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## Overhaul of U. Rec Facilities to Better Campus Athletics

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Following years of criticism over a severe lack of campus recreation facilities, the University has made several significant strides over the past 12 months -- including the opening of a new indoor fitness center, the start of renovations on two athletic fields and the unveiling of plans for a major gymnasium expansion.

The two-story, 7,500-square-foot facility -- which houses both cardiovascular and weight training rooms -- was greeted with high marks of approval from students, faculty and local residents when it opened for business in September.

Full-year memberships are available for \$75 for students. Faculty and staff pay high prices for use of the facility.

The gymnasium and fitness center faced a tremendous influx of new members at the beginning of the year, and while overcrowding problems have diminished slightly over the past nine months, University officials announced in April that Gimbel will be significantly expanded and renovated -- thanks to a recent \$10 million donation from University Trustee and 1970 College graduate David Pottruck.

The University's extensive measures to raise the level of campus recreation facilities stems partly from the results of a 1996 list of recommendations created by the Washington, D.C.-based Brailsford & Dunlavy consulting firm.

The report, which took 18 months to prepare, recommended the addition of 320,000 square feet of recreation space, doubling the size of Gimbel and building a fieldhouse on the eastern end of campus. University officials estimated the cost of Brailsford's recommendations to be close to \$100 million.

The opening of the Katz center was billed by University officials as a short-term measure. The future expansion of Gimbel helps meet the more long-term goals set by the Brailsford recommendations.

Penn administrators have said they recognize that adequate sporting facilities are an essential part of college life.

"Penn students appreciate the value of physical activity as a release from schoolwork and the foundation of a healthy life," University President Judith Rodin said following the Pottruck donation.

Also this year, construction began at Bower and Murphy fields in a plan designed to increase outdoor space for Penn's intramural and club sports teams. The improvements will also result in a new baseball stadium.

In February, Rodin and Athletic Director Steve Bilsky announced that Bower Field -- the site of Penn's existing baseball facility -- will be transformed into recreation space for club and intramural teams.

The baseball team, meanwhile, is scheduled to move into a new 1,000-seat park at Murphy Field -- which previously served as recreation space -- in time for the spring 2000 season.

Bower Field, located on the southern edge of campus near the intersection of the Schuylkill Expressway and University Avenue, will be re-sod and will have nighttime lighting -- two measures that University officials said will "double or triple" the usage value of the field.

Penn officials said that Murphy Field, situated just east of Franklin Field, was the right choice for a new baseball facility because of its accessibility and proximity to the players' lockers in the nearby Hollenbach Center.

The recent measures taken to improve Bower and Murphy fields fall in line with the University's master plan that will make the east side of campus the hub for intramural and club sports activities.

"We want this to be a place that, all weekend, morning, noon and night, is an active part of campus," Bilsky said in February, adding that he would like to see students use the eastern part of campus more, making it a more "vibrant" area.