCAA Division II soccer teams, which include 50 students, now both practice and play their games on the same grass field.

In addition to the fall competitive play, the teams practice and play in nonchampionship games in the spring.

The constant use and condition of the grass field limits its use by other groups. When the new field is finished, it will be available for youth league, high school and community soccer programs.

During the summer, MSU Billings also has soccer camps attended by more than 200 children.

The new field boosts Billings' growing reputation as a city with top-flight athletic facilities, including the new baseball stadium under construction and the updated Wendy's Field at Daylis Stadium, Trentham said.

Even when the new university field is finished, Billings won't have an overabundance of soccer fields, said Larry Van Atta, president of Magic City Soccer, one of the two major youth soccer leagues in town.

Because the grass soccer complex at Amend Park is used so extensively for games, teams aren't allowed to practice there and must find other places as they can.

Van Atta was among the leaders of the effort to raise money for the new field.

Greg McDonald, whose family runs Wendy's of Montana, also worked on the committee and is sponsoring the new scoreboard.

Other committee members were MSU Billings head men's coach Dan McNally; assistant coaches Ally Stroup and Adam Spinelli; Jim Elliott; Lance Hoskins; Larry Martin; Susan Maier; Shelley Prosiniski; Kevin Luse; and Steve Baum.

Large donors include Bresnan Communications, HKM Engineering, Hardy Construction and US Bank.

In a couple of years, a second phase of improvements at the field may start, Gray said. That would include a building with locker rooms, a training room, restrooms and more bleachers.

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The soccer field is one of three major construction projects under way at the College of Technology.

A new \$11 million, 48,000-square-foot health sciences and general education building is expected to be done in January.

A \$175,000 project to replace a deteriorating entrance road into the college and move it to the east so it aligns with 38th Street West across Central Avenue has started. The realignment will allow a traffic light at that busy intersection in the future. The project's cost is being paid for through parking and building fees.

Contact Mary Pickett at mpickett@billingsgazette.com or 657-1262.

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