



Sports

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Van Sickle leads LCWM
to victory over Cleveland



MSU proposes upgrade to athletic facilities

Outcome of \$21.7 million plan hangs on student referendum

By Robb Murray
Free Press Staff Writer

MANKATO — By March, Minnesota State University students could face a most difficult decision: Should they or should they not, in a time of rising tuition and textbook prices, add up to \$155 to their annual bill in the name of premium outdoor athletic facilities?

Athletics officials spent Monday briefing upper-level administrators and student leaders on an ambitious, \$21.7 million plan to add a series of fea-

tures to the athletic landscape. But it's all contingent on a student referendum. Athletics and campus recreation officials say they want the students' approval before pursuing something this big, and another proposal will be made to the student Senate on Wednesday.

"I think everybody would agree this would be a significant improvement to campus facilities," MSU director of athletics Kevin Buisman said. "I think now, everyone will look at the investment and what it will mean to them personally. I think

(campus leaders) were impressed with the scope of the project and see that it will impact nearly every student on campus."

Buisman expects that there will be a request for open student forums in the next few months, and there will be meetings with various student groups, trying to build support for the project.

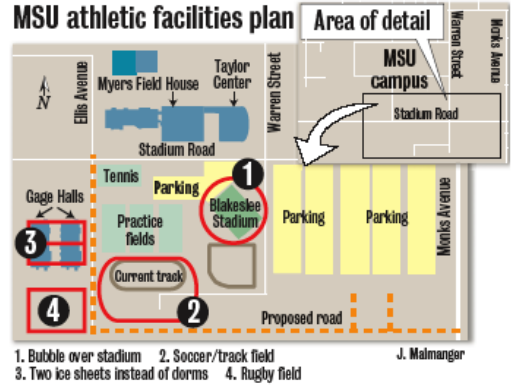
If the proposal passes, construction would begin soon, and some of the new features — such as the plan to install synthetic turf at Blakeslee Stadium

— could be in place by the time the Minnesota Vikings return for summer training camp.

"The real push is not from the athletic side, contrary to what some people might believe," said Todd Pflingsten, director of campus recreation. "The real push is from the campus recreation side."

Among the project's highlights:

- Three lighted softball fields, two lighted flag football fields, new rugby pitch, new lights on the soccer field, renovations to lacrosse field. It would be, in



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Pflingsten's words, "a little Caswell."

■ New stadium for soccer and track and field. It would include a lighted, all-weather, nine-lane track with a combination football/soccer field inside. The stadium would include seating for 1,500, and would be built where the existing track facility is. It would allow MSU's track and field team to have home meets, which they haven't had for several years.

"That track is so poor," Pflingsten said. "It's basically condemned."

■ On of the current football practice fields would be converted to a soccer pitch. The varsity women's field would be relocat-

ed to football practice field three, the one nearest the Gage towers.

■ Synthetic turf would be installed at Blakeslee, and a bubble would be installed over the stadium, allowing it to be used 12 months per year and ease the busy schedule at Myers Fieldhouse. Another bubble would cover the tennis courts near the football practice fields.

■ When the Gage towers come down, a \$10.5 million student ice facility with two rinks would go on that site. Plans call for the women's hockey team to play games at one of the rinks, which would include seating for 1,500. The facility would eliminate the university's reliance on All Seasons Arena, expand youth hockey options and eliminate

the need for campus recreations hockey teams to pay for their own ice time, which is well over \$100 per hour.

Athletics officials have stressed that the upgrades are not just for intercollegiate athletics. Just as important, they say, are the potential benefits for the student body at large, particularly those who participate in intramural activities.

At a presentation before the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities Board last week, MSU President Richard Davenport said nearly half of all students at MSU are involved in some form of campus recreation.

Pflingsten said that number is actually closer to 60 percent. In 1999, between 30 and 40 per-

cent of students were involved in campus recreation. The new goal is to push the number to 80 percent. The new facilities, he said, will help them push the participation numbers higher.

In 1999, there were 21 intramural flag football teams. Last year there were 50. In 1999, there were 27 intramural softball teams. Last year, there were 81.

Even with increasing participation, Pflingsten says he knows a referendum isn't a slam dunk.

"Look at the rising cost of tuition and fees," he said. "We're asking for them to make an investment in their health and in their fitness."

"We want to be better than what we currently are, and we want to be the best possible institution in our region."