

Lane Community College replaces eyesore track with ‘front door’

A \$2.5-million upgrade to Lane Community College’s track gives Titans a facility they’re more than happy to show off

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The lanes were badly deteriorated, the infield was a boggy mess and the total package was so embarrassing for Lane Community College’s Grady O’Connor, he wouldn’t even bring recruits down to the LCC track bowl to show off their potential home venue.

Not anymore.

Thanks to a 2008 voter-approved \$83 million bond measure, the track received a \$2.5 million upgrade during the offseason to make it usable — and safe — again. A new \$1.1 million turf soccer field, which made its debut last fall, was also built at the same time behind Lane’s baseball field.

“Every day I pinch myself when I’m out there,” said O’Connor, the director of men’s and women’s track and field, who is in his 13th year at Lane.

The Titans will officially break in their remodeled venue Saturday when they host the Lane Preview, featuring Northwest Christian University, Willamette University, College of the Siskiyous and Southwestern Oregon Community College.

It will be the first home meet for the Titans since 2005.

“That’s when we shut the old track down,” O’Connor said. “It had seen its last days. It was basically unusable for six months out of the year, from November to April.”

It wasn’t much better during the other six months either.

O'Connor would often send his sprinters and distance team to the track at South Eugene High School for training because the lanes at the old track, last resurfaced in 1996, were too hard and uneven, while sinkholes pockmarked the infield. Not to mention, there was also an issue with some local wildlife.

"We have a Canada geese problem at Lane," O'Connor said. "So you can imagine 300 geese living the winter on the infield. It was, um, a little gross."

Now the venue is anything but.

On the infield, the old grass was torn out and Field Turf put down, with a pair of shot put sectors, two lanes and four pits for horizontal jumps, two lanes for pole vaulting and clearly marked areas for the javelin and discus.

On the track, the lanes were widened (lane 3 is now where lane 8 previously was) and the turns reshaped.

"Most tracks in the United States are built around football fields and they have these long straights and tight corners and narrow lanes," O'Connor said. "That's how our (previous track) was built. You want bigger, wider, sweeping turns such as Hayward Field and the international tracks that are built around soccer fields."

The BSS 2000 track surface, considered to be the fastest in the world, was installed as a full pour, instead of in layers, and yes, the color of the surface remains Titan Blue.

And the whole remodel, which also included a scoreboard and lights installed on the berms above the track, was all built to IAAF specs.

"Outside of Hayward Field, we honestly feel we have the second-best facility in the Northwest," O'Connor claimed. "Our runway length, our shot put sectors, the width of our lanes, are all built so Olympic athletes feel comfortable here and collegiate meets would want to come here."

The facility will definitely get a workout this spring. After six years of not seeing any action, the LCC track will be bustling with meets.

The Titans will host the Northwest Athletic Association of Community Colleges multi-event championships May 2-3; the Southern Region championship meet May 14; the Southwest Conference district meet May 11, 13; and this summer, when Hayward Field is being resurfaced, the weekly Oregon Track Club all-comers meets will move to Lane.

The infield also doubles as a turf field for other sports and, along with the new soccer field, has been actively booked for other sporting events.

"Having a facility like that at our disposal is phenomenal," Lane athletic director Greg Sheley said. "Track and soccer, are both lighted, turf facilities and community groups are already using our facilities. People are coming onto our campus that wouldn't normally come onto our campus. They're getting exposed to our campus."

Both fields are also considered outdoor classrooms and are available for use by the LCC student body.

"The number of classes that we are now able to offer year-round, especially with this enrollment boom, is great," Sheley said. "We can now have a soccer class during the winter term, we can have a

flag football class during the winter term, we can have other classes out there where normally the field would be under two inches of water.”

Or worse, thanks to the geese, who now make their home on the empty grass field between the track and soccer fields.

“The old track was just a black eye to be honest,” O’Connor said. “It was not something we wanted to showcase. Now, it’s our front door. It’s the first thing we want to show kids.”