

Crownpoint football field price tag climbs

Written by By Kevin Opsahl Sun Correspondent
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Coach says new field will feel like a pillow top

A new football field for Crownpoint High School will cost almost twice as much as originally anticipated due to a “hidden condition” school district maintenance personnel came upon when they started the project.

Roxy Flanders, director of construction and maintenance for the Gallup-McKinley County School District, said the Crownpoint Eagles’ field will cost approximately \$800,000 — some \$350,000 more than was budgeted — because the subgrade was in poor condition. District officials thought they would just be replacing the field’s turf, with a price tag of \$400,000.

Subgrade, the material under a road or building, is critical in keeping the ground level. Otherwise, it starts to deform — especially if it is mixed with a lot of clay. When that happens, numerous problems, including player injuries, can occur.

“It’s going to take us about a month and a half longer, but their students are going to be safer,” she said. “That’s our key reason for doing it, is student safety.”

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“A football field has to be level within a quarter of an inch every ten feet — you can’t have more deviation than that, so you can’t injure the players,” Flanders said.

Roderick Harlan, a Crownpoint Middle School teacher who is also the high school’s football coach, reported some player knee injuries due to the old field.

“It felt like, sometimes, they were playing on asphalt,” he said. “It was a blessing to get a new field.”

Harlan said the new field will feel like “a very cushioned, soft pillow topping.”

When district officials tore off the turf of Crownpoint’s football field, they found water on it and something going on: pumping.

“As you walk on it, the clay will move two or three feet away from you — you’ll see the soil move,” Flanders said. “We knew we couldn’t leave it like that.”

The district ripped out the bad subgrade and will replace it with two different layers of gravel for the turf to grow on, according to Flanders. The subgrade replacement is expected to be complete by the end of March. The field is expected to be ready around that time or mid-April at the latest.

Harlan praised the new field, saying it was time for an upgrade. He also believes it will boost team morale.

“I think a lot of rural schools feel like they’re being left out from the main school,” Harlan said. “We, being a rural school, having this football field laid out for us is really nice.”

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These field renovations come just as football practice is getting underway (Feb. 22). The New Mexico Activities Association had given schools statewide the green light to play sports, which had been halted this year due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Crownpoint High School's football team had not been able to practice before that decision, but since has been able to practice with helmets, shoulder pads — and no contact.

Without a true football field, the team started practice on a grass field south of it.

Harlan said instead of playing home games during this season, the team will travel to Gallup Public Stadium or Thoreau High School.

"It's been a long time coming," he said, before noting his team's mood. "They're ecstatic because it's been months before they've been able to get up, put on the shoulder pads and just have fun out there, just to play football."

According to a calendar posted on NMAA's website, practice began Feb. 22 and runs until March 3. Games begin the following day and run to the first weekend in April. The Association cautioned that dates of games are subject to change.

"They're just glad to be playing," Harlan said of his team. "We tell them everyday that they're very fortunate and a lot of people are not playing because of the coronavirus."

It's important for student athletes to have some type of outlet, he said, because kids are tired of being confined at home.

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