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TOPICAL

ALERT

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Norman fields to be larger with better drainage and lighting

By Joy Hampton | Senior Staff Writer 2 hrs ago



Norman Youth Soccer Association Complex Director Steve Gillis talks about Norman Forward improvements currently under at the soccer complex as City Project Manager Matt Hendren looks on Thursday.

Joy Hampton / The Transcript



NORMAN — Field by field, Norman's soccer complex is being updated.

The plan was established by residents serving on an ad hoc committee to oversee the use of designated Norman Forward sales tax funds.

The Norman Youth Soccer Association, which cares for the fields at Griffin Park, invited city leaders including Mayor Lynne Miller and Ward 8 council member Alex Scott for a project site visit to see the work in progress on Thursday morning.

“All the original field construction was done back in the early 80s and the preference was to build crowns into the field,” said Norman Parks Director Judd Foster. “It’s like you would see on a typical football field with drainage in all directions. That isn’t the best configuration now for soccer play, especially.”

The Norman Youth Soccer Association has 3,000 total registered players in recreation leagues, academy leagues and competitive leagues. Last year the organization gave out \$85,000 in scholarships. By upgrading a field or two at a time, Norman is allowing kids to continue playing without interruption.

So far, existing fields are being graded and leveled with improved drainage. Lights are being added or moved. Because the outdated steep crowns created ditches that flooded during rains, the new fields are more spacious and families won’t be circumventing huge wet spots along sidelines to watch their kids play.

Foster said upgrade will also allow for more versatility in how fields are used, whether it’s to divide them into small units for the youngest players or to host a competitive level tournament.

Eventually, new fields will be added, but that’s a ways down the timeline. First, the adult softball fields currently at Reaves Park will be moved to a site on east Robinson Street not far from the city’s water plant. Next the baseball fields at Griffin Park will be moved to Reaves Park which will allow for the additional soccer fields.

“We can do this in bits and pieces,” Foster said. “All of the programs will continue running.”

Mayor Lynne Miller said the agreements are in place as longterm leases to allow the projects to move forward.

“We’re excited that we’re getting the Norman Forward projects under way,” said NYSA Complex Director Steve Gillis. “It will help with Norman Youth Association’s growth in recent years. We have so many recreational players, we use every inch of the place all of the time.”

Gillis said Norman Forward improvements will help get more recreational players involved in multiple sports and will keep them active.

“It will also help us host more tournaments,” Gillis said. “In previous tournaments, we've had to turn teams away.”

Tyler Hardridge, former Norman High girls soccer coach said Norman's youth program is crucial to player development.

“I think that players who start at the recreational level and come through the program get great development and are trained thoroughly,” Hardridge said. “When they come to high school, they're ready to play at a high level which can lead to opportunities to play at college or beyond.”

Hardridge said high school and club play work together to provide more exposure for athletes hoping to play at the college level.

“I think the boys and girls in our program have lots of opportunity because of how well the club is doing and get seen by lots of colleges,” Hardridge said.

Much has been said about the economic benefits of bringing more soccer tournaments to Norman, but from a quality of life perspective, the potential for Norman players to earn college scholarships might be worth taking into consideration.

According to The Chronicle of Higher Education, soccer — especially women's soccer — is one of the college level sports that continues to grow.

From the 2007-08 year until 2016-17, Division 1 schools offering soccer programs stayed fairly consistent with only one university dropping its mens program. Across all colleges, men's programs saw an 8 percent increase growing from 1,310 programs in 2007 to 1,415 in 2016.

Growth was more dramatic in women's soccer. From 2007-08 to 2016-17, Division 1 women's soccer programs increased from 318 to 327 and for all colleges that number grew by 11.6 percent, increasing from 1,408 in 2007 to 1,572 in 2016.

The NCAA reported that of the 450,234 young men who play high school, 5.5 percent or 24,986 kids will go on to play at a NCAA college in either Division I, II or III.

For the 388,339 young women playing high school soccer, 7.1 percent or 27,638 will go on to play NCAA college sports, while [scholarshipstats.com](#) reports that of those 388,339 high school female soccer players, 9.3 percent or 36,251 will play at some college level.

Looking at the top four women's sports — basketball, softball, soccer and volleyball — high school soccer players have the best odds of continuing to play in college according to [scholarshipstats.com](#).

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SUN

MON

TUE

WED

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7

8

9

10

11

Lucid Mix Series curates Delektronidisco

Bison Witches

Joy Hampton

My passions include yoga, running, swimming, cycling, hiking, nature photography and a love of animals and the natural environment.

