

Bills renew contract

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The Buffalo Bills will continue to train at St. John Fisher College for the foreseeable future, but the campus will see some drastic changes as part of the deal signed Sept. 29.

On the way out are the college's tennis courts, the home of the men's and women's tennis teams and long open to any Fisher students that wanted to use them. On the way in will be a new, all-grass field, 120 yard-long field, which will be used by the Bills during their yearly camp.

The construction is being done, according to camp co-director Professor Todd Harrison, because of concerns that the Bills had with how they had to change camp after the addition of the Polisseni Track and Field facility. The new facility meant that there were fewer fields on which to practice, leading to the Bills splitting one of their fields into two halves. This did not meet the Bills' needs, however.

"We looked at the other 14 teams on college campuses, and they all have at least three fields," Harrison said, "so Coach [Chan] Gailey and his staff found that having one full field and two half-fields wasn't ideal. "

To build that new field for the Bills, however, something would have to go, and it is the tennis courts- in addition to some maintenance sheds- that will be removed to make room for it. Athletic Director Bob Ward, speaking the day after the announcement to the public of the new deal, spoke of why the construction of the new field would have to begin soon.

"The reason it has to happen now," he says, "the reason we need to have it in now, is to get the grass to grow before the snow comes."

This urgency, however, meant a sudden announcement to the people who use the tennis courts regularly.

According to Chris Maley, the co-captain of the men's tennis team, the women and men's teams were told of the decision about a week before it was announced to the general public and media.

"Bob Ward had a meeting with us and the girl's tennis team and the coaches," he said, "He told us about how good the Bills are for Fisher, and how they have helped Fisher grow over the years."

"It was like a defense for how he wasn't putting the players first in this situation."

Ward said that the short notice was for the most part a result of how they were unsure whether the Bills' would re-sign.

"If the Bills never signed this contract, it would never have happened," Ward said, adding that "The planning of trying to keep the Bills here has been going on for years, but we couldn't really announce that before the contract got signed."

As for the tennis team, Ward said that transportation would be provided for the teams to get to places such as Mendon Tennis Club and Nazareth College to practice and play games. In addition, he hopes that new tennis courts will be built by mid-summer. He also went out of his way to talk of how the new grass field may help the rest of Fisher athletics.

"It'll really give us some more space for field hockey, rugby, intramurals, some free play. We'll have a lot of open space to re-create."

For Maley, a Senior, however, it won't mean the final season of tennis he anticipated.

"I didn't expect to not have courts, so it was disappointing," he said.