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New Brinkley Softball Stadium serves as an asset to GWU



Photo by Hannah Haggerty.

By: Matthew Johnson

After 16 years as coach of the softball team, Thomas Cole is “thrilled” to have new facilities and a new field for his team to play on at Gardner-Webb’s Brinkley Softball Stadium.



The refurbishing of the stadium finished in September of 2015, and now includes many upgrades that help the team better prepare for their games. The new facilities and field also give a better appearance to visitors—doing away with bleacher seating and a grass field that did not resemble the accommodations of a collegiate institution.

“We had an adequate facility, but when recruiting, athletes would see their high school facility being better than a

Division I University's," said Cole.

As part of the NCAA Division I Big South Conference, Gardner-Webb wants to give a true college appearance. The new softball facility, along with all the other sports complexes, now has a true college presence for visitors as they watch an event.

The field itself now has artificial turf grass on the infield and outfield. This upgrade allows the softball to have a more "true bounce" when hitting the surface. Bouncing on hard, unlevelled ground causes the softball to change directions. Practicing on a perfectly level and smooth turf gives the players a home advantage over the visiting team.

The new facilities come with a larger seating capacity of 300 seats—an obvious upgrade from the previous portable bleachers behind the first and third bases. The seating area is now directly behind home base, allowing audiences to see the whole field clearly.



Photo by Hannah Haggerty.

Additionally, there are now larger in-ground dugouts equipped with restrooms. Before, players would have to leave the field and go to the locker rooms to use the restroom, according to Cole. This meant leaving the game and possibly missing important elements of the game.



Photo by Hannah Haggerty.

The team now has locker rooms that are separate from their team room. This allows them to have a cleaner space for the team to meet before and after the game. It keeps their lockers separate from where serious meetings occur.

The new facility includes a new press box behind home base for live streaming and keeping score of the game. Before, the cameras were in the same space where the coaches' offices were located. This caused the coaches to have to clean all the paper work and desks for the press box crew to use. The game can now be viewed with an angle where all the infield and outfield are seen from behind home base.

A new indoor practice facility allows the team to train even during bad weather. The team can have a full infield practice when it is snowing, lightning or just raining outside. Such indoor facilities are common among collegiate teams in the north who experience colder weather. Gardner-

Webb's team now has the same advantages.

The new softball facility is the first thing many students see when coming from Interstate 85. It will give an image to students and athletes that the school is up to par with other Division I schools.

Photo by Hannah Haggerty.

"The
softball

facility is premiere, the first thing they will see is quality," said Cole. "From that stand point, it is an asset to the University."

Parking may be the new facility's only shortcoming. Visitors need to park across the road at Boiling Springs Baptist Church and across from the tennis courts. Traffic guides will help visitors the proper parking areas at every game.

In spite of the struggles with parking, Cole remains positive about the changes done to the facility. "There is nothing in the facility that I would say 'I wish we would have done that and done this differently'," said Cole. "I feel tremendously blessed with this new facility."



Photo by Hannah Haggerty.