

Fresno State unveils vision for Bulldog Stadium upgrades, adding wrestling, women's water polo

By Robert
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Fresno State Athletic Director Jim Bartko talks about his five-year plan to restore wrestling and enacting renovations to Bulldog Stadium. THEFRESNOBEE

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Fresno State under Jim Bartko will not lack for direction.



The new athletic director's plan was outlined in specifics as well as broad strokes Thursday — from the reinstatement of a wrestling program and addition of women's water polo, to staffing and fundraising goals, to facilities upgrades including perhaps the department's largest underdeveloped resource in Bulldog Stadium.



"It's a great venue, a great setting, it's just getting old," Bartko said. "If we're going to keep up, it doesn't matter what I say now, it has got to get upgraded. It has to get fixed to some regard. Whether it's just the paths and concessions, the restrooms, we need to make it better and if we can make it better and enhance the fan experience, we have to do it.

"We have to look at the stairwells going up and the golf carts going up, the points of sale, scoreboard signage, club access, a few amenities here and there. We have a ways to go, but it has to be fixed."

AECOM, which has designed and developed a number of college and professional sports venues, will have consultants on campus for a second time Friday and in 90 days is expected to provide an analysis of potential upgrades for the stadium and surrounding area.

Scoreboard improvements could be in place this summer in the initial phase, and the AECOM report will include potential development costs and revenue opportunities.

Also in the first phase are graphics, improved circulation in and around the stadium, fencing, and better parking and tailgating space. Phase 2 includes a sound system, signage, club seating and sky boxes. Phase 3 includes press-box improvements and a training center.

Enhancing the fan experience at Fresno State football games is paramount and there is potential for increased revenue generated throughout the stadium.

"That is what's going to be really interesting, when we see in 90 days when they come back what the costs are, what are the hidden costs we don't know about from earthquake (retrofit) to power to electricity to water and everything else," Bartko said.

"We have to look at all that and get an idea what can we do quickly to make it better and what can we do long term that we can raise the money and do?"

Along with Bulldog Stadium enhancements, Fresno State has re-sodded the women's soccer and lacrosse stadium and has plans to resurface the courts at Wathen Tennis Center and renovate Warmerdam Field for the track and field

program.

Venues for a wrestling and women's water polo already are in place: Save Mart Center and the university's Aquatics Center. Under the timetable presented Thursday, those programs are not likely to start competition until 2018-19.

The nine- to 12-month timeline to launch both sports starts with fundraising and setting budgets, which were outlined by Bartko. The next phase, from June 1 to Dec. 1, centers around conference evaluation, practice facilities and offices and evaluating coaching prospects. The third phase, from Dec. 1 to Feb. 28, 2016, is hiring coaches and recruiting.

The projected budget for wrestling in Year One is \$140,000, with \$119,000 in coaching salaries and benefits and \$21,000 in operating costs, then in Year Two \$292,500 with \$269,500 in salaries and benefits and \$23,000 in operating costs. By Year Three, with the team at full strength, it will be \$689,293 with \$269,500 in salaries and benefits and \$248,976 in athletic aid (scholarships).

The plan, Bartko said, is to build the scholarship number in the first couple of years, starting with three or four, and working up to the 9.9 allowed by the NCAA.

Women's water would follow a similar track. In Year One, the cost is projected to be \$110,175, in Year Two \$181,447 and in Year Three, with the addition of athletic aid, \$456,489.

"There's no way I can say we're not doing it: We are bringing back two sports," Bartko said. "Now it's the timing. We're going to have wrestling and water polo. We have to raise a little bit of money. That's on our fundraising staff to go out, not just for these two sports, but others. We have a committee, great people in this community that are passionate and can help kind of get us over the hump the first couple of years and get it started. We'll figure out how to keep it going down the road."

"Budgets, we did research, did a little background, as to what coaches make around the country, kind of gives us an idea what we have to raise the first year, second year, third year, to get everything going. What we're not going to do is take money from current programs to fund new programs, because that's not right for those programs. We're going to make sure those sports are taken care of, raise some money for the new sports and make sure we have 21 cohesive sports working together, maximize what we're doing and do it the right way."

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