

Home Field Advantage Does Matter

By Joseph P. Guzzo

I am writing this article as a Gloucester resident and a life long sports fan. Although I am not from Gloucester I have been here going on 17 years now. But regardless of where your from it seems that in most Cites and Towns across America there is one constant we all have in common, High School sports. It is part of the basic fabric of hometown life.

Recently the Times wrote an editorial about High School sports here in Gloucester. I thought the article was accurate in that Gloucester residents are passionate about school sports, the poor conditions of Newell Stadium and the Talbot Rink, and the dreadful fiscal conditions the City is wrestling with. However most of the commentary we already know and have heard over and over again. The facts for the Stadium are sombering and can be found in the Committee report. In short unless something is done in the near future Newell Stadium will close.

The reasons the Stadium will close include the deterioration of the track and field to a point of not being able to be repaired, to serious code and safety violations. Among them, the lack of proper and adequate toilet facilities, violations of State and Federal accessibility laws, and perhaps the most dangerous of all the condition of the stands.

I recall many years ago in my home Town of Melrose when the bleachers collapsed during a football game. Melrose was playing Stoneham, and the visitors bleachers were full. The field is similar to Gloucester's being built on wetlands. It is adjacent to Ell Pond, and many knew the stands and the school for that matter were slowly sinking. All of a sudden one end of the stands came crashing down. There was pandemonium. If my memory serves me right eight people were injured and taken to the hospital, luckily no one was killed.

From the beginning of time Building codes have been built on tragedy's. You have heard the expression written in blood. And they are being revised based on tragedy's. The latest being new carbon monoxide regulations written because of the death of a young girl. The horrific fire at the Station Night Club in in Rhode Island that claimed the life's of 100 people. New sprinkler regulations were adopted soon after. The problem is that it takes a tragedy to finally act on something.

The stands at Newell Stadium have been deemed to be safe, and are checked and shored up each year. But there eventually will come a point when they will become beyond repair, I just hope that time does not come when the stands are full of spectators. I would much rather see the Stadium closed due to lack of toilet facilities than closing it because the stands collapsed and fans were injured or worse. We also can not discount the possibility of injuries to athletes because of poor field conditions.

Unfortunately I do not have a solution to the Newell Stadium problem. The Times suggested a piecemeal approach to keep both Newell and Talbot open. Although I do partially agree with that, it may not be feasible for the Stadium. According to the committee report rebuilding portions of the Stadium do not fit into the logistics of rebuilding the entire stadium.

However I am sure of one thing. The City of Gloucester needs many things right now. Schools and education must be first on the list. Followed by keeping all fire stations

opened, permanent municipal office buildings, and perhaps even a new library. Although not high on the priority list of some, Newell Stadium and Talbot Rink must be included. Because school sports is part of education, and Gloucester deserves a first class sports Stadium that is safe, clean, accessible to all, and usable for higher competition like State meets. A Stadium the City can be proud of, not embarrassed.

Home field advantage does matter to the school athletes, the parents and relatives, and all the fans of school sports. Otherwise among your precious memories of sports events will be traveling in or following buses in a caravan out of Town, as there will be no home field advantage anymore.