



Hellgate's track plans good for Knights

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Not more than 15 years ago I gave up on my fledgling high school track and field career to focus on my real love interest: baseball.

It's a decision I've regretted in recent years - not the pursuit of baseball, but rather the quick dismissal of track - especially now that I cover the sport so routinely each spring. Coincidentally, my track and prep baseball careers lasted the same length of time - one season.

It should be noted that I had plenty of opportunities to rejoin the track team under the watchful eye of legendary coach Ron Jones, whose powers of persuasion were so well known he could make even the most confident high schooler do an about-face in the halls of Hellgate in fear of being recruited and suited up all in the same day.

But alas, I never tried track again. Now, I think I've fallen for it again.

I love the plans that Alan Pfister, the Knights' newest head coach, and his staff unveiled this season. Pfister and crew - backed by \$300,000 in private fundraising - want to provide the Hellgate track program with its own practice site, albeit a familiar one.

A decision on paper was hammered out this spring between the city and the school district, but the tangible efforts will begin in the next few weeks when shot put and discuss rings are added to the landscape at the jointly-owned River Bowl, which is where the Knights currently hold their football practices.

Pfister, a 1980 Hellgate grad, and generations of other Scarlet and Gold tracksters spent years busing or car-pooling over to Sentinel to hone their skills on the track and fields over there. Now, they'll be just a short jog from their own facility.

In some ways it's a shame. Each sub-group has their own memories of how they got to track practice each day, whether it was all the throwers piling in the back of former coach Dan Gilman's red Chevy pickup, aptly named "shot put," or the pole vaulters, who once a spring - so they say - stopped at the Dairy Queen on Higgins on their way to practice.

"It's tradition," said Pfister, an old vaulter himself.

Pfister knows that creating a new track and field facility may not sit well with some, who'll say "if it ain't broke, don't fix it." But he's also looking to create new memories for a program that hasn't always had a place to call home.

Earlier this spring, Pfister and a parent reminisced about the old days while shooting the breeze at the Knights' end-of-the-year banquet. This parent ran track at Hellgate in the '70s and recalled some classmates avoiding track back then because they didn't want to deal with the clunky bus ride over to Sentinel.

Pfister, who calculated they'll save the district \$1,848 in transportation costs each year by not taking the bus, explained all the benefits of having the Knights' practice area closer to the school, and a better retention rate was at the top of that list.

"They thought that was pretty cool," Pfister said, "to which I said, 'Times are a changin.' "

Indeed they are, although I'm sure a run to the DQ will still be part of the new tradition.

I know that'd be enough to get my once-promising prep career up and running again.

Nick Lockridge can be reached at 523-5298 or at nick.lockridge@lee.net.