

Kernels installing new drainage system

Written by Jim Ecker

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The Cedar Rapids Kernels are confident they've solved their flooding problems by installing a new drainage system at Veterans Memorial Stadium this fall.

The \$120,000 project is nearing completion, although it fell behind schedule due to unseasonably cold temperatures in November.

The flooding problem has existed ever since the stadium opened in 2002. When the stadium was built, a 10-inch pipe was installed to drain the entire bowl section of seats and it was not big enough to handle all the water from a heavy storm.

Excess rain water would run down the tunnel behind home plate and into dressing areas.

"Whenever there's a heavy downpour, it exceeds the limit for what that little 10-inch pipe will carry, and that creates flooding into the umpires room and both the visiting and home locker rooms," Kernels General Manager Doug Nelson explained Monday.

Iowa State Contractors of Ottumwa, who submitted the low bid for the project, dug a big trench in the field that began behind home plate and went down the left-field warning track before cutting diagonally to left-center field and behind the left-field wall, where the new 24-inch pipe meets the city storm sewer pipe.

"It basically starts behind home plate and goes all the way down to Rockford Road," said Nelson.

The storm sewage project is part of the 10 Year Capital Improvements Plan that was developed several years ago to pay for improvements to the stadium. A total of \$300,000 is contributed to

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the fund each year with the City of Cedar Rapids donating \$150,000, the Veterans Commission \$100,000 and the Kernels \$50,000.

The drainage project was No. 3 on the list of 10-year improvements, following a new scoreboard and new field lights that were installed in recent years. Next year, the Kernels plan to replace the original seats in the stadium that are becoming cracked and broken.

Nelson said the construction phase of the draining system should be finished by Friday, then the work crew will need a few more days to clean up some of the dirt and debris left behind. New sod will be installed as early as possible this spring, to replace a 10-foot swath along the left-field warning track and the 10-foot diagonal path in left-center field.

They had hoped to lay the new sod this fall, but Nelson is confident everything will be ready for the 2015 campaign. "We will be ready to go by next season," he said.

Nelson said the City of Cedar Rapids settled with the stadium architect and builder many years ago, so there is no recourse for reimbursement even though the original 10-inch pipe proved to be too small for the facility.

"We've had this problem ever since the stadium was built," he said. "It's a design issue. That 10-inch pipe is trying to drain over an acre of cement. So when there's a downpour, it just quickly gets overwhelmed by the water coming down to it.

"The drains were not designed for a stadium, because as soon as you get a few peanut shells on those drains they plug up and that compounds the problem even further."

Two large drainage grates have been installed behind home plate and two drainage intakes have been installed at the bottom of the lawn section along the left-field line.

The Kernels also resolved draining issues in front of the stadium as part of the approximate

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\$120,000 project.

In a separate project, the Kernels have replaced the clay in the circle around home plate with a new mixture in an effort to use fewer baseballs next season. Nelson said the Kernels would normally use about 550 dozen baseballs during a season, but that number jumped to 650 dozen last season because so many balls were being stained by the red clay on pitches in the dirt.

Nelson said the baseballs cost \$60 per dozen, so an extra 100 dozen baseballs cost an extra \$6,000.

The Minnesota Twins, who are the Kernels' parent club, helped the Kernels install the same clay mixture that is used at Target Field in Minneapolis. Nelson is confident that will help solve the problem.

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