

Memorial Stadium gets new field, drainage system



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Advocate staff photo by RICHARD ALAN HANNON -- BREC sports turf foreman Steve Ramirez, left, uses a paint machine to stripe Memorial Stadium's new grass turf as Roosevelt Parker looks on Thursday. Approximately 20 gallons of paint are laid down every Friday in preparation for each weekend's game

Memorial Stadium gets new grass, drainage as season arrives

[By Robin Fambrough](#)

Advocate sportswriter

A crew of BREC workers took their time to meticulously paint the yard lines at Memorial Stadium on Thursday morning.

The sight of freshly painted markings on a well-manicured field is an inviting vision that symbolizes the start of another high school football season.

This is not just another season at Memorial, a 64-year-old Baton Rouge landmark

that sits adjacent to Interstate 110 not far from the State Capitol. A new natural grass surface will be on display when a portion of Coca-Cola Kickoff Classic jamboree starts at 6:30 p.m. Friday at Memorial.

“The first time I came to Memorial a few years ago I couldn’t get over it,” BREC sports turf manager Jim Husted said. “Depending on which direction a team was going, the quarterback either had to throw uphill or downhill. It was subtle, but I saw it.

“That won’t happen now, and that’s just one of the good things about this surface. We think the teams will like it. Our goal was to make it so nice here that it will knock their socks off.”

Of course, football cleats will be preferred when Capitol takes on Istrouma in the first game of the Memorial portion of the EBR jamboree. Scotlandville plays Southern Lab in the second game. Each game will consist of two 12-minute halves.

BREC’s Olympia Stadium and Woodlawn are other Kickoff Classic sites. Four teams will play each of those sites.

A year ago, Olympia went through a similar field transformation. Though both have a celebration grass field — the same as Olympia and LSU’s Tiger Stadium — the process was different.

“Olympia and Memorial were two different kinds of challenges,” Husted said. “Olympia was basically a flat field that held a lot of water. Memorial was done like a lot of the older football fields. It had a big crown in the middle, which meant there was an incline.

“After we killed the existing grass, we had to strip that crown and top layer off the field. From there it was laser graded to get the slight incline we wanted.”

The \$70,000 Memorial project started in March when the old Bermuda grass was sprayed numerous times and killed. Husted said workers then took 1,200 square yards of soil, including the crown, off the field, along with its old irrigation system. Next, 1,100 tons of sand was brought in to provide a solid base.

Irrigation and drainage systems were then installed. The drainage was installed in the same herringbone pattern used at Olympia and can carry 60,000 gallons of water an hour off the field. The field now has irrigation and drainage spots in 15-foot increments.

It took 6,900 feet of pipe to put together the drainage system. Foreman Steven Ramirez helped oversee the project that Husted said was a labor of love for BREC’s Maplewood crew, which got assistance from the Burbank crew.

Irrigation specialist Alan Howland proved what a labor of love it was when workers found a 1958 Notre Dame class ring buried in the dirt near the home side of the stadium. Howland called South Bend, Ind., and tracked down the owner, a Catholic High graduate who reportedly lost the ring in 1958.

Husted said the celebration grass was planted two months ago. Fertilizer and other nutrients were added along the way. Crews now cut the field four times a week and add fertilizer each Monday.

“This is the best natural grass surface, and that’s what we wanted to have for a major venue like Memorial,” Husted said. “Not only is it safer and level, but it’s also a fast, durable surface.”

Husted and Ashton Hawkins, BREC’s manager for Memorial, said teams will get to enjoy the new field for a limited time. After a fall of high school and youth league games are completed, Memorial will be shut down until next fall, allowing the field more time to grow and mature. A similar strategy worked well for Olympia last year.

Hawkins, who grew up playing youth league games and high school games for Southern Lab at Memorial, said he can’t wait.

“We’re supposed to open at about 5 tomorrow, but I’ll probably get here earlier,” Hawkins said. “This field is great. I’m so excited I feel like I’m getting ready to play.”

Jamboree information

The Denham Springs Jamboree and Redemptorist’s All-Catholic Jamboree are the most ambitious events on Friday. Each jamboree will feature three games.

Action at Denham Springs will start at 5:30 p.m., while All-Catholic games are set to start at 6 p.m.

The host Wolves play Ascension Catholic in the first game at Redemptorist. Catholic faces St. Michael in the nightcap. Denham Springs meets West Feliciana in the third game at DSHS.

Meanwhile, another traditional jamboree, the Ascension Parish-based LeBlanc’s Jamboree, will feature two sites instead of one with games set for 7 p.m. East Ascension hosts Dutchtown at EAHS’ Spartan Stadium, while Donaldsonville hosts St. Amant at Boutte Stadium.

The area’s other multi-team jamboree is the South Baton Rouge Jamboree at Episcopal. Episcopal plays Christian Life in the first game at 6 p.m. Parkview Baptist and Dunham meet in the second game.

Olympia will host two Kickoff Classic games with the first starting at 6:30 p.m. It's Glen Oaks vs. Northeast in the first game and McKinley vs. Tara in the second. At Woodlawn, games start at 7 p.m. with Sarah Reed vs. Belaire then Broadmoor vs. Woodlawn.

Fans going to Olympia should note that all cars must now turn from Perkins onto Kenilworth to park. An access route from Perkins is no longer available. Cars will be routed around the stadium to the visitors side.

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