

**Chairs' Corner – January 2008**  
**Husky Stadium**

TO: UW Foundation, Campaign Cabinet, Deans, Development & Alumni Staff  
FROM: Orin C. Smith, Chair, UW Foundation  
Daniel J. Evans, Vice Chair, UW Foundation  
William H. Gates, Campaign Chair

Dear Friends,

The English majors among you will remember the poem “Kubla Khan” by Samuel Taylor Coleridge:

“In Xanadu did Kubla Khan  
A stately pleasure-dome decree:  
Where Alph, the sacred river, ran  
Through caverns measureless to man  
Down to a sunless sea. . . .”

The poem came to Coleridge in an opium dream. It was never finished, he said, because a neighbor arrived and woke him from his dream.

Back in the fall, our re-imagined Husky Stadium was looking a little too much like Coleridge’s pleasure-dome: visionary but rudely interrupted. A price tag of \$415-\$450 million had emerged. The President and the Regents did not exactly ask what the planners had been smoking, but it was clear to all that it would take a Kubla Khan to get the project done, and none was in sight. (Of course, the stadium was never going to have a dome, and “sunless” is perhaps a slight slur on Lake Washington, but grant us some poetic license—we’re sportswriters here.)

We are very pleased to tell you that, as of today’s Regents Meeting (January 17), the stadium renovation has come out of the vapors with a new lease on life. One of us, Dan, is especially pleased, because he has been involved with the project for a long time and chairs the Husky Stadium Advisory Committee, which President Emmert appointed last April to oversee plans for the stadium’s future.

Todd Turner, outgoing athletic director, has been talking about the sorry state of Husky Stadium since he arrived in 2004, and his was hardly a lone voice. There is no longer any question that action is urgently required. The lower bowl, completed in 1920, is crumbling, there are seismic issues, and overall facilities for access and the comfort of fans (such as restrooms) are completely inadequate. Deferred maintenance costs over the next 10 years are estimated at \$100 million, even if we do nothing more.

But *shouldn't* we do something more? Many people think so. Given the centrality of football to our whole athletic program (70 percent of athletic funding comes from

football earnings), and given the current realities of big TV dollars and intense competition in recruiting players, and given the stately pleasure-domes popping up on campuses around the country—shouldn't we use this moment of renovation to make a significantly better stadium? Shouldn't we give the players better facilities? Shouldn't we put fans closer to the action and provide more amenities? Wouldn't this ultimately strengthen our football program and therefore our whole athletic program?

Of course, there are larger questions about the place of athletics and pleasure-domes at institutions of higher learning. For those questions we refer you to last week's *Seattle Times* column by Mark Emmert: [http://seattletimes.nwsourc.com/html/opinion/2004116048\\_emmert10.html](http://seattletimes.nwsourc.com/html/opinion/2004116048_emmert10.html) . We concur with Mark: sports are a worthy part of the University of Washington when pursued with the right values and a sense of perspective.

In that context, the arguments for a better Husky Stadium are very persuasive. If it's worth doing, it's worth doing well. So, almost three years ago, the architectural firm HOK Sport joined a master-planning effort for Husky athletics, with Husky Stadium at the top of everybody's list. In November 2006, conceptual plans for a striking stadium renovation were unveiled.

You can see HOK's wonderful drawings at [http://gohuskies.cstv.com/view.gal?id=3869&template=player\\_gallery](http://gohuskies.cstv.com/view.gal?id=3869&template=player_gallery) . The track is gone, the field is lower, and seats in the new bowl reach right down to the edge. The big east-end scoreboard is replaced by smaller ones in each eastern corner, opening up the view of Lake Washington. The west end is moved in close and built up, with the option of a covered deck, with state-of-the-art training facilities below, and with administrative and retail spaces facing out toward the street. There is provision for premium seating. And of course there are the essential upgrades: restrooms, elevators, ADA access, food concessions, seismic strengthening, and so on. Though there is more space for seating, total capacity remains about the same, once the ADA adjustments and premium seating are accounted for.

The vision was and is compelling. But in this incarnation, it proved to be beyond our means. (Some of you may be recalling your own remodels.) Last summer Dan's committee, which includes John Connors, Ron Crockett, Anne Gittinger, Don James, Rick Redman, Jon Runstad, Todd Turner, Doug Wadden, Scott Woodward and student leaders, asked a contractor for cost estimates. The price, as we noted above, came in at \$415-\$450 million—and the committee had projected to raise (through donations and higher ticket revenue) only about \$130 million.

At this point, as Mark Emmert turned thumbs down and the press reported glum Regental discussions of selling stadium naming rights (Dan: over my dead body), the committee went back to work.

In brief, here is what it brought back to the President and the Regents:

The total renovation has been scaled back by about a third, primarily by making the west-end piece less ambitious, so that the cost is down to \$300 million. The committee has taken a hard look at potential fund-raising and ticket-revenue income and raised its projection to \$150 million.

With that money, it is proposed, the UW would fund the parts of the project that are real enhancements to the stadium: lowering the field and removing the track, new stands below the old bowl, new service and support space, new premium seating and club room, sound system upgrades, some of the costs associated with new concourses, restrooms, and concessions, and a new football operations and support building. These are the “vision” parts of the project—the things that will lift the stadium to a new level.

But for the other half of the cost, which covers basic repair and preservation—replacing the old bowl, meeting seismic and ADA standards, utility improvements, elevators, and much of the work on concourses, restrooms, and concessions—the University will go to the state for help. The committee’s reasoning? This is a much-loved public facility at a public institution, and the state has an interest in its safety and utility.

If you read our message last month, you will ask if the UW is requesting a capital appropriation. The answer is no. Working with Randy Hodgins, Dan and his committee have devised a two-part approach to the legislature. The first request is for deferral of the sales tax on construction of the stadium. The second is for the transfer to Husky Stadium of some of the revenues currently being used to help pay for professional stadiums in King County, once those bonds are retired in the next few years. Together, these two pieces would give us the missing half of our project cost.

Mark, Dan, and Randy have already begun exploratory talks with legislators and public officials. These conversations have been encouraging. There are no promises, but no turndowns either. (Husky fans are everywhere.)

With the Regents’ approval, given today, Dan and the committee will start an expedited process for moving the project along. If the pieces fall into place, construction could begin immediately after the 2008 season, the team could play the 2009 season in (probably) Qwest Field, and the whole project could be nearly wrapped up before Sound Transit begins building its University Station in front of the stadium. This is a brief window—missing it means either tangling with the transit construction or postponing the renovation for several years. And the economic advantages of going ahead quickly, in a cooling economy and construction market, are considerable.

So wish us luck here in Xanadu.

Orin, Dan, and Bill