

NEW TENNIS COURTS

Emily Maerz

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With wooden racquets and playing on lawn courts like Wimbledon, tennis was a founding sport at Hood College in 1893. Tennis evolved into the competitive sport it is today, while continuing to maintain its place in campus life.

This long history of tennis on campus, however, was briefly interrupted in 2008 when the tennis courts by Gambrill Gymnasium were removed in favor of a parking lot, forcing the tennis teams to practice and play matches at nearby Baker Park. Now, after a four-year process of raising money and planning, tennis has been brought back to campus with the opening of the new six-court tennis facility on Sept. 14.

“The new tennis facility is bringing something back that has always been there,” said Suzie Smith, Director of Corporate Relations, who also serves as an assistant coach for the women’s team.

Smith added that Hood alumni are what truly made the project a reality, for many specifically wanted their money to go to this facility. Hood alumni Nancy Tressel Brown, Linda Allen, Beverly Kirill, along with the Hodson Trust and K.B.E. Building Corporation were the major donors for the courts.

“The alumni were so proud to be part of making it happen,” Smith said of the reactions to the new tennis complex. “There was support from alumni across several generations and they all gave in order to improve the college for future generations.”

The new facility is a huge step towards improving the Hood tennis program, for the team has a home again. First-year Head Tennis Coach Tim Halter said, “It will definitely boost the

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program. You can get a lot more use out of them, for they are only a few feet away from where you're living on campus."

Halter added that they also will have a huge impact on improving recruiting. He said that there are already five men players that are strongly considering coming to play for Hood next year.

History professor Dr. Len Latkovski and former tennis coach from 1996 to 2005 was initially disappointed when the courts were first removed. After all, on those courts, he was extremely successful, leading the women's team to six conference championships during his coaching span.

He said, however, that these courts are far superior to the former courts. "The old courts were resurfaced a couple of times, but they needed a long-term fix, which could only be achieved if they were completely replaced," Latkovski said.

Latkovski, who also started teaching a tennis class this semester, added that he believes the courts benefit the entire student body as well as faculty and staff. Latkovski plans to offer a tennis workout for interested faculty and also said that Hood now has the ability to create an intermural tennis program like it has for other sports.

Ultimately, the tennis complex is just one part of a long-term effort to improve Hood's athletic facilities as well as promote the wellness and fitness of all students. First, the softball field was upgraded along with the Thomas Athletic Field, which was completed in the summer of 2009.

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In 2011, the college built the Hood Athletic Center, which includes the BB&T Arena and Hodson Fitness Center. The final phase includes the tennis complex and upgrades to the aquatic center that will be finished this winter for the start of the swim season.

Smith believes that these facilities not only improve recruiting of athletes, but also the overall school admissions. She said, “The tennis courts are part of the entire package. Students want to know about everything a school has to offer and this just makes the school more attractive.”

At the dedication ceremony, Hood President Dr. Ron Volpe talked about keeping his promise to bring back tennis courts to campus after they were removed four years ago. But it was the alumni who he asked to make it happen and they came through.

While Hood tennis players and students will get to use this facility for years to come, it means just as much to the alumni who wanted to continue the heritage of having sports on campus.

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