



Illinois State University celebrates OSF HealthCare naming its Athletic Indoor Practice Center

For Immediate Release

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(April 12, 2025 | (Normal, Ill.) – The sun shone brightly on the signature OSF HealthCare brown and white logo which now adorns the Illinois State University Athletic Indoor Practice Center – a nearly 79,000-square-foot facility just north of Horton Fieldhouse that includes a 100-yard practice football field with a single end zone.

Kids played various games and engaged with student athletes in the heated, inflatable dual-membrane fabric air dome designed for year-round use by Redbird student-athletes. It also has artificial turf to match the current surface at Hancock Stadium.

The open house celebration was held prior to the Illinois State football spring game. OSF STEAM hosted a table where kids learned about color blindness with special 3D glasses, plus they explored the human brain with specimens they could experience hands-on. They also took away a coloring page as part of activities designed to engage young people to think about the wonders of science and a potential career in medicine.

OSF decided to make a significant financial contribution to the long-anticipated ISU athletic indoor practice facility on the heels of a five-year agreement that made OSF HealthCare the official health care provider for Illinois State University athletics in an exclusive partnership. As part of that agreement, OSF HealthCare provides Illinois State University student-athletes with access to athletic trainers, sports medicine providers, orthopedic surgeons, and behavioral health professionals.

OSF HealthCare Eastern Region Chief Medical Officer Carol Friesen says the strong partnership between two long-standing community organizations is about contributing to better education, and health and wellness.

"It's important that we take care of each other. Health care and academics are the lynchpin of every community and if we're strong, then the whole community is vibrant. So, we wanted to make an investment in a meaningful way that would further what's going on here at ISU."

Friesen was astounded to learn 19 different sports on campus use the facility, along with community use by various travel sports teams. OSF HealthCare St. Joseph Medical Center President Eunmee (pronounced UHN-may) Shim was impressed by the size and scope of the facility and shared that the significant OSF investment reflects its Mission to serve with the greatest care and love. Plus, it supports a potential future talent pool.

"Investing in ISU makes perfect sense because we'll be getting the talents from them. They are the anchor of the community we can serve together."

Athletic Director Jeri Beggs says having an indoor practice facility is so necessary to remain a competitive program in NCAA Division 1 athletics. But even Beggs was surprised by how many sports are now using the building.

"Our golf team loves this space because they can chip and actually see the trajectory of the ball. Baseball and softball play almost legitimate games in here. They put home plate over here. Softball says it's basically a real field for them except right field is a little short. So, all of our sports come in here – just doing sprints in here." She adds, "It has changed every sport that we have."

Retired former athletic director Larry Lyons started the fundraising and planning for the facility. Head football coach Brock Spack credits him with a vision for the indoor practice center, as well as for improving other facilities dating back to Spack's start with the university 15 years ago. But Spack says without financial support from OSF HealthCare, Lyon's vision might not have become reality.

Spack also points out the impressive facility has helped with recruiting, and he says it has made a significant difference in the excitement and performance among student athletes.

"It doesn't matter when we practice here – whether its spring or winter, or fall, they come in here and they play lights out because I think it has a big-time feel to it, and they feel like a big-time team in here. We have really good practices in here."

Redbird Athletics dedicated and officially opened the newly named OSF HealthCare Athletics Training Center on September 30, 2023.

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