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Preparing for kickoff

New indoor soccer facility in Glen Dale nears completion

by Ted Black | Staff Writer

Even on a hot, humid summer afternoon, with the fledgling facility still under construction, Ron Santos strolled through the Greenbelt Sportsplex like a kid in a candy store.

Santos, 46, president of Sportsplex Athletics of Maryland, said he has dreamed of opening an indoor sports facility for years, almost all the way back to his days as a student at Suitland High School. This month, those dreams will come to fruition, as the Sportsplex opens its doors at 10011 Good Luck Road in Glen Dale with two 142-foot by 90-foot synthetic turf fields suited for soccer, lacrosse, field hockey, flag football and more.

Santos and partners Rob Biondolillo and Tony Guerreirro have spent nearly a year spearheading the transformation of the former storage facility and one-time home of the Prince George's Racquet Club into an indoor turf facility. The group is leasing the property from Annapolis businessman Harvey Blonder with an option to buy.

Santos said he took time observing similar facilities in an effort to avoid the shortcomings he's seen at other venues.

"One thing people will realize when they play here is that the fields will be the exact same size, so it won't matter which one you play on," Santos said June 25 as a crew from Montreal-based GTR Turf installed the synthetic surface on one of the fields. "We'll provide the balls and all of the referees who work the games here will have to take our one-day certification class to make sure all of the games are officiated the same way. The entire facility is going to be air conditioned. You won't see us leaving doors open to create circulation like you do in other facilities."

Pat Rush, the on-site superintendent for Builderguru Contracting Inc., the Millersville firm in charge of construction of the Greenbelt Sportsplex, has overseen the project from its infancy. He said 20 to 25 workers are on hand each day.

"Something like this is a lot easier than putting together a restaurant," Rush said. "You usually only have about 10,000 square feet in a restaurant, whereas here we have over 42,000 square feet. You just have a lot more space to work with. These guys have really done a great job putting in the floors, the concessions and the electrical work. It really has not been a difficult project."

Santos maintains a strong passion for soccer, although a recent knee surgery to repair a damaged meniscus has limited his rec league playing days considerably. While he works as a K-9 officer for the City of Hyattsville Police Department, Santos, an Odenton resident, also has been the

junior varsity boys' soccer coach at Arundel High School in Gambrills for the last five years. His sons Ryan, 18, and Collin, 14, have played soccer since their youth.

According to the Greenbelt Sportsplex website (www.greenbeltsportsplex.net), the facility plans to offer an ambitious schedule of 24 soccer leagues starting Aug. 2. In addition to four 9-on-9 youth leagues for boys and girls, there are six adult co-ed 7-on-7 leagues, 10 men's leagues and four women's leagues. There are also two flag football leagues set to start next month and another in October, two men's lacrosse leagues and a Sunday co-ed field hockey league set to begin in August.

Steve Campbell, a co-director of coaching for Bowie-based Freestate Soccer United, said he hasn't seen the facility yet, but welcomes its opening.

"I think there has been a shortage of indoor facilities for the kids to play," Campbell said. "Having another indoor facility will serve a great purpose for the younger kids. There are so few opportunities now for the kids to play indoors during the winter, having another indoor facility will certainly give the younger kids the opportunity to play more games."

Pat Noel, another co-director of coaching for Freestate Soccer United, is also eager for the opening of the new facility.

"I think facilities like that are always helpful to get kids to play," Noel said. "There are a couple of indoor facilities where our kids already play. The nicest one that I've seen is over in Salisbury. That one is air conditioned, so if the new one is [also air conditioned] then that will help the youth and adult leagues attract more teams. It will be interesting to see what this one [Greenbelt] looks like in relation to that one."

According to the website, registration fees for each team range from \$350 for the youth squads to \$1,000 and an additional 10 percent state and amusement tax will be added to those sums. Individuals can join leagues for \$80 and Santos noted that "free agents" who don't have a team will pay an additional \$5 for each game they play.

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