

D2 ADA



Kim Pate

Lenoir-Rhyne University
Director of Athletics

The Facilities Arms Race – How Do You Ever Catch Up?

As athletics directors, I think we all feel the inherent pressure to either keep up or catch up with the never-ending facilities arms race. I'm constantly tracking on the latest and greatest trends with facility development. The challenge is how we prioritize everyday needs versus embarking on an exciting transformational project that could set us apart from our competition.

Like many of my colleagues, when I took over as the AD at my institution, I stepped into a situation that presented some unique facility challenges. We have 22 varsity sports with the majority of our facilities being dated. Some would say that gives them character while we all know that today's recruits are looking for new, modern, branded, state-of-the-art DI caliber facilities that some have come to expect even at the high school level.

Out of the gate, I wanted to address a few obvious areas for improvement and experience an early win for the department. We set out to renovate our gymnasium lobby which serves as the entrance and first impression for recruits visiting campus. It had a classic 1960's feel. We completely transformed the space with paint, wall graphics, and branding. This small project made an immediate impact on our department as it established a more professional image and incorporated some big-time college elements via branding with minimal investment.

Next, we got to work on developing a strategic plan for the athletics department that outlined future facility needs. Strategic planning is time-consuming and not near as exciting as turning over dirt, but it's a necessary step in the process. It's vital to get everyone on the same page, most importantly your president. Out of our planning process, we identified that we were missing a 'wow' factor for athletics. We had a solid base of facilities across the spectrum but nothing that served as a flagship venue for every coach to showcase. We wanted a marquee facility that would position us at the top of Division II and would benefit all sports.

Given our need for a larger weight room, we launched a campaign to build a new sports performance center that included a weight room, turf training area, nutrition bar, team

meeting space, and an enclosed pavilion. We left nothing to the imagination to make this a special facility including top-of-the-line flooring, equipment, branding, AV equipment, furniture, etc. This project turned out better than we could have imagined and has been a game-changer for our athletics programs. Every head coach raves about the tremendous impact this facility has had on their recruiting and student-athlete experience.

We still have a lot of work to do on our facilities as a whole, yet I think we have made up some ground in the arms race by prioritizing the development of a signature facility that demonstrates our commitment to the student-athlete experience while positioning ourselves apart from our competition; of course, until someone else inspires the next generation sports performance center concept.

D2 CCA



Tom Daeger

GMAC
Commissioner

The Great Midwest Athletic Conference (GMAC), as do many NCAA Division II conferences, hosts a number of championship events at neutral site venues. It is a tremendous opportunity to engage communities within our respective footprint and create a unique experience for the student-athletes, coaches and spectators.

Establishing a quality experience for the students is our league's number one priority, and with the right venue, this goal can be achieved. Identifying the perfect neutral site venue and community partner, however, is critical in delivering that championship experience.

There are a number of factors that are evaluated by our members as we identify if a neutral site venue is the right setting for an event, including location, community, staffing, and external support. However, the primary concern with any neutral site event is ensuring the facility

provides the playing surface, dimensions, and supporting amenities that will contribute to the positive experience. This includes meeting NCAA playing rules, proper locker room space, and ample press box space for personnel. The competitive equity of the facility for both participating teams is something that is taken very seriously.

It can be a challenge to find that perfect venue to meet these facility needs, and often in our research, we identify great facilities and venues that may fall short in a requisite criterion. That may be a community stadium that did not consider potentially hosting collegiate events in planning and development stages with a pristine surface for soccer that is not wide enough to meet the NCAA playing width. Or perhaps a great facility that falls short of locker room space for multiple teams should a tournament be conducted.

These notes are certainly no discredit to the facility, as a third-party event was not their priority in planning, but it does place a premium on facilities that can accommodate a conference championship event. It makes it special when the right neutral site facility can be identified, and our conference has been fortunate to connect with several of these venues in the Midwest. It has also been evident in our planning for future

events, that a number of new venues in the region are coming online that have taken great care to ensure their venues are versatile in creating hosting opportunities for conference events, regional competitions and national championship bids.

In addition to the focus on the facility, our successful conference championships have been enhanced by a significant commitment from the venue staff, local organizing committee, or community as a whole. As a Division II conference, it is essential that we find the right community to host the event and assist in ensuring our student-athletes feel welcome. This aids significantly in the overall experience they have while competing and ensures our staff has a strong network of support.

Over the initial eight years of the league's championship offerings, the Great Midwest has conducted neutral site championships in a variety of sports. Additionally, we have partnered with fellow Midwest Region conferences to also conduct a number of conference crossover events. When the right facility is available, and the support provided by the community is there, these neutral site events ultimately create an amazing experience for our student-athletes.