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Broncos looking for lots of bucks

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Caption: An artist's rendering indicates what the northgate High School all-weather sports field will look like. (Kassie Wenzell/Correspondent)

It took the Broncos more than three decades, but in 2004 they were finally able to play a football game on their home field. And now, Northgate High School students want more than just a field with rented bleachers and ruts in the grass, they want a home they can be proud of.

Those on the school's soccer, lacrosse and track teams would simply like to experience what home-court advantage feels like.

That is why the Northgate Community Pride Foundation, a fundraising group for the school, is trying to raise the \$1.3 million needed for a new all-weather track and field.

Already the foundation has raised \$820,000 for the project, which would replace the track made of crushed brick with an all-weather track and the field of grass would become artificial turf.

Kassie Wenzell, project leader for the foundation, said the field on a rainy day is referred to as a "moat" because water surrounds the field.

"The water can pool up to an inch or so deep and the kids can't practice when it rains; they have to move to the black-top," Wenzell said. "It's hard for our athletes when they live in Walnut Creek and go to school here and there are no good athletic facilities."

In 2004, Northgate received goal posts and a scoreboard, which qualified then for home games. That was phase one of the Pride Foundation project. The renovation of the track and field is phase two.

It's not just the 400 athletes who would benefit from better fields, it's the whole community and all students who take physical education at Northgate, Wenzell said.

Groups such as the Walnut Creek Soccer Club have already pledged \$50,000 and other sports groups have also given money because once built, the field could be used by the entire community, she said. The Northgate soccer team currently practices at the Castlerock Fields.

There is also a sense of urgency to raising the remaining \$480,000.

A \$300,000 grant from the Wayne and Gladys Valley Foundation has been pledged to the project but it will only be awarded once the rest of

the money is raised. And the foundation has given a deadline that all funds must be raised by September, Wenzell said.

Where those funds will come from is unknown.

Richard Nicoll, assistant superintendent for the district, said there is no money set aside for upgrades to the Northgate High School sports fields.

The Mt. Diablo Unified School District board granted each of its six high schools, \$1 million for facilities improvements several years ago. At Northgate, staff and the Northgate Community Pride Foundation decided all the money should go to the Little Theatre renovation, which was completed in November. Other schools, such as Ygnacio Valley, used the money to improve their athletic fields.

Out of the district's six high schools there are two other schools besides Northgate, Mt. Diablo and Concord High, that do not have a synthetic track and field, he said.

The foundation plans on asking the district for the remaining funding needed for the project.

Fundraising for the complex has ranged from parties to Christmas caroling, and if the district does not grant any money to the project then the group will try to get business support, Wenzell said.

Christian Pelayo, a sophomore and quarterback for Northgate's football team, said the field has holes and is not well maintained. It's embarrassing when Northgate hosts a game, Pelayo said.

"When we go to other schools, they have brand new fields," he said. "You have better pride when you are at home and your own stadium, I feel like you can have an advantage. I think a new field would make that amazing."

There is a third phase to the project, which is for permanent bleachers and lights. Wenzell has no guess on when the final phase could be finished but she estimates it will cost more than \$1 million.

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