

Athletic Director Raising \$1M in 90 Days for New Turf

BENTONVILLE, AR -- The school board approved a project Monday night to replace the football and soccer turf, but funding will not come from the district. "The seams are coming loose... You can just pull fibers up out of the turf... We're here today to try to fundraise to replace both the football stadium field and the soccer field."

Bentonville Athletic Director Scott Passmore is hoping to raise \$1-million in about 90 days.

"We're going to do it hopefully 100-percent through fundraising and not ask for any operational money that would take away from curriculum or education, or any other group within the school district."

District money is expanding elementaries and building a second high school, so the project to replace the soccer and football turf is solely based on supporters.

"We're not asking someone to write a \$150,000 check right away. If they can do a contribution over a time span, that works for us... We would like to have \$1-million in commitments... Our goal is by March to have a large sum of this money raised, so then I can go back to the board and say, 'I've got my million dollars in commitments and we're ready to put together the specifications and put this out to bid and allow companies to bid on it and hopefully get turf on our soccer field and our football stadium.'"

Passmore wants to have the fields, which will eventually be used by both high schools, ready by next season. When asking the community to contribute, coming off a state championship win does not hurt.

"It's easier to raise money after success versus if you were coming off an 0-10 season, so that does help out... There will be opportunities to buy advertisement space that's actually in the turf... There will also be some opportunities possibly to even get some naming rights on our field."

Ideally, Passmore would like to see improvements made to the football scoreboard as well by tripling the size of the video screen. Doing so would help sell turf advertisements in conjunction with advertisement time on the video screen. Also, donations are being accepted through the Athletic Booster Club so they are tax-deductible. After eight years, the turf is past its time and is even a safety hazard. Technology has come a long way and the new turf should last at least 12 years, but it is more about students having pride.

"I think it's important for not just an athlete, but a student walking in to their classroom or walking into their school that they have pride in their facility. When we can put a facility out there that kids feel excited to be a part of, I think it makes a difference in the way they treat it and the way they perform." So as Passmore braces for the huge task ahead, he is in the right state of mind. "I think we can."

This process started a couple of years ago, when the district invested \$55,000 to fix the football field turf, indoor turf and the softball field. At that point, the soccer field was already in such bad shape it would have been a waste to try and fix it. Passmore said the plan at that time was to eventually replace the field. Now that they are in that position, the brainstorming sessions with community member, coaches and district officials will begin.

The district has a contract with Athletic Surfaces Plus out of Memphis, and that company will help with the design as well as organizing fundraising. The money the district fronted to get that contract will be reimbursed through the fundraising process, since the plan is to fund the entire project with donations.