

SPARTAN STADIUM
THROUGH THE YEARS

An Essay
Presented to
the California Pioneers
of Santa Clara County

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INTRODUCTION

San Jose State University's Spartan Stadium is a significant and well-used landmark in the city of San Jose. Spartan Stadium has seen many changes since the opening day back in October of 1933. From the Great Depression to the present, the Spartan football games have attracted crowds of thousands of excited and cheering people.

CHAPTER ONE
THE EARLY STAGES OF SPARTAN STADIUM

October of 1933 was the height of the Great Depression and a time of changing governments for countries overseas. It was during this time that the idea of a new site for the San Jose State College football team to play its games originated as the present playing area was unsuitable for sports and unable to hold large crowds. Spartan Field, located on the northwest corner of the rectangle formed by Alma, Humboldt, Seventh, and Tenth streets, was very poorly maintained. There were weeds instead of grass on the playing field. The field was rarely watered, making it dry, and there were stickers all over the field. When a football player was tackled, he would have to pull out all of the stickers when he got up.(1) The Spartan Field of early years had the capacity to seat only three to four thousand people in its bleachers while an additional two to three thousand people could sit around the playing field on the ground. The crowds were always large at the football games, and mainly all of the people there were Spartan fans. The students, athletes, and staff at San Jose State, however, were growing tired of the poor field conditions and the many people having to sit on the ground. Consequently, in mid-1932, an idea for a new stadium was proposed.(2)

The new stadium would be moved south from where it was located at the time, and it was suggested by many that the school itself be moved south into the vacant lot where a major college could be built. Everyone was for the idea of a new stadium, but as for the planned move for the school, there was some

controversy. Merchants opposed the moving of the school greatly because most of their business came from San Jose State students. Places like Brian's candies and many other stores and restaurants located in downtown San Jose fought the move and ultimately won. The school didn't move.(3)

In 1933, ground was broken for a football stadium on property located on South Seventh Street, a mile from Washington Square. The estimated cost of the stadium was \$20,000, and it would initially seat up to 6,000 people.

During construction, on March 22, 1933, remains of Indian tribesmen were unearthed. Ashes from fires once burned by the tribesmen, along with two pestles and a mortar, were found over a large area, ten feet underground. Dr. Earl C. Count of San Jose State expressed the belief that the depth of the ash proved that the spot was used for many years before it was flooded over by the waters of the Coyote River. He also estimated that the site had been covered at least one-thousand years.

In early October of 1933, the finishing touches were still being added to the stadium, but opening day remained on the same date it had been planned for...October 7th. The Spartans were to battle San Francisco State University in the very first game to be played in the new facility. To a roaring, full capacity crowd, San Jose's Spartans defeated San Francisco by a score of forty-four to six. The new stadium was dedicated on October 14, 1933, where it was named "Spartan Stadium".(4)

CHAPTER TWO
THE EXPANSION PROJECT

Up to the mid-1960's there wasn't really a need for a major stadium expansion. The gradual expansions of Spartan Stadium since opening day up to the 1960's had helped the stadium go from 6,000 seats to 18,000.(5) The expansion projects had been done every few years, or whenever San Jose State had the money to fund it. This just wasn't good enough for those Spartan's, however, because they felt there still wasn't enough seating for the growing number of fans and Spartan's themselves. In the latter part of 1965, a massive stadium expansion was proposed which would raise the total seating from 18,000 to somewhere in the area of 40,000 seats.(6) The stadium, which was proposed in late 1965 by the City Sports Commission, would cost an estimated \$3.3 million. That was a huge hang-up for many people who were told that an expansion from 18,300 seats to 41,000 seats would only cost \$2 million. The new cost estimate was developed by architects Higgins and Root during September of 1969.(7)

The expansion plans were put off for a while due to problems over funding for the stadium. Also, August of 1970, an alternate stadium site at Evergreen Junior College, located in San Jose, was suggested by Optimum Systems, Inc. of Palo Alto. This plan was later rejected because a feasibility report had shown that the present location of Spartan Stadium would be economically sound if the parking problems were solved.(8)

