New Osborne Field dedication ceremony today

Alan Hancock baseball coach Chris Stevens and Hancock Athletic Director Kim Ensing on the new John Osborne Field which is set to open at the end of the month.

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It has been years in the making, but the Allan Hancock College project to build a new baseball stadium is nearly complete.

Using money from the Measure I Bond, voted in by the community in June of 2006, which allocated a $160 million fund for general facilities improvements, technology upgrades and infrastructure replacements, the college has completed a brand new John Osborne Field. The new facility will be re-dedicated Saturday with a ceremony followed by an alumni game.

Located across from the main campus on College Street and right next to the Hancock softball complex, the construction of the new John Osborne Field was a joint effort that needed several steps to get the project going.

“Our department had preliminary allocation to improve some of the things in our building," Hancock athletic director Kim Ensing explained during a visit to the new field recently. "Our department agreed that since state funds do not support outdoor facilities, we asked that the allocation from the bond go to help our fields.

“So fast forward to needing to build a new IT building, which has to go in the footprint of our current track — which we obviously needed a new one anyway."

The old running track had fallen into complete disrepair, but the school had to wait until the opportune time to replace it.

“The leading domino of the entire fields project was re-locating baseball,” Ensing continued. “The (original) baseball field was supposed to be a temporary facility anyway.”

With the new Industrial Building coming up on the projects list, there became a need to remove the track and install a new one. So the plan was for the baseball field to be moved across the street, then to build an all-weather track in its place, parallel to the pool and men’s locker room, install a football practice field inside of the track and build a pair of soccer fields.

The project has been a collaborative effort in which Ensing and baseball coach Chris Stevens have had a strong voice.

“We had a lot of latitude in where to put the fences, the dugouts, putting the batting cages like that,” Stevens explained. “Basically when you got the architectural plans, you sit down with a red marker and highlighter and adjust things.

“The district, along with our architect, was very accommodating working with Kim and me, not only on baseball, but all the other athletic fields that Kim has worked on. I think they are trying to use our backgrounds in athletics to make sure it’s conducive for our use.”

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Stevens was extremely pleased at the space now available.

"Across the street we had tight foul territories, tight bullpens, tight batting cages and didn’t have much room to grow," he said. "Part of the design was to make sure we had plenty of elbow room."

The outfield dimensions are the same to the corners (320) and center field (390), but the power alleys were expanded to 370. The foul territory is larger, the batting cages and bullpens are all much larger and the dugouts are each twice the size as the old field.

"And the fence is higher, it’s an eight foot high fence as opposed to the six or seven foot fences we had," Stevens said.

Facing in a new direction, left field is pointed north and right field is pointed east. Before left field was aiming south with right field headed toward the west, where the wind usually blew in towards the plate. The wind will now be blowing out to right and center.

"Primarily it will be blowing out," Stevens said. "I’m real curious to get some batting practice in here because I don’t know how the ball will travel.

"I don’t know if it will be a doubles park, will the grass play fast, will it travel well where we will have more home runs. We have to wait until we get out here and I can’t wait for that day actually."

While the field is beautiful and laid out much to the specifications set by Stevens, there are still items to be completed that were not available in the Measure I budget.

"There are still things we will have to garner support for," Ensing said. "We have the bare necessities, but there are things we still need.

"We’d like to have stadium seating for baseball and softball, we’d like to have permanent bathrooms and we are still uncertain in how we are going to solve that hurdle."

Ensing believes that through the generosity of the annual Joe White Dinner, some funds will help fill in the needs at baseball and softball, as well as the incoming athletic facilities. But for now, Ensing and Stevens are looking forward to the season getting underway in the new facility. Although Stevens had a bigger picture to paint.

"The bigger picture is this whole campus is going through a major transformation," Stevens said. "If you were to walk on this campus three years ago and then somehow disappear and come back three years from now, it will look completely different.

"Not only the placement of the athletic facilities, but all of the new buildings — there will be new roads throughout the campus, new parking lots — it’s a complete transformation that I think the entire community will look at and be proud of."

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