

TOP-NOTCH IN THE TOWNSHIP

By Shayne Combs, SVCsportszone.com

HUNTINGTON PROVIDING ELITE FACILITIES FOR STUDENT-ATHLETES

their experience the top priority. Whether it's in the classroom or on the field of play, we want to give our students the best chance to succeed."

As I continued to talk to other members of the Huntington staff and athletic department, it was common to hear a positive echo with my conversation with Kerns.

"The upgrades to our athletic facilities over the past five years have given our student athletes the affirmation that their commitment to the TWP (Huntington Township) is matched by the athletic department, the administration and the Board of Education," said Huntington Athletic Director Justin Kellough. "We have taken great pride in providing our kids with the best we possibly can."

For starters, the softball field was moved from the high school location to the complex in 2016. This allowed the old diamond to be used more exclusively for little league and physical education.

The football field has been recently upgraded in some press box areas and with a replaced scoreboard. The track program also benefited from a resurfaced track and relocation of field events. Currently, the baseball team is in the middle of an incredible upgrade that will include a new backstop, better drainage, resurfaced field, a new scoreboard, new seating, improved dugouts, new press box, and much more.

"I think it is a great thing for baseball at Huntington," said Ed Yates, who serves as the head coach for baseball and also as the football defensive coordinator. "In the



If you have not had a chance to visit the athletic facilities at Huntington High School in recent years, you have missed out on a school which has somewhat quietly started to put together some of the best small-school facilities in all of the Southeast District. The district has made quite a commitment to its athletic facilities located off campus. The Myrl Shoemaker Athletic Complex is located on Blain Highway, less than a mile from the high school, and is the home of several Huntsmen athletic teams.

According to high school principal Craig Kerns, the visions for these improvements have been in the works for much of the past decade. According to Kerns, the work has really taken off and started to come to fruition in the past four or five years.

"We want our students to have access and the opportunity to benefit from the best facilities we can provide," said Kerns. "We are fortunate that our Board of Education, administration, and staff all continue to make decisions that keep the students and

past, we have been unable to play some league home games, and last year we even lost our home tournament game (moved to Waverly). It is exciting for the baseball team to have a field that they can be very proud of!"

The school's commitment to bettering the facilities has generated some involvement from the outside as well. Through donations, Huntington has been able to remodel its weight-training facility at the school and this is allowing them to implement the Bigger, Faster, Stronger Training Program.

Furthermore, Huntington is implementing an Energy Project which resulted in new lights in the middle school and high school gymnasiums, as well as new lights at the football field.

"As we've made improvements, we've seen our students and staff take great pride in the facilities and all that has been provided," said Kerns. "We also understand the school is the hub

of our community. We can't thank the Township enough for its support of our students and school. I'm confident they will also continue to benefit from the access they have to our facilities."

All of these projects have supplemented perhaps the biggest addition of all -- the remodeling of the football fieldhouse, including the home and visitor locker rooms, as well as officials' locker room. The school has also added a new wrestling facility, as well as a new archery/multi-purpose facility.

As anyone involved in sports could imagine at a small school, gym time is hard to find in the winter. Wrestling and archery will continue to compete in the high school gymnasium; however, the new facility will allow basketball programs the freedom to use the necessary gym time. This should benefit the little league and junior high teams in terms of getting the proper practice times throughout the season and offseason.

Kellough discussed with me how Huntington always prides itself on being tough and doing the little things, but the school felt like it was important to stay up with the competition in terms of facilities and other consistency of resources. He also stressed how important it was to provide for all the sports.

"By giving our secondary sports like wrestling and archery club dedicated spaces to practice, the coaches and organizers of those programs are able to autonomously create a culture of their own," said Kellough, who was a successful three-sport athlete and a 2008 graduate at Huntington. "Prior to those facilities, archery and wrestling would have to share spaces with basketball or cheerleading, and even baseball and softball in the spring. Fighting for gym time or storage space is a variable we could eliminate for our wrestling coaches and archery coordinators. This in turn gave our basketball, baseball, softball, and track coaches the space they needed as well. Archery is part of our culture. The same is true with wrestling. We are a decade away from having a second

generation wrestler at Huntington, so every time a bitty wrestler starts to roll on the mat, his parents are learning the sport, too. Now both programs are able to provide great instruction, while at the same time strengthening relationships at home."

Facilities playing a big part in growth of Huntington Wrestling

With the new facility (at 60' X 72'), the wrestling program at Huntington has full access for completing a full schedule for every member K-12 in the program. The building is in use for kids of all ages Monday through Friday, which prepares kids to compete on the weekend (including little league on Sundays) all over southeast Ohio and beyond.

"Our new facility is really nice, and we are grateful for that support," said wrestling head coach Mark DePugh, who is leading a program which is only six years old. "It is a great place where the wrestlers can focus undistracted on training and preparation. We have actually had multiple area wrestling coaches and





athletic directors come and tour the facility with hopes of their own."

The foundation of the program appears to be the younger kids who are benefiting greatly from the new training opportunities. "The sport of wrestling has so much to offer kids," said DePugh when talking about his 42 little league wrestlers in the program. "Wrestling teaches balance, leverage, strength, agility, and so much more... plus the kids have fun."

The current high school squad, mostly freshmen and sophomores, has been extremely competitive this winter. At the time of print for this feature, the Huntsmen had wrestled in six tournaments with the individuals combining for a 51-19 record.

Leading the way is sophomore Dayland Thomas. Thomas

competes in the 106-pound division. His 20 consecutive victories, as well as his five straight tournament championships this season, are both school records and are setting an impressive bar for the young program. Thomas has started the season 28-1 with 27 pins.

"Dayland is a really good kid to have in the room," said DePugh. "He has a great attitude, is a hard worker, and is coachable. When you bring those qualities into the wrestling room every day, great things are going to happen. We are very proud of Dayland Thomas."

Join us on March 11 as we host the MADE dodgeball tournament. The facilities will also be open to the public for tours. Come see the exciting things that are happening in the Township!

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