From humble beginnings using borrowed and hand-me-down equipment, the athletic program has evolved into a much larger undertaking than Bishop Barnwell could have imagined when he founded the school in 1932. Today, Bronco athletic facilities rival any in the Intermountain West.

By Roger Emerson

When Boise Junior College was founded the school was located in an existing building — St. Margaret's Hall. There were no facilities for sports or physical education, but Bishop Barnwell solved that problem before the college opened. Doing most of the work himself, Barnwell built a gymnasium on Bannock Street that served as an auditorium, basketball court and physical education building. Although not big enough to hold spectators, it housed all of the school’s intramural games. It was named Talbot Gymnasium to honor Episcopal Bishop Ethelbert Talbot, who in 1892 founded St. Margaret’s Academy.1

Besides being the center of athletics, Talbot Gym became the social hub, the place to "hang out" and to be seen on the tiny campus.2 The frame building was used by St. Luke’s Regional Medical Center as a storehouse before it was torn down.

In the early days, the spotlight was not on athletics. The college fielded teams in football, track, tennis, basketball and baseball, but they were supported by only a handful of enthusiastic fans among townspeople. BJC played basketball in the city league against local sports clubs, and all competition took place either in the Boise High School gymnasium or at the YMCA. BJC continued to play its games off campus until 1956, when the college constructed a new brick gymnasium that was home to Bronco basketball teams until the Pavilion opened in 1982.

For outdoor sports, BJC used Public School Field, now East Junior High Field off Warm Springs Avenue. Pioneer baseball enthusiast Jack Cody, who held a franchise in the Union Baseball Association, cleared the land and constructed Old Cody Field in 1911 as a commercial
venture. Completed in time for the baseball season, it was reported by the Idaho Daily Statesman that the finest pine went into the construction. Much to the disappointment of neighborhood boys, the fence lacked knotholes through which to watch a free game. Old Cody Field was purchased by the Boise Independent School District in 1930 and renamed Public School Field. With the cooperation of the school district, the college continued to use the field, which was located only three blocks from the campus.

Public School Field included a track and a baseball diamond. The facility also served as the first home of the Broncos' fledgling football team. In 1935, the Junior Chamber of Commerce helped raise money so lights could be added for night games.

Faced with its own financial problems, the Episcopal Church discontinued its support of the college after the 1934 academic year. The school struggled financially for the next five years, with the bulk of its budget coming from the $120 tuition charged each student. The community, led by the Chamber of Commerce, also stepped forward with donations.

In 1934, a group of local business leaders created Boise Junior College, Inc. to raise funds and supervise the operation of the school. Their efforts kept the school open, but a more consistent source of funds was necessary to secure its future. In 1939, taking advantage of a recently passed state bill that allowed communities to create college taxing districts, the patrons of Boise Independent School District voted 2,014 to 234 to form the BJC District. With support from local property taxes, the school at last was on a sound financial foundation.

When the Episcopal Church needed St. Margaret’s Hall in 1939, the college began a search for another location. That summer, several sites for a new BJC campus were considered. The old airport location at Varney Field seemed best because of its considerable open space for future growth, its quiet neighborhood buffered from downtown by Julia Davis Park and its easy access to two major thoroughfares — Broadway and Capitol. The city donated the land, and a bond election raised $260,000 for construction of a new school.

In the fall of 1940, College Field (also referred to as Chaffee Field)
BSU Built on Historic Site

By Margaret Skogerson Loveland

My family lived at 1201 Longmont Street in south Boise, just three blocks from the airport (Varney Field) where Boise State University is now located. In the 1930s, the airport consisted of three hangars with a restaurant, the Air Way Inn, among them. The hangars ran along present-day University Drive, and the airport extended from Broadway to Capitol Boulevard. The Boise city dump occupied the far west end of the complex. Because of the short runway, two-seater planes such as Taylor Crafts and Piper Cubs occupied the airstrip.

The United States Army flew mail in and out of the airport. They used old World War I planes. One giant floodlight guided planes to the field at night. Eventually, a new restaurant opened in a large hangar located along the river near the Broadway Bridge. The concrete apron of the large hangar offered excellent roller skating for children, but seldom did they get to skate for very long before being chased away.

In October 1927, Charles A. Lindbergh landed his Spirit of St. Louis where Bronco Stadium now stands. My mother, my brother Eugene and I walked to the airport to watch the Lindbergh plane land. What a thrill to see this famous man standing beside his plane with his familiar white scarf flying in the breeze! After a brief ceremony, Lindbergh was whisked off by city officials to make a speech at the fairgrounds.

United Airlines arrived in Boise in the 1930s and occupied a new steel hangar. A French aircraft that had made a non-stop flight from Paris to New York also landed at the airport on September 25, 1930. The French pilots were on a goodwill tour of the United States.

The July 4 celebrations usually featured an air show and firing of cannons by the 148th Field Artillery of the Idaho National Guard. The cannons, situated on the north side of the river, fired over the city just east of St. Luke's Hospital and the shells burst into the foothills.

