

Move to Asheville High School unfortunate but necessary

EDITORIAL

Readers of local newspapers over the summer witnessed a strange kind of back-and-forth jockeying between Brevard College and the Brevard School District over a “Will-they-or-won’t-they” question.

The question referred, of course, to whether the Tornados football team would play their Fall 2010 home games—the fifth season since football was reinstated at the College in 2006—once again at Brevard High School, or would they move to a different location, most likely Asheville High School?

Before the College officially confirmed on June 28 that BC football home games would be moved to Asheville for the 2010 season, that question had been answered for all intents and purposes in the local press.

And almost immediately, the rumors and jockeying and second-guessing began. Was the College making the move simply to save money? Had the College turned its back on the city and fans who had supported it for the past four seasons? How would this move affect local businesses that had reaped the benefits of Tornado football?

For its part, the Brevard School District also faced some tough questions. Was the field at Brevard High School overused? Did it pose a danger, especially in wet weather, to athletes who played on it? Was it wise to double the price it charged Brevard College from \$8,500 to \$16,500 to play home games there?

No matter how one chooses to answer these questions, nearly everyone agrees that the move of Tornado home games to Asheville High School is unfortunate for those in Brevard who are fans of BC football.

Unfortunate, but necessary, given the circumstances.

President Drew Van Horn and Athletic Director Kim Pate have said repeatedly that the decision to move home games to Asheville High School was not based on cost. Despite the lower cost charged by the Asheville school district, other factors—such as the added cost of transportation, lower gate receipts and concessions—serve to offset the price difference, enough that it may actually cost the College *more* to play in Asheville in the long run. The real reason for the move lies elsewhere.

Last season’s rainfall, coupled with the heavy use and poor drainage of the Brevard High School field, directly impacted at least two BC games. One could not be played at all because of the severe saturation of the field, requiring the College to move at the last minute to an alternate venue for that week’s game.

The other game was the so-called “Mud Bowl” Oct. 31, in which field conditions were so bad, South Atlantic Conference officials were concerned it could affect player safety. Officials had raised a similar concern about the BHS field conditions two weeks earlier, following the Mars Hill game.

Pate has said that player safety is the overriding factor that led to the decision. “As a member of the NCAA and the South Atlantic Conference, we value student-athlete welfare and are committed to providing a safe playing environment for our student-athletes to compete,” she said at a press conference announcing the decision June 28. “In consideration for the safety and welfare of our student-athletes, including the youth in this community who rely on the venue for multiple sporting opportunities, we feel it is in the best interest for us to move our games temporarily until the field can be addressed.”

Van Horn reiterated how difficult it was for the College to reach this decision. “The ultimate safety and welfare of all student-athletes is a priority for our conference, the NCAA Division

II and Brevard College,” he said. “Brevard College sees this relocation as a one year solution and hopes to return to our great town next fall. We do ask our boosters, fans and community to understand the reasons for our decision and to support our student-athletes this fall.”

Also present at the June 28 press conference was SAC Commissioner Patrick Britz, who reiterated the emphasis on player safety while referencing the games affected by field conditions last season that contributed to the decision. “It was important to make every effort to avoid similar situations for future contests,” Britz said. “One of the priorities of the Conference’s strategic plan is to protect the health of and provide a safe environment for all SAC student-athletes.

“It would have been very easy for Brevard College to sit back and say we hope what happened in 2009 does not happen again. By ensuring that the unfortunate situations that occurred last season do not occur again in 2010, Brevard College has embraced the priority of protecting the health and safety of the student-athletes and the SAC applauds them for it.”

As these speakers demonstrate, the issue is bigger, really, than just whether Brevard College plays its home games at BHS. It affects players on opposing teams—particularly if poor field conditions would require a last-minute change of location, as it did last season—as well as all the other high school and junior high players who use the BHS field for their athletic events.

Pate, Van Horn, and Britz all say the move to AHS this season is temporary, a one-year deal until field conditions can be addressed at Brevard High School. Let’s hope for the sake of Tornado football that over the next year, something will be done to make the Brevard field safer for all the many student-athletes who call it “home.”

THE MOVE TO AHS: A TIMELINE OF KEY EVENTS

Oct. 17, 2009: SAC officials express concern for player safety after the Mars Hill game at BHS.

Oct. 31, 2009: Tornados win “Mud Bowl” against Catawba, after a week of heavy rain turned the BHS field into a quagmire. SAC officials again express concern for player safety.

Winter/Spring: In contract negotiations for the 2010 season, Transylvania School District raises the price from \$8,500 to \$16,500 for the College to play home games at Brevard High School. The Asheville school district, meanwhile, requests at least eight days notice should the College need to relocate a home game to the AHS stadium.

July 2: A Hendersonville Times-News editorial lauds the move to Asheville as a smart decision. “Let’s do the math,” the editorial reads. “Pay \$16,000 to play on a grass field that is overused and basically turns into a mud pit by the end of the season or pay \$7,500 to play on a state-of-the-art, never muddy artificial turf surface.” According to the Times-News, “It’s a no-brainer. In these tough times, you have to be thrifty.”

SEP **OCT** **NOV** **DEC** **JAN** **FEB** **MAR** **APR** **MAY** **JUN** **JUL** **AUG**

Sept. 19, 2009: The home game scheduled against Southern Virginia University is moved to Asheville High School. Heavy rains earlier in the week saturate the field at Brevard High School, leading to a decision on Friday that the game scheduled for the next day could not be played at BHS.

January: SAC Commissioner Patrick Britz meets with Brevard College officials, reiterating a concern for player safety, and gives the College the green light to consider moving home games for the 2010 season.

June 28: Brevard Athletic Director Kim Pate announces that 2010 home football games will be played at Asheville High School. The decision is supported by President Drew Van Horn and SAC Commissioner Britz as a short-term resolution until field conditions at BHS can be improved.

Aug. 28: Brevard’s home season opens at AHS with a 53-27 win against Edward Waters.