

Return of men's program still on schedule

But Spartans AD says timetable for new facility depends on fund-raising efforts

By Jeff Faraudo
Correspondent

SAN JOSE » The return of men's track and field at San Jose State remains on schedule for 2018-19, but a new facility for the program once known as Speed City has hit a speed bump.

SJSU athletic director Marie Tuite shot down rumors Friday that the school intends to pave over the old Bud Winter Field for a parking lot on 10th Street and confirmed that the Spartans will sponsor men's indoor and outdoor teams next school year.

"There is no doubt, no gray about San Jose State in 2018-19 sponsoring men's indoor and outdoor track," she said.

The timetable for a new track facility is less certain, Tuite conceded. It will not happen by next season and the timing will depend on the success of private fundraising efforts.

Fifteen months ago, the school announced plans to bring back the program and build a new \$5 million track facility on the 50th anniversary of ex-Spartans sprint greats Tommie Smith and John Carlos

making worldwide headlines with their raised-fist civil rights protest on the medal stand at the 1968 Mexico City Olympics.

Asked when a permanent track facility could be built, Tuite said, "As soon as we raise the money."

In August 2016, the school said it already had \$2 million of the \$5 million needed. Tuite characterized those funds as money that has been "committed."

Fundraising also will dictate how extensively the athletic department will be able to dole out the 12.6 scholarships allowed to men's track and field by the NCAA.

Bob Poynter, an All-American sprinter for the Spartans in the early 1960s and later an assistant coach for the program, was skeptical the program can thrive without scholarships.

"You might be able to get some walk-ons. You're not going to get quality athletes," he said.

Tuite is more optimistic. "I am not concerned we're not going to be able to attract high-quality student-athletes," she said.

The San Jose State

men's track program was once among the nation's best. Coach Bud Winter produced 27 Olympians, also including Lee Evans, John Powell and Ed Burke. Ninety-one SJSU athletes earned top-10 world rankings by Track and Field News and the Spartans won the 1969 NCAA men's track championship.

"The best sport San Jose State ever had," Poynter said.

Putting SJSU back on the sport's map will be a huge undertaking, and will require a facility.

Supporters heard talk this week that the existing plot, which houses a decaying track oval, was to be used as a parking facility.

"That is false," Tuite said. "We are in discussions as far as a permanent site for our men's and women's track program. The current footprint of the track is not going to be turned in a full-fledged parking structure."

She conceded that on any urban campus parking is at a premium.

"No final decisions have been made, Tuite said.

All possibilities remain on the table for how and

where to build a track oval and all that is needed for the program. That includes possibly mimicking the "Sports Deck" built at San Diego State, where a multi-use track and soccer facility sits atop a two-story parking structure.

She also said the school will look into creating temporary training facilities that might initially be limited.

San Jose City College coach Steve Nelson hopes the school doesn't settle for the rumored plan he heard about — a six-lane track spanning only 120 meters with one turn. That's 80 meters short of the 200-meter distance at which Smith won his gold medal in 1968.

"Realistically, I could see a junior high having a six-lane deal where they can work out," Nelson said.

Money will determine everything, Tuite said.

"When the university announced we were going to be sponsoring men's track, we knew we would have to generate the funding to support it," she said. "All of our sports are working feverishly to do that."