The feasibility report, (which cost \$6,000), was the product of a study that the San Jose City Council had ordered to find out if the expansion proposal was economically sound. The report made a few more suggestions to the expansion group which

basically said that they should promote the Spartan football team and find a coach that could give the Spartans a winning season. The report also projected that the first five to eight years of the newly expanded stadium there would be a loss of money unless San Jose State's athletic program was unusually effective. The success or failure of the team and its management could mean \$200,000 in profits a year. (9)

One more thing the feasibility report displayed was the costs to build a new stadium on Evergreen's campus which would cost an estimated \$2.1 million, and to expand Spartan Stadium, which was \$2.1 million in 1969, but had gone up to \$2.8 million, (\$3.1 million with astroturf), because of inflation, making the annual payment amount to \$300,000. (The report had been finished in late August 1970.) (10)

Another two years of delay went by before the stadium plans were brought up again, but this time the Stadium Building Committee wouldn't let the expansion plans slip by the City Council for another time. In early January of 1972, a new and more expensive plan for expanding Spartan Stadium had won the support of San Jose City Council without an advisory vote of the people. (11) The new set of expansion plans had included a soccer field, which would hike the total price up \$2 million more dollars, equaling \$5.6 million. (12) The City Council voted on the same day to proceed on the drawings and plans for the revamped project, and they also voted to authorize a \$1,950 updating of the 1970 economic feasibility study, and still on that same day, they voted 3-3 on Councilwoman Janet Gray Hayes'

move to express an intention to consider putting the stadium expansion on a ballot. The 3-3 tie failed and a go-ahead advisory vote was approved 5-1, with Mrs. Hayes dissenting. (13)

Around the same time, (January of 1972), Chester Root, of Higgins and Root Architectural firm went over the reasons for the inflation with the City Council. He said that the addition of seventy yards to the playing field to accommodate soccer, the rebuilding of ramps and other facilities to meet fire codes, the addition of artificial turf, and a half-million dollar inflation factor caused the rise in the price. Mr. Root also said that it would take a year before construction could begin, and once it did, it would be an additional fourteen to fifteen months before the project was finished, setting the opening date for Spring of 1974. (14)

Once again, the problem of parking came up, but city manager Thomas Fletcher said that 7,000 parking spaces were more than many new stadiums around the country had, and that there were also other ways of transportation available. (15)

In early February of 1974, San Jose City Council members cleared the way for the sale of \$8 million in bonds to finance the stadium expansion. In August of that year, the City Council unexpectedly killed the stadium expansion project, leaving only \$500,000 in bills from the project. A huge portion of the money was for the new set of plans, all 111 pages, which cost \$256,443. The main reason for trashing the project was that the bids came in \$3 million higher than expected. (16)

For what would need to be the final time, in early 1976, the

Spartan Stadium expansion plans were brought back to life. On February 15 of that year, Al Garza, a San Jose City Councilman, approved an admissions and entertainment tax, where some of the money from the tax would go to fund the Spartan Stadium expansion project.

On the first day of April in 1976, Santa Clara County supervisors approved the expansion project, on the condition that no county tax money was spent on construction or operation costs for the sports facility. Supervisor Rod Diridon, a 1962 graduate of San Jose State University, introduced a solution to pay for the expansion, a fundraiser which would raise \$6 million.(17) Sometime in early June of 1976, San Jose City Council was asked by members of the City Sports Commission to endorse the expansion project, and the council said yes, provided that the city didn't have to pay any of the costs, and that the huge parking problem would be solved.

In August of 1977, another feasibility report was released, but this time people only looked to it for suggestions, instead of alternate stadium locations. The Environmental Impact Report brought up the issue of parking for another time, stating that there were only 6,400 parking spaces, when there should at least be 9,600. The report suggested that private land owners in the area of the stadium convert their property to parking lots, that a shuttle-bus system should be developed, and that the City-owned land next to Municipal Stadium should be turned into a parking lot, but that move would present a problem with Olinder Community Garden.(18) The streets were another headache for the stadium

expansion supporters. Traffic was not a new problem for Spartan Stadium, as neighborhood residents had long complained about cars blocking their driveways and creating a nuisance.

