



Advancing Athletics

An inside look at Nordonia Schools' comprehensive outdoor sport facilities improvements

By Jay E. Jesensky | Images courtesy of ADA Architects

ADA Architects

In 2004, the Nordonia Hills City School District unveiled its master plan for a comprehensive outdoor athletic facilities improvement with one goal in mind: creating an investment for the community. Through a series of meetings, committee assessments, levy passage and hard work, the \$6.5 million, Phase I of a three-phase project has been completed.

Considering the original Bolantz Stadium was erected in the 1960s as the high school's football field, the original facilities planners could never have anticipated not only the growth in the community but school sports programs overall. Currently there are over 1,000 athletes utilizing the District's outdoor athletic facilities throughout the year. Coupled with a lack of funding for maintenance pro-

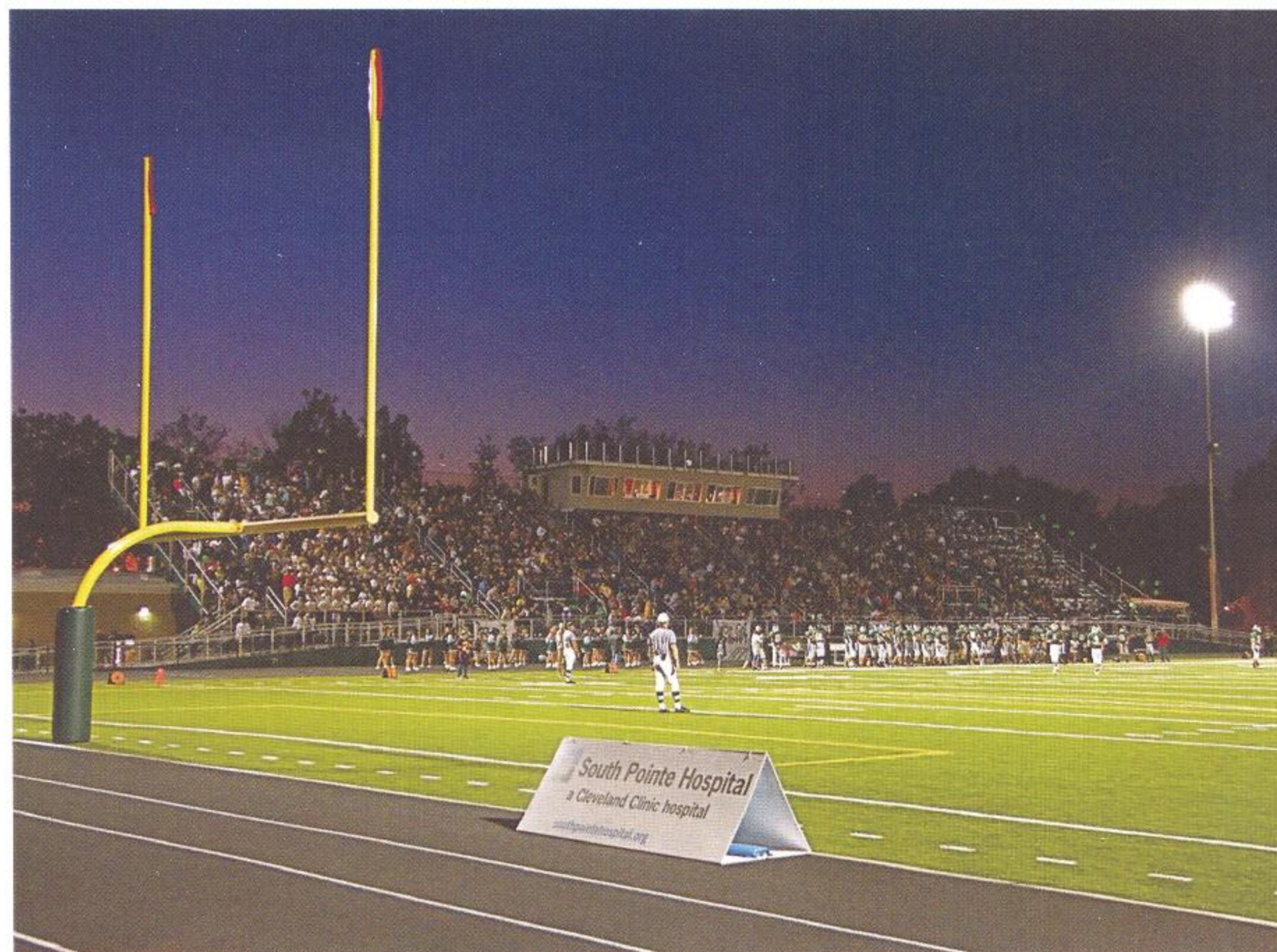
grams and increasing usage over the years, time took its toll on the facilities to the point where the facilities had to be replaced.

But the football stadium was not the only facility in need of repair. Practice fields utilized land not appropriately graded for their use, baseball fields had been cobbled together over the years from various funding efforts and lacked a cohesive design and the

tennis court surfaces had fissured so badly that tennis balls literally got swallowed into the cracks.

The deteriorated field also produced an operational hardship for not only the students but the administration as well.

In order to keep the fields in shape for game day, teams were bussed to alternate locations for practices and scrimmages, not to mention the



ACTIVE IMPROVEMENTS The project includes an Olympic-quality track surface (top), professional athletic turf and goal posts (middle) and a state of the art lighting system (bottom). The scoreboard (right) will eventually feature an instant replay TV, once funding is in place.

marching band, which had to practice on a nearby parking lot.

