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SMC holds community meeting to discuss proposed Athletic Field Lighting Project

By Vera Kochan



SMC's men's baseball field (one of three athletic fields anticipating light installment) Photo Vera Kochan

Saint Mary's College has plans to add lights to three of its athletic fields in order to introduce evening games to the campus. Anticipated to receive the new light installations are Saint Mary's Stadium (men's/women's soccer and rugby), Br. Ronald Gallagher Stadium (baseball), and Cottrell Field (softball).

In order to inform the community and nearby residents of its plans and to answer any questions or concerns, SMC held an April 11 community meeting on campus, headed by various school personnel. SMC Vice President for Intercollegiate Athletics Mike Matoso got the ball rolling. "Having lights is crucial to the success of our program. It has an impact on recruiting and the overall experience of our student athletes." He also anticipates that it would increase game attendance, student enrollment, allow athletes' parents to attend more games, benefit local retail, and strengthen the town/gown relationship.

Saint Mary's Stadium, located beyond University Credit Union Pavilion, has seating for 5,500. It was originally constructed in 1973 for SMC's football games, until the program ended in 2004. Men's soccer season runs between August and November, with 11 home games. Women's soccer will have 10 home games. Men's rugby season is November through May with 10 home games, and women's rugby will have five home games. Minor League soccer runs April through August with 10 home games. Not all soccer or rugby home games will be played in the evening.

SMC women's soccer coach Theresa Romagnolo stated, "We are one of the only schools in the WCC (West Coast Conference) that doesn't have lights. From an athletic side of things, it will draw a great crowd. It will reach more people if we play at night. It will be a different ball game."

The Br. Ronald Gallagher Stadium is located at the intersection of Saint Mary's Parkway and De La Salle Drive, near the front of the campus. The brand new stadium was opened in 2024, just 400 feet down the right field line from the old stadium location. Baseball season runs from February to May with a total of approximately 28 home games (not all of which will be played in the evening).

Cottrell Field, completed in 1999 and located at the intersection of Saint Mary's Parkway and Saint Mary's Road, was built almost entirely by the Saint Mary's Buildings and Grounds staff; in 2000, it was named as an NFCA (National Fastpitch Coaches Association) Regional Turf Field Winner. Softball season is February through May, and there will be approximately 21 home games (not all of which will be played in the evening).

Approximately 10 residents from the immediate vicinity to the campus showed up for the presentation. Their major concern was over excessive lighting and noise. It was explained that LED lights would be installed and directed downward onto the fields in order to meet the Dark Sky Approved Outdoor Sports Lighting Program standards. Additionally, the lights would be turned on and off manually and not by automatic timers.

According to SMC's website, "Home games will start no later than 6:30 p.m. and end no later than 10 p.m. for the games played at the Saint Mary's Stadium and Cottrell Field. Home games at the Br. Ronald Gallagher Stadium will end no later than 11 p.m."

With regards to noise, the fields in question already have amplified sound systems in order to make announcements during the day games. While noise is expected from a cheering crowd, noisemakers, and air horns are currently prohibited during all of SMC's sporting events. Their website also states, "Vulgar and inappropriate language will not be tolerated during events, and SMC officials will eject any spectator, player, or coach who violates the rules."

Additionally, "Saint Mary's students are required to follow the Good Neighbor Policy and the Town of Moraga's Loud and Unruly Party Ordinance, and any students who violate these rules will be subject to Saint Mary's discipline process."

Several residents were skeptical of any actions taken with regards to over-excessive noise after having received no satisfaction from their complaints in recent years. The most common issue was that game

announcements were heard throughout various nearby neighborhoods which stand in close proximity to the campus' sporting fields during day games. SMC Vice President of Facilities Services Isidro Farias assured residents that going forward, complaints would be addressed.?

The college doesn't anticipate any "significant traffic impacts" throughout the town as it expects more than half of the spectators to be students and Lamorinda locals. "If traffic before and after games becomes a problem as determined by the Town of Moraga, Saint Mary's will work with the Moraga Police Department to facilitate traffic control on game days."

SMC doesn't foresee problems with spillover parking, citing that large events, such as graduation ceremonies, have always been accommodated.

Some local business owners in attendance expressed excitement over the anticipation of evening games and what it could mean to Moraga in the form of spending dollars.

Vice Mayor Steve Woehleke and Council Member Renata Sos expect SMC will approach the Moraga Planning Commission next.

For more information visit: stmarys-ca.edu/athletic-lighting-project, or contact Farias at (925) 631-4150 or email: if5@stmarys-ca.edu.

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