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With Town's Help, Volleyball Courts No Longer 'Moraga Pond' Again

By *Sophie Braccini*



Photo Andy Scheck

NCAA match, "and we only have one court on campus," Browning said. In order to make the courts usable the team would have to till the sand to make it soft enough to play on, and if it rained it became a mess again.

Because the NCAA has adopted women's beach volleyball as a championship sport, beach volleyball for girls is growing rapidly. "Saint Mary's team has done extremely well," says Browning, "We have been one of the best teams in Northern California." The town decided to do its part to support the local athletes and decided to renovate the courts.

Parks and Recreation Director Jay Ingram consulted with Browning on design issues. "They wanted some input on the sand, standards, court size, etc.," said Browning. A construction contract was awarded to Integra Construction Services, Inc. to complete renovations in the amount of \$133,422, including the high-quality sand the college recommended.

Because of the MOU signed between the town and the college (see article about shared facilities) Saint Mary's does not pay to use the courts. But others do, and according to Kimberley Nelson, Park and Recreation Coordinator, other groups have been renting the location and it is booked throughout the summer. "There are people playing there now all the time, even during the concerts," she said. Nelson adds that the hourly rental fee for the courts is \$24 for individuals, \$18 for nonprofits and \$35 for commercial entities.

To see the real competitive games, like against Stanford and Cal, residents will have to wait for March and April during the competition season. The Saint Mary's team does not use the beach courts at all in the fall because they play indoor volleyball at that time. They will use them starting in January for some practices. That's when the team will see how the courts really do, and sometimes in inclement weather.

"By all appearances and having watched the construction process it looks like they've done

The truth must be told: for years Moraga's sand volleyball courts at the Commons were barely usable.

"Drainage was clogged and the sand was from the delta, so it had a lot of dirt in it, making it hard packed," recalls Rob Browning, head volleyball coach at Saint Mary's College. In winter, water would stagnate in the sagging courts, getting it its nickname of "Moraga Pond."

The sorry state was going to sign the death warrant of the courts, as they were scheduled to be removed. That is, until the college took an interest in them and started, sometimes painfully, to use them.

Saint Mary's has had a beach volleyball team since 2012 and needed two courts in order to host an

everything they needed to do," added Browning.

For the first two seasons Saint Mary's Beach Volleyball record was 19-4 with multiple wins over Stanford, Cal, Santa Clara, San Francisco, Pacific and all other Norcal teams. They also sent a pair to the national championships those first two seasons. This past season SMC's record was 17-6 with wins over Stanford, Santa Clara, San Francisco, Pacific, and Oregon. The team finished second in the WCC championships and were the only team in the WCC to win matches against Pepperdine, which was ranked second in the nation when the lady-Gaels played them. The Lady Gaels also swept the WCC Player of the Year awards with Player of the Year Dalas Dodd, Freshman of the Year Lindsey Knudsen, and Defensive Player of the Year Mary Hernandez.

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