

# Gladiators to play season in Beloit

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After a final rejection from the Janesville School Board on Tuesday night, the Rock County Gladiators announced this morning they will practice and play this summer at the former Beloit Catholic High School.

The Janesville School Board turn away the semi-pro football team's bid to use the Monterey Stadium.

"Obviously, yesterday was a disappointing day of not getting Monterey," Head Coach Carter Linneman said this morning. "Today is a brand new day, and we're happy to have the old school."

Linneman said the team will pay about \$100 per week to the Hendricks Development Group for games and practices at the field at 1221 Henry Ave. The team will be responsible for maintaining the field and finding bleachers.

The deal is pending final approval of insurance, Linneman said.

Ken and Diane Hendricks bought the field and former school building in August 2002 for \$250,000.

The Gladiators games will fit nicely into the group's goal of supporting the community, said Tim Weeden, director of government affairs for Hendricks.

"We're looking to promote the community," Linneman said. "We hope that just because we're playing in Beloit, we're still going to get the support of the whole county. It's just so far, Beloit has welcomed us."

That community support will kick off this weekend as the Gladiators host a park clean-up day from 8 a.m. to 2 p.m. Saturday at the Beloit Catholic field. Linneman said it will be a good way to meet the neighbors and tidy up the playing space.

The first practice on the new digs will take place from 2 to 4 p.m. that day.

The lease with Hendricks is for one year, Linneman said. When the season

is over, the team will have to decide whether to stay or move.

If the team decides to try for Monterey again, Linneman said they learned they have to start conversations with the district earlier.

The Janesville School Board on Tuesday night encouraged the team to continue talking to the school district administration in hopes of gaining permission for the 2008 season.

The school board's 7-1 vote to reject the request for this year came after a number of team members and supporters spoke.

The lone "no" vote was from Bill Sodemann, who wanted the district to consider changing the fees proposed for Monterey from the commercial rate to the rate for civic groups.

The proposed costs of using Monterey, including a hefty liability insurance policy, had persuaded the team that they couldn't afford it.

The proposed requirements would have pushed costs to the \$2,500-\$3,000 range per game, Linneman said.

Gladiators acting general manager Brian Worth said he had run into similar costs when he investigated using the football fields of Beloit College and UW-Whitewater.

The Gladiators apparently had decided not to pursue the matter with the school board. A representative called district business director Doug Bunton Monday to tell him so.

But later the team received a groundswell of encouragement from the community and decided to attend the board meeting at the last minute, Linneman said.

Bunton wasn't informed of the change of heart, so he was surprised when a large number of team members and supporters showed up at the meeting.

Board member Amy Rashkin said the lack of communication didn't bode well for a future relationship, which would require prompt communication about the condition of the field.

Board member Todd Bailey said he was bothered at the administration's

lengthy list of proposed conditions for the Gladiators. He said it looked as though the administration had inflated the costs.

Bailey also said he didn't appreciate the administration's suggestion that any field damage by the Gladiators could open up claims by high school players who later get injured on the field.

Liability concerns have not been a big deal with other groups using district facilities, Bailey said, but making a big deal of the issue in this case could serve to "open a can of worms" in the future when a high school player suffers a turf-related injury.

Speaking against the Gladiators' bid was the head coach of the Craig High School football team, Bill O'Leary, who spoke on behalf of himself and his counterpart at Parker High School, Joe Dye.

O'Leary said he and Dye are "diehard football guys" who would like to help the Gladiators, but he couldn't recommend that the adults be allowed to play at Monterey.

O'Leary said Monterey already sees 27 high school games over nine weeks in the fall. But when the field is in risk of damage, he has to tell his sophomore teams they can't play at Monterey in order to keep the field in "pristine" condition for varsity games.

O'Leary worried the Gladiators would further stress the field.

"I don't want my kid to lose a chance to play on that field when that field is there for them to play on" because of the Gladiators, O'Leary said.