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WKU athletics

WKU previews planned new fieldhouse and press box

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Western Kentucky President Dr. Timothy C. Caboni speaks at a ceremony Friday at Houchens-Smith Stadium.

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For Western Kentucky University President Timothy C. Caboni, the school's new planned multi-use fieldhouse and press box will be true game changers for the school.

WKU unveiled plans Friday for a new state-of-the-art fieldhouse and press box. A groundbreaking celebration will take place at 10 a.m. Nov. 10, with construction on the fieldhouse expected to officially begin later this fall with project completion late in 2025.

The press box construction will begin in December and is expected to be ready for kickoff in 2024.



“Once this is complete in two years, we will have arguably the finest facilities in any Group of Five institution and certainly the best facilities in sports that we’ve had – ever – at Western Kentucky University,” Caboni said Friday.

“Also pleased for our upstairs press box continuing to have a game-day experience second to none for our fans, creating opportunity for media, for our visitors and for our guests to have a full understanding of what it means to be a Hilltopper.”

The 120,000 square-foot Hilltopper Fieldhouse will be home to the WKU forensics and e-sports programs, as well as provide practice and training space for the Big Red Marching Band and Hilltopper athletics. The facility will be built upon the land that currently is home to the football practice field, in between Houchens-Smith Stadium and Nick Denes Field.

The 15,300 square-foot press box will serve as a newhome for media coverage of Hilltopper football games. Situated above the existing Harbaugh Club, the press box will house the television broadcast, radio booths, coaches' booths, working press and game operations. Premium suites will also be in the new facility.

The renderings were revealed Friday morning during the Board of Regents committee meetings.

“The Hilltopper Fieldhouse will be an incredible complex for our student-athletes to utilize, as well as serving as the home to our Hilltopper baseball program,” WKU Athletic Director Todd Stewart said in a news release. “Situated between Houchens Industries-L.T. Smith Stadium and Nick Denes Field, this state-of-the-art facility will enhance every one of our sport programs. The indoor space will allow for year-round, climate-controlled training for all 16 of our programs and puts us in the best position, from a facilities standpoint, we have ever been in the history of WKU athletics once it is completed.”

WKU selected K. Norman Berry Associates Architects in association with HKS Architects for the project. The projected cost of the project is \$45 million, Caboni said, with the school planning donor fundraising campaigns to help cover the construction.

“We’ve managed to reduce our debt load to the place where we’re able to do this project without a noticeable increase in our annual debt payments – as a matter of fact, they’re going to continue to come down,” Caboni said. “The anticipated price is about \$45 million, but we all know what inflation is doing and so we’ll continue to have to work toward completing the project. There will be a significant portion of this that will be voluntary support or private-giving support of the construction.”

The new Hilltopper Fieldhouse will:

- Serve as the permanent home to the WKU forensics program and provide the program with modern classroom, practice, office and competition space to allow it to continue its run of excellence as the most dominant collegiate speech and debate organization in the country.
- House the WKU e-sports programs and teams and equip them with state-of-the-art competition space, practice pods and offices.
- Become the new base for the Big Red Marching Band program with dedicated storage/support space for the band as well as a venue for year-round, all-weather practice.

- Include a new baseball clubhouse with locker room, weight room, team room and coaches' offices.
- House a new baseball hitting facility with four batting cages and flexible multi-purpose space.
- Incorporate an 87,000-square-foot indoor training facility for use by the WKU marching band, WKU athletics, intramurals and the greater WKU community.
- Serve to better equip WKU students for their endeavors in the classroom and in their competitions, provide a place of learning and collaboration for the various programs that will call it home.

The new press box will:

- Be constructed within the existing Smith West stadium, as a new floor level built above the existing Harbaugh Club.
- Include modern media and press facilities to enable the media to better broadcast the continued success of the WKU programs.
- Provide state-of-the-art coaches facilities to better equip coaches and staff to guide the student-athletes of the University.
- House several suites for additional premium seating and viewing options.

A steering committee comprised of WKU faculty and staff worked with KNBA Architects & HKS Architects to design the new facilities.

Caboni said the new fieldhouse will be unique among college institutions.

“I think just the combination of what you see together,” Caboni said. “You’d be hard-pressed to find an indoor practice facility that was for marching band and football – to combine it with baseball in innovative. And then you add to it forensics and e-sports, you won’t find anything like this in the nation.”

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