Another thing stated by the report was that twenty-five policemen would be needed to direct traffic before and after games. This would cost the City up to \$1,500 per event. The final problem involving ways to get to the stadium would be pedestrians. The walkways, and space provided on the walkways to Spartan Stadium had been proved not able to handle large crowds, and the entrances into the stadium would have to be enlarged as well. (19)

The Spartan Building Crew and the City Council took the suggestions into mind, and they began to work on ways of making transportation to Spartan Stadium better. A year later, Santa Clara County Supervisors said that they would pledge \$150,000 for the fiscal year 1977-1978 and planned to pay out \$750,000 over five years for the project. (20) Some other ways of making money for Spartan Stadium's expansion would be to bring a major professional soccer team to play there and to have concerts held in the facility. In late April to early May of 1978, the City Council waited on a professional soccer team's contract with Spartan Stadium before they gave up \$90,000 in preliminary engineering and design work designated for street improvements as part of the proposed expansion of Spartan Stadium. It wasn't much longer before the Earthquakes' professional soccer team owner, Tony Kovac, signed a contract that would last five years, allowing the City to start on the street work. The start of

stadium expansion was set for Fall of 1979; the pieces were finally coming together.

On December 15th, 1979, ground was finally broken to start the Spartan Stadium expansion, ending a long road of delay and doubt that had begun back in 1965 when the expansion plans were first introduced. The University had approved a building contract with Stolte Inc. of Oakland in late November and at the same was working out an agreement with the Earthquakes for the partial repayment of City money the team had borrowed. University officials had also drafted a traffic-management plan to meet the needs of the traffic created by the expanded Spartan Stadium.

The stadium expansion was partially over at the end of 1980, when it allowed upper deck seating for the first time and a new press box facility. The capacity of the stadium was at 22,000 people, leaving 15,000 seats to go. The rest of the expansion was finished in 1985. At that time there were mezzanine level private box seats, additional upper deck seating on the west side, and end zone stands that all made up for 31,218 seats. These were a few thousand shorter than expected at first, but they were enough. (21)

CHAPTER THREE
SPARTAN STADIUM TODAY

Since the expansion project which was completed in the 1980's, Spartan Stadium has seen a few more projects, one of them being a brand-new Field House. The Field House which was started back in 1992, was designed to accommodate the visiting team and the home team and even the officials with lockers and showers. The Field House, however, will have many other functions. One of them will be as a weight room, another as a dining room and even as a place for meetings to be held. The field house will measure in at 22,000 square feet when completed and will be named "Simpkins Field House", after the two people who have dedicated many hours of their time and a large financial donation to achieve the Field House. Alan and Phyllis Simpkins say that they are just giving back to the University they attended.(22) The Field House is a major boost for the San Jose State Football program because now they have a tool to lure the top players to their school. The present football players say that they are glad that someone is finally showing that they care.

Ground-breaking ceremonies for the Field House which will be located on the northwest corner of the Stadium's lot, were held on July 30, 1992. The total cost for the new Field House amounted up to \$2.218 million.(23)

On May 21, 1992, another addition was finally made to the Spartan Stadium parking. It was a badly needed parking lot located on Seventh and Alma streets in downtown San Jose. A light fixture was added to the new lot when workers from Cupertino Electric raised a 4,000 pound light fixture into place. The four thousand watt bulbs in the fixture will provide an

ample amount of light for the people who choose to park their vehicles there. (24)

CHAPTER FOUR
THE CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Spartan Stadium has been proven to be vitally important to the city of San Jose, to those who visit it, those who play in it, and to those who live near it. Spartan Stadium has seen crowds up to the size of 37,000 people, at a ZZ Topp concert. The largest sports event was a football game, San Jose State against Fresno State, on November 17, 1990, when there were 31,218 people, filling every single seat in the stadium. In addition, Spartan Stadium has been the center of a major university and an important landmark to the people of San Jose. There is no doubt that the stadium will continue to play a larger role in the city in the future.

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