Time had come for an intervention and District officials acted accordingly.

Addressing needs

Considering the fact that the District was looking at the daunting task in having to replace all of their athletic facilities, the administration created the Outdoor Facility Task Force. The committee was formed in 2004 and included both members of the school administration and parents alike. The committee met on a regular basis and explored numerous possibilities for resolving their outdoor athletic facility issues. A milestone in the committee's efforts was when ADA Architects was commissioned in 2004 to start the initial planning and design of the new facilities. However, it became increasingly clear that the committee's work could not be compressed into a finite timeline but would need to continue as the project unfolded. As ADA's planning services commenced, the District's needs and available resources dictated that the project would have to be phased in, thus creating the need for multiple funding sources, a long-term communications strategy and careful implementation of the new construction.

As a result, the District regrouped and formed three separate committees in 2008 to address the long-term issues. An Alternative Resource Committee was tasked with identifying the strategies to raise the necessary funds needed to make the project a reality. A Communication Committee identified the best practices to share the information about the project with the community. Lastly, a Facility Planning Advisory Committee was responsible for assessing the overall project from multiple perspectives including bal-



FORWARD PROGRESS As part of the athletic facility upgrades, the new football stadium includes separate locker rooms and concession stands for both home and visiting teams, low maintenance aluminum bleachers and a new press-box.

ancing the needs with the available funding and integrating both into a feasible timeline.

Taking on challenges

To appreciate the challenges the District had before them, one must understand that the high school facilities had no excess land from which to expand into. In order for new facilities to be constructed, either the old ones had to be demolished and new ones built in their place or the new facility had to be built on land currently occupied by another sport and that sport displaced until its new facilities could be built. However, the sports programs could not be interrupted. In order to allow construction to take place, a phased implementation program was created that not only took into consideration the sports season, but the weather as well. While some work could take place in the winter, allowances had to be made to accommodate growth of the new plantings before students could use the fields. The result was a fairly complicated shell game where the football stadium and

tennis courts were built on the former baseball fields, baseball fields were temporarily relocated to areas designated for practice fields while the old stadium was demolished to accommodate their reconstruction and finally parking lots and soccer fields in filled the remaining area.

However, the first challenge prior to any construction activity dealt with the site's inhabitants: bats! The U.S.

In order to allow construction to take place, a phased implementation program was created that not only took into consideration the sports season, but the weather as well.

Army Corps of Engineers mandated that the District conduct an Indiana Bat survey through the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to ensure this endangered species was not present. Mostly found in the eastern and Midwest states, regulations prevent disturbing these bats during their nesting season, and as a result the survey delayed the

start of construction. Fortunately, the Indiana Bat species was not found on site. But, in a defiant stance against taking their former home for the athletic facilities, one bat was observed hanging from a canopy above an entrance door to the athletic wing the day after the trees were cut down. All is well now as the bats have migrated to alternative nesting areas.

Although an extensive geotechnical survey was conducted, just as the first shovel hit the ground for the new football stadium, bad soils were encountered and threatened not only the projects schedule but the construction budget as well. Ultimately, while there was a two-month delay in the schedule, due to creative value engineering by the projects contractor, JTO Construction, costs were kept to a minimum and the stadium construction carried on to meet the original deadline.

The result of an U.S. Army Corps of Engineers mandated survey, various pockets of wetlands were found on site. Fortunately mitigation proved to be fairly easy but added to the complexity

of the jurisdictional approval process. The approval process alone for the mitigation plan took in excess of six months to complete.

The final challenge was storm water management. Being that the redevelopment's area is bisected by an environmentally protected stream, once again, numerous approvals from various agencies had to be obtained. Additionally, the City of Macedonia's latest storm water management guidelines applied to the project. It was clear that the site would become a poster child for the City as it was going to exhibit features of virtually every storm water regulation the City has in their code.

The baseball parking lot and the emergency access drive around the stadium were installed using grass pavers to help limit storm water runoff. Pervious asphalt pavement was used in all new parking areas around the stadium, which allows the storm water to enter the subsurface detention areas located under the north and south ends of the stadium and under the new tennis courts. By doing so, this will help recharge the ground water and cut down the amount of storm water run off entering the stream. Infiltration trenches and landscaped bio-swales were also installed on the site to help recharge the ground water and cut down the amount of storm

water run off from entering the stream. Lastly, riparian setbacks had to be closely followed to protect the integrity of the stream.

Construction at last!

Despite the financial and physical challenges during the course of the project, the end result is that phase I was completed on time for a grand opening football game in August 2010.

The project boasts an Olympic quality track surface, professional athletic turf and goal posts, separate locker rooms and concession stands for both home and visiting teams. Along with the new stadium low maintenance aluminum bleachers and press-box, a state of the art lighting system was also installed which will cut operating costs and light pollution by 50%. The scoreboard will eventually feature an instant replay TV, once funding is in place.

Along with the stadium and track improvements new tennis courts were constructed and are located where the baseball infield was used to be located. An additional 500 parking spaces were also constructed for patron usage.

When funding becomes available for phases II and III, varsity baseball and softball fields will be located on the site of the old stadium. Two new soccer fields will also be constructed on the site of the varsity softball fields.

"The project was completed approximately \$87,000 under budget and we will put that savings toward the next two phases of construction which is estimated at \$3.3 million," says Tom Hartman, Nordonia Hills School District's business director.

"We are also thrilled to have been selected by the Ohio High School Athletic Association to host a Division IV Football play off game, which further proves that we have had a very successful project and one to be proud of." **P**

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Congratulations!

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