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Kansas football facility gets \$10-million donation

By Kevin Haskin
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LAWRENCE – To make a new football facility a reality, Kansas needed a jump start.

It turned to a graduate who knows more about jump balls and hopes the contribution convinces other donors to pitch in.

KU announced Monday that Tom Kivisto has pledged \$10 million toward the planned facility at Memorial Stadium. Kivisto played basketball for the Jayhawks, beginning with the 1971-1972 season and continuing with a Final Four appearance in 1974.

“I believe a successful football program helps a university at every level,” Kivisto said. “By making the football program stronger, the entire university and all of its sports programs are the beneficiaries.”

“Athletics was a huge part of my life at KU, and I respect and appreciate what (athletic director) Lew Perkins is doing. I am happy to do what I can to support the university, especially its athletics programs.”

The football facility is estimated to cost \$40 million and include offices, meeting rooms, locker rooms, a weight room and academic facilities.

With Kivisto’s donation, KU has \$18 million pointed toward the project, but officials want the bulk of the money raised before construction begins.

“There’s still a ways to go, but we’re excited about this gift because it’s from someone in the KU family,” KU associate athletic director Jim Marchiony said. “The public pitch (for donations) is really the splash that a gift like this makes.”

KU coach Mark Mangino, as well as officials within the athletic department, have stressed the need to consolidate the football operation in one location.

Currently, the KU football offices are located in the Wagnon Center, which sits just north of the practice fields. The Jayhawks share the weight room in the Anderson Family Strength Center with other athletics programs. Whenever they desire to practice on artificial turf, they must bus to Memorial Stadium.

KU chancellor Robert Hemenway supports the proposed football facility, but doesn’t want it to compromise the graduation procession, or the overall view, down Campanile Hill.

A native of the Chicago area, Kivisto was an Academic All-American at KU. He serves as president and chief executive officer of SemGroup, L.P., an energy service company based in Tulsa, Okla. Under Kivisto's oversight, SemGroup has completed more than 35 acquisitions, and its total assets have grown from \$227.4 million in 2000 to more than \$1.7 billion at the end of 2004.

"The entire KU athletics family is indebted to Tom for his generosity," Perkins said. "By consolidating all football activities into one area, the facility will free up space needed for other sports. In addition, this football facility will help KU football be more competitive with other Big 12 programs."