

# MCCLAIN FACILITY



Fig. 1. The McClain Center, looking west, 1988. The connection to the Shell is visible, but the one to the stadium is not. The building at the right is Engineering, and the Camp Randall arch is in the right foreground. [slide S-1418]

*The McClain Facility was erected with gift funds in 1989. It houses indoor practice facilities for football practice. It is named for the late football coach Dave McClain.*

Coach Dave McClain argued that part of the woes of the Badger football program could be attributed to the lack of indoor practice facilities. This problem had been supposedly taken care of in the 1950s when the Memorial Shell was built, but the shell was so heavily used by other sports that the football program was not able to get adequate time or facilities in the shell. McClain planned and lobbied hard for a new indoor practice facility like the ones used by other Big 10 schools. The moment of victory in this campaign seemed to come in late 1985, when the Athletic board authorized the construction of a \$1.5 million "bubble" over Camp Randall stadium. The bubble was to be paid for by the "W" Club, the Mendota gridiron Club, and other boosters. In a few months this idea had been discarded, because of questions about its life expectancy, where to store the bubble in the months when it was not erected, and the cost of heating the skin to keep snow off. At this time planning began for a permanent building.<sup>1</sup>

In March 1986 the regents resolved to accept gifts and grants to build an indoor athletic facility, to ask the legislature for approval to locate the building on the site just north of Camp Randall Sports Center, which would slightly encroach on the Memorial Park. From the regents discussion it is clear that the plan was well developed at the time. Besides the site, the plan already had the shell-type

building at right angles to the Memorial Shell, and connected to the stadium. The regents also discussed the unusual funding for the building. There was never any possibility of state money for this project, so the entire cost would be borne by gifts, many of which were "gifts-in-kind" or noncash donations of services, materials etc. The regents authorized the land to be used by a private corporation in order to develop the project, which would on completion be given back to the University as a gift-in-kind. Chancellor Shain told the regents that gift pledges were already sufficient to build the foundation and erect the building, but that the finishing of the lower level would have to be deferred. The encroachment on the Memorial Park was minimized by the regents since the small corner of the park to be used by the new building was already fenced off and part of a practice field. More cautious heads (who may have remembered the original uproar over the construction of the Memorial Shell on Memorial Park property) would soon prevail; the legislature arranged a swap of half-acre land parcels, so that the regents would own the bit needed for the building on the north end of the Memorial Shell. The Department of Veteran's Affairs received in exchange a plot south of the Memorial Shell. The legislature approved the building in June 1986.<sup>2</sup>

On April 28, 1986, coach Dave McClain, age 48, died of massive heart failure in a whirlpool tub. He had been coach at Wisconsin for less than ten years. At their June 1986 meeting the regents unanimously passed a resolution that the indoor practice facility would be dedicated to the memory of David McClain. By December 1986 financial arrangements had been announced. The national "W" club would select an architect, and conduct the project and act as principal owner until the building was turned over to the regents.<sup>3</sup>

By January 1987 the club had made an agreement with architects Bowen Williamson Zimmerman Incorporated of Madison for the design and construction oversight of the McClain Athletic Facility. This agreement split the project into two phases: phase I the foundation and erection of the basic building with practice field and phase II the finishing of the space in the level below the field. The budget was estimated at \$5.88 million for phase I and \$3.6 million for phase II.<sup>4</sup>

Funding for the project was a complicated arrangement. In July 1987 the M & I bank of Hilldale agreed to loan the "W" club \$4.5 million secured by the assets of a group of football backing organizations (the "W" club, the Mendota gridiron Club and the Wisconsin Foundation) for construction. This construction loan was temporary, and was to be repaid by November 1, 1988, at which time a permanent loan would be arranged.<sup>5</sup>

An agreement with contractor J. H. Findorff and Son of Madison on July 13 1987 got the construction under way. Findorff agreed to accept only a five per cent commission on the total contract, a sharp discount from their usual fee. Because of the unusual nature of the entire project, everyone involved was anxious to finish in the shortest possible time, and the contractors were able to complete phase I of the building by September 1988, at which time the "W" club arranged for the football team to begin formal use of the practice field. Phase II was not turned over to the athletic department until January 20, 1989. The total cost of the facility was \$9.5 million. Some difficulty in financing was experienced by the booster clubs because of the extremely low levels of support for the football program in 1989, and correspondingly low donations to the McClain project. These problems were worked out in cooperation of the M & I bank and the legal representatives of the booster clubs.<sup>6</sup>

The building is a 374 by 222 foot rectangle with two main levels and a partial third level. The lower part of the exterior walls are sheathed in ashlar stone to match the Memorial Shell, the outer edges of the roof are of metal, and the central portion of the roof is of Teflon coated fabric. The lower floor contains offices, conference rooms, weight training rooms, locker rooms, a therapy pool, saunas and lounges. On the second level are a 90 yard astroturf practice field, storage and a connection to the Memorial Shell. The mezzanine level holds seating for 80, classrooms, coaches offices, meeting rooms, and a connection to the stadium.

There was a \$4.5 million debt remaining on the McClain facility when it was given to the University

by the "W" club on December 8, 1989. This debt was refinanced by the University through the state to pay off M & I Bank and to obtain the lowest possible interest rate, and is now being paid off by the clubs ("W" club, Mendota gridiron club and the Big Red Fund). The debt will be extinguished in 2010.<sup>7</sup>

- 1) *Wisconsin Alumni Magazine*, January/February 1986, p. 11, March/April 1986, p. 15.
- 2) *Regent's Minutes*, March 7, 1986; *Wisconsin State Journal*, March 7, 1986, April 30, 1986, May 23, 1986, June 13, 1986.
- 3) Archives' McClain, biographical file; *Wisconsin State Journal*, December 13, 1986; *Regent's Minutes*, May 9, 1986, June 6, 1986, July 11, 1986.
- 4) Section 1 of McClain Athletic Facility Project Documents, series 4/31/9-3 box 1.
- 5) Section 3 of McClain Athletic Facility Project Documents, series 4/31/9-3 box 1.
- 6) Section 14 of McClain Athletic Facility Project Documents, series 4/31/9-3 box 1; *Wisconsin Alumni Magazine*, September/October, 1988 p. 11; *Wisconsin State Journal*, September 7, 1988; Sweet to Neale et al. November 10, 1988, Van Ess to Brown, January 31, 1989, Memorandum Murphy and Desmond to Murawski, November 9, 1988, series 4/31/9-3 box 1.
- 7) *Regent's Minutes*, December 8, 1989; *Wisconsin Alumni Magazine*, May/June 1989 p. 10; Barca to George and Kunicki, May 17, 1989, Dedication Program, April 27, 1990, series 4/31/9-3 box 1.