

Kirkwood spending \$750,000 on ballfields

Written by Jim Ecker
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Kirkwood Community College is spending approximately \$750,000 to improve its baseball and softball fields on campus.

The project began this spring and both fields will get new padded fences, improved drainage systems, new netting behind home plate and possibly new scoreboards.

"When those two fields are done, I'll be surprised if there's any junior college - and I haven't seen them all - but I'll be surprised if any junior college rivals it in the state," said Doug Wagemester, the athletic director at Kirkwood.

The softball project is expected to be finished by late August, in time for the players returning to school and the start of fall drills.

The baseball project will take a little longer but will be ready for next season. All of the sod has been stripped off the field and the entire surface will be re-seeded, forcing the Eagles to practice at other on-campus sites and Prairie High School this fall.

Wagemester said it was time to address several issues at both fields, which sit next to each other on campus. He said "safety and playability" for the driving forces behind the combined project.

"It was just time," he said. "For 25 years, it's been band-aids. It's always been a little bit of this, a little bit of that. One thing kind of stacked on the next thing and on the next thing."

Both fields have experienced problems with standing water and are getting entirely new drainage systems. The baseball field is also being re-graded to eliminate low spots.

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"It's one thing to be playing baseball in Iowa (in March)," said Wagemester. "It's another thing to be playing when your field retains water."

Padding will be installed on both outfield fences, for safety reasons and aesthetics. Some softball fans like to sit in lawn chairs behind the outfield fence, but they'll need to relocate because the padding will block their view.

The softball fence in center field will be moved five feet further back, making it 205 feet, but the distances to the corners will remain 200 feet.

Kirkwood is installing a warning track at the softball field for the first time for safety reasons. The baseball field is getting a new batter's eye in center field for improved visibility at the plate.

Wagemester said both projects were over-due.

"We're excited about it," he said. "We're trying to do it right."