Anyone familiar with outdoor activities at Prairie High School over the years probably also is familiar with with occasional football games played in mud, canceled band practices and other inconveniences brought on by the Iowa weather.

Those problems should be history soon, thanks to a large-scale renovation of John Wall Field that's scheduled to be finished before next football season. It's the latest phase in a series of facilities improvements at Prairie, where upgrades for the baseball and softball programs are nearing completion and a 1,000-seat concert hall has been in use for a couple of years.

"A lot of fantastic things are going on," said Rocky Bennett, Associate Principal and Activities Director at Prairie, citing cooperative efforts by the College Community School Board, the Prairie booster club and "many, many others. I can't say enough about all they've done."

The big news at the football field is replacement of natural turf with an all-weather surface. The College Community School Board will be taking bids on that and other parts of the project soon.

It should make a huge difference for participants in football, soccer, marching band and physical education, whose practice and competition requirements put heavy demands on the field and suffer when it isn't usable.

"Two springs ago we had 67 or 68 cancellations," recalls Bennett. And that number doesn't take the effect on football into account.

The update is not limited to the new surface. It also includes the addition of 1,500 seats to the 3,400 now available, plus work on restrooms and perhaps construction of storage space. Bennett was reluctant to put a price tag on the improvements, because the extent of the work is still to be determined, and bids are still to be solicited.

Considering the need to make final plans and the fact construction always seems to encounter delays, could the goal of having the work finished next summer be a little optimistic? Not in Bennett's view.

"It will be done," he said confidently. And for the future, he added, "I'm hoping every child in this district has an experience on that field."

The revamping of the baseball and softball facilities already is done, or nearly so. Construction workers were on the job even as the snow began to fly last month on a new press box and a building for concession sales and restrooms. Those are among the finishing touches of a project that has been in progress several years.

"I took over as Athletics Director six years ago and started right away working to renovate the baseball and softball fields," Bennett said.

The fields were stripped and resurfaced, the dugouts replaced. Baseball and softball players have two indoor batting cages now where they can sharpen their eye, both located at nearby Prairie Creek Elementary School; those units will be joined by three more, one located with the two existing cages on the stage and the other two in the basement of the South gym.

The upgrades have been varied and extensive, and in Bennett's view, necessary.

"If you want award-winning bands and teams and (other) activities, you have to have top facilities," he said, taking the opportunity to once again express gratitude to those who are making it possible.

"It takes a village," he said of the task of making the wide-ranging project a reality. "The district has stepped up huge."

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