



To print this article open the file menu and choose Print.

<< [Back](#)

Eagles have big plans for stadium

Soccer facility will host many levels of talent

By Craig Handel

chandel@news-press.com

Originally posted on June 11, 2007

When it's finished, Florida Gulf Coast University's soccer stadium won't just be the home for the Eagles' men's and women's teams.

Officials and coaches in the soccer world said that FGCU's field could also play host to European and Major League Soccer teams. Additionally, the facility could entertain national youth teams and tournaments, high school tourneys, NCAA Division I play and maybe even the College Cup, soccer's equivalent of basketball's Final Four.

"I would put it up there right now with any facility in Florida," said Bob Butehorn, FGCU's men's soccer coach. "If it's not the best, it's one of the best."

There are a number of reasons why this area has a chance to draw all levels of soccer talent and matches.

- The surface of FGCU's field will be Celebration Bermudagrass.

Used on a number of athletic fields, it's a hybrid cultivar of Bermuda grass developed in Australia. It requires less mowing than typical bermudagrass varieties and has tough runners, rhizomes, and deep roots that provide excellent sod strength, wearability and improved drought tolerance.

It was was rated No. 1 for wear and overall turf quality by a North Carolina State University study.

"It was recommended to us by a lot of different people," Butehorn said. "We flew to Philadelphia and looked at the Eagles' surface."

Butehorn said artificial turf was considered, but that it retains heat, wouldn't attract top college soccer teams and also could be used as a recruiting ploy against FGCU.

"It's a huge issue, especially in the South," he said.

FGCU women's soccer coach Jim Blankenship said: "It's like playing on a golf course."

• We have expanded coverage of athletics on our Web site, including: reader forums, story archive, photo galleries, essential information for fans, and status reports on every team.

DELIVERING YOUR WORLD

- [Subscribe to The News-Press](#)
- [Place a classified ad](#)
- [Printer friendly version](#)
- [Email this article](#)

..... ADVERTISEMENT

- Seating capacity is scheduled to be 3,500, with most of that covered.

"It'll be good, rain or shine," Butehorn said.

There also will be lighting and an electronic scoreboard. FGCU athletic director Carl McAloose said that \$2 million is currently projected for the stadium.

That means that the overhang shown in artist renderings may be put on hold until naming rights are taken care of.

Most Division I programs have seating for 1,500 to 2,500, with Top 20 programs ranging from 4,000 to 6,000, according to Maryland men's soccer coach Sasho Cirovski, who also is head of the NCAA Division I men's selection committee.

"There's no question when Bob goes out and tries to get teams to play there that will help," Cirovski said. "I won't consider going to a place if it's not up to standard."

Cirovski said the College Cup hasn't found its own Omaha, Neb. — home of baseball's College World Series — so the committee is always looking at sites for its big December event. This fall, the College Cup will be in Cary, N.C., in a stadium that has a seating capacity of 6,200. Berm seating that will raise that to 9,000.

Cirovski said that if temporary seating could be brought in to raise the capacity to between 8,000 and 13,000, FGCU could be the host someday.

"One distinct advantage they have is weather," Cirovski said. "We've talked to places like Disney World, where there's not enough seating capacity and Lockhart Stadium (in Fort Lauderdale), which is too big.

"When they get that brand-new facility in the Greater Naples area, we would consider it. It's a little ways off, but if they're serious ..."

- Weather also is a key in bringing European and MLS teams here. Butehorn said European teams like to take a winter break in December for 2-4 weeks, while MLS teams are looking at sites in February and March. MLS teams have trained and played exhibition games in Tampa, Fort Lauderdale, Bradenton and Sunrise.

"We're always looking for opportunities in the spring season," said Dave Kasper, D.C. United's technical director who oversees player personnel for the MLS team. "We're looking for good facilities. If we can tie in an exhibition game, that's like icing on the cake."

Kasper also said there have been tournaments involving three or four teams in Charleston, S.C., as well as different places in North Carolina. Next year, Disney will be on the docket. Crowds have ranged from 3,000 to 8,000.

"We're always looking for new places," Kasper said. "Guys like new areas. It's great for local soccer and, from our standpoint, it's all about branding soccer and branding D.C. United."

- Players also like new things, and the soccer stadium will be built at the same time as a building that will house the baseball and softball teams, as well as the soccer squads. Construction on the 20,000-square-foot, two-story facility has already begun.

Butehorn said he's also talked to the executive director of the Florida Youth Soccer association to get some high-profile events, as well as prep matches. "We can easily use it all year round," he said.

"The potential is unlimited to so many things," said Blankenship said. "We feel it's going to be a world-class stadium."

"Bob and I will make decisions to help us first. If we can showcase it and get events and students on our campus, it can help us with recruiting. We hope we can have the luxury of what we can pick and choose."

<< [Back](#)