In 1940, Boise Junior College moved to the airport site and history continued to be made on the land adjacent to the beautiful Boise River.

The BSU campus was an airport prior to 1940.
was ready for the opening football game. Located on the site of the current Student Union, the field had wooden bleachers on both sides of the playing field, seating a total of 1,000 fans. For special games or a bigger crowd, bleachers were borrowed from Boise High.8

On September 24, 1940, the Broncos played their first night game in the new stadium. Idaho Power helped move the lights from Public School Field just days earlier, and the team had two practices under the lights before the game.

In 1949, the college spent $3,000 on sports improvements. Some of the money went into two additional 2,500-watt bulbs to improve the lighting on the field.9 Administrators, their wives and faculty members sold tickets, manned the entry gates, controlled the fans and kept the clock and game statistics. College Field remained in use until the construction of Bronco Stadium in 1950.

Originally, the college considered building a combined gymnasium/auditorium on its new site in 1940. However, the decision to build a separate gymnasium became easier because of the availability of vacant hangars at the former airport. Johnson Flying Service sold the largest, called Webb Hangar, to the trustees of the junior college for $600.

Much of the construction of the original campus depended upon the availability of WPA workers and federal funding. In the case of Webb Hangar, the WPA provided $14,400 toward converting the building into a temporary gymnasium. The Junior College District provided another $9,800. The firm of Kloepfer and Cahoon received the contract and finished the gymnasium in August 1941.

The ceiling was raised 8 feet and the building was extended to provide a regulation-size basketball court with dressing rooms and shower space. Two parallel benches along the sidelines provided such limited spectator seating that scheduled games were played at the Boise High School gymnasium. When a new gymnasium was built in 1956, old Webb Hangar became a practice gymnasium. The vocational technical department converted the hangar into an auto body shop in 1957. It also housed the ceramic shop and mechanical drawing classes for the

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Aerial view of Boise Junior College and College Field, early 1940s.
The other hangars on the site had potential beyond renovation. After one was razed, the remaining concrete floor became a site for much-needed tennis courts. As with much of the construction and improvements on the campus, students and faculty did most of the work themselves. In the spring of 1940, coach Francis Haines and members of the Racquet Club prepared the hangar floor for painting. The students raised enough money to buy backstops for the courts with proceeds from a “tennis ball” dance. Admission was 35 cents a couple. The growth of the school made relocation of the tennis courts necessary, first to an area behind the new gymnasium in the 1950s, and in 1980 to the area west of the Pavilion.

BSU no longer has a baseball diamond, but from the school’s beginning in 1932 until 1980, baseball attracted players and fans to the campus. From 1932 to 1940, BJC used the diamond at Public School Field. Following the completion of the new football stadium in 1950, the teams played at College Field. In 1967, a new Student Union was built on the site.

Planners discussed moving the baseball park to a site on Protest Avenue, but also considered the advantages of keeping the sport on campus. Their decision resulted in the creation of a new baseball diamond placed in the right angle formed by Driscoll and Chaffee halls on the campus. In the late 1970s, it became apparent that the diamond had to be moved again. This time, tennis courts displaced by the Pavilion needed the space. Blueprints for a ballpark were drawn up for the Protest location. But budget reductions in the early 1980s and the need for additional funds to meet Title IX funding requirements for women’s athletics spelled the end of the baseball program. The Broncos played their last season on Wigle Field at Borah High School in 1980.

By 1949, the Bronco football program had outgrown College Field. Under the leadership of Coach Lyle Smith, the Broncos produced an impressive 31 straight victories. That year, the Broncos played in their first Potato Bowl game at Bakersfield, California. The excitement of the Potato Bowl game spurred talk of a new stadium. Local University of Idaho alumni also supported
an expanded or new stadium, proposing one Vandal game a year in Boise if 10,000 seats could be provided. But the efforts of Vandal and Bronco fans to raise funds for expanding College Field did not materialize.12

Eventually, it was the Idaho Statesman that moved the project forward. James L. Brown, editor of the paper, and Margaret Cobb Ailshie, the owner of the Statesman, secured the support and financial backing for a new stadium instead of an expanded field.13 In the fall of 1949, the paper carried an ongoing discussion of a new stadium for BJC. Throughout the fall, the college board of trustees debated the issue of using public funds for a new stadium.14 After much discussion, the board decided that it could not support a tax-funded project. Since the stadium served the community, the board decided the community should pay the bill for construction.

Following the board's decision, Boise Junior College trustee Oscar Worthwine developed an idea for private support. He founded Bronco Stadium Inc., a private satellite of BJC, to raise the money needed to build a new stadium. In October 1949, Brown offered his services to lead a private venture funded through the sale of non-interest-bearing debenture bonds. The support from the community and the Idaho Statesman assured the board that the project would succeed.

Articles of incorporation were drawn up stating that Bronco Stadium Inc. was a "non-profit cooperative corporation" dedicated to "scholastic, social, benevolent, athletic, and patriotic purposes." On December 22, 1949, Bronco Stadium Inc., a 50-year corporation, was established with the five members of the BJC board of trustees as its governing members. Bronco Stadