

THE FUTURE IS NOW

Today's Athletics Master Plan

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MAKING A CONNECTION

Facility arms race, conference re-alignment, recruitment, and increasing technologies are just some of the reasons why athletics departments are preparing for the future. Universities across the country are creating master plans for their athletics departments and using their plans to augment private/public support of new facilities and connect to existing

facilities. Master plans have entered new territory as stakeholders now expect future plans, which are often seen as a representation of the university's core values and ability to sustain itself in the future.

It's very rare that a master plan starts with a blank slate, and most are developments from existing plans or existing facilities. As their master plans continue to develop and footprints expand, universities are asking themselves many questions: Why connect our facilities? Will our master plan lock in a singular vernacular? Do we lose all flexibility with a new master plan? The challenge becomes, how to connect existing facilities and newly developed facilities within a robust athletics master plan?

MASTER PLANS

Typically, a university will start by planning out its long-term vision for the athletics campus by developing a master plan or updating an existing master plan. A master plan is meant to be continually restructured and flexible with updates over time – a well-developed master plan should create a vision for the next 15+ years. And with

athletics departments' needs consistently changing, this document should be active to give departments the most flexibility.

The athletics master plan should also interact and respond to the overall university's master plan, so that the same objectives and strategies align. The importance of having an athletics-specific master plan is that it allows the department to narrow in on the ever-changing arms race in collegiate athletics and focus on the existing facilities and needs of the teams, while providing a recruiting advantage that highlights future development and renovations.



ORANGE COUNTY GREAT PARK

Because athletics-specific master plans are a newer trend (universities that have them are often on their first iteration), it is instructive to look outside higher education for current best practices in athletics master planning. Orange County Great Park (OCCGP), a 194-acre sports park on the site of the former El Toro Marine Corps Air Station in Irvine, California, is part of a private/public development and a landmark recreational destination within Southern California. The biggest challenge in planning and programming the park was connecting all the facilities in such an overwhelming, expansive site.

Architectural Connections

Instead of using the traditional approach of designing each building independently within the sports park complex, the designers, the sports architecture practice of NBBJ, explored the possibility of unifying all buildings into one architectural language. Because the Sports Park is a large complex, the design of each pavilion begins with the concept of providing a visual "link" that connects all sporting facilities into one sport complex. The pavilion is then broken into smaller masses for each of the specific sports functions, where it provides multiple access points and human circulation between the sports facilities.

Each building shares a unique, yet similar architectural gesture with the application of consistent materials such as wood patterns, painted metal and concrete texture, inspired by the geometry of tree canopies and their distinctive configurations of branches and leaves. The concept was then used to create a pattern on the canopies to provide shading and protection from the often-hot weather of Orange County. This unique canopy design acts as visual icon to visitors and a shading device for human activities.

Programmatic Connections

Because the OCCGP was a new concept, the facilities needed to be flexible enough so that venues could be shared amongst multiple sports and the teams and fans using the venues. Making the buildings and their programs read as a connected destination was an important element in the programming. All the sports venues share a similar seating design; a confetti-esque pattern of primarily white and light gray, but with each sport owning its own color accent. Amidst the vast footprint of the park, attendees can simply say, "Meet me at the blue stadium," and that is enough to make the connection.

Ground Level Connections

Because OCCGP is a decommissioned Marine Corps air base with existing military infrastructure, the design team used a representation when laying

out the groundwork. "Champion's Way" became the main connection artery through the park – very metaphorically like an airplane runway would. Off of that main artery, it was important to have secondary connectors that could easily serve as a guide to the next stadium or venue, but still provide the ability to get back to the "Champion's Way" without any confusing re-orientation. Grouping



BECAUSE THE OCCGP WAS A NEW CONCEPT THE FACILITIES NEEDED TO BE FLEXIBLE

venues and fields based on sport also imparts a sense of place when trying to connect the facilities.

Technological Connections

And what new development is up-to-date without a savvy technology plan? Each venue was designed with an oversized data room that can grow with the technology of tomorrow. Although all the buildings are not 100 percent complete, the intent is eventually to have the park on an app-based system to understand the times of operation and paths of travel.

THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY ATHLETICS MASTER PLAN

The principles embodied in the Orange County Great Park master plan – the connections created amongst architecture, programming, wayfinding and technology – readily translate onto university campuses as well, as can be seen at The Ohio State University (OSU). Since the adoption of OSU's campus Framework Plan in 2010, the university's athletics programmatic priorities have greatly evolved. An update to the Athletics District plan was considered necessary to respond to the evolved priorities while honoring the university's "On Ohio" vision and the 2010 Framework Principles.

The 255-acre Athletics District Framework Plan presents physical ideas to meet these emerging near-term needs within the context of an updated framework that establishes the long-term growth of the Athletics District. The plan consolidates the athletics facility to create a convenient, navigable Athletics Village that provides a sense of community for student-athletes and exciting experiences for visitors. A central Athletics Plaza is proposed at the heart of the district with athletics programs surrounding it. The Plaza is programmed for active athletics use, passive recreation, and communal gathering with fields arrayed around the facilities that frame the plaza. The Village's main street, a pedestrian spine along the west side of the Plaza, connects the district from north to south. Additionally, the plan locates a number of new athletics facilities in the district to ensure multiple access points, enhanced vehicular and transit circulation and clear and safe pedestrian connections, especially for athletes moving between facilities.



THE PLAN CONSOLIDATES THE ATHLETICS FACILITY TO CREATE A CONVENIENT, NAVIGABLE ATHLETICS VILLAGE



A CLEAR AND DETAILED REVENUE GENERATOR MODEL FOR A UNIVERSITY'S ATHLETICS MASTER PLAN CAN HELP MAKE DECISIONS ON NEW BUILD, RENOVATION, OR PHASING OF FACILITIES

Flexibility And Revenue

An important decision for a university developing an athletics master plan is the revenue generator concept. While developing Orange County Great Park, the design team didn't know a minor league soccer team would eventually call the soccer stadium its home, but the simple, yet flexible spaces provided them enough support to make it their permanent home. Considerations like current berm seating that can be transformed into permanent seating, were features that were decided on at OCGP, knowing this could be a home for some team. The developer knew at the time what the revenue model looked like, but flexible architectural moves allowed endless potential to capitalize on its revenue sources. Not only was the marketing and planning shared with the community, but the community embraced it, with housing and commercial development taking off in the region. The revenue model of OCGP became a major connector for the community and transformed into major growth!

Additionally, a clear and detailed revenue generator model for a university's athletics master plan can help make decisions on new build, renovation, or phasing of facilities. Timing and structure can then help set the athletics department up for fundraising and educated decisions on its development.

So What's Next?

No master plan is completely flawless: that is why they're meant to be living documents, updated every 15-20 years. But the main idea is to ensure growth and balance within an organization. An important tool is to not forget the core values that made a master plan so valuable and to follow the plan closely. Universities will obviously need to evaluate trends and evolving development to make sure they're staying ahead of the game – and respond accordingly by developing or renovating facilities – but they need to make sure the connections and core values stay true. Successful master plans can shape a program's futures and success, the campus as a whole and the recruitment of the next generation of student-athletes. ●



Key Connector Principles:

- Consolidate Athletic Facilities west of the river
- Create a convenient, navigable Athletics Village atmosphere
- Provide a sense of community for student-athletes
- Offer an exciting experience for visitors
- Create a pedestrian connection linking programs in the center of the District
- Locate athletics facilities along this connection
- Respect restored tributaries and the working landscape
- Provide transit to connect to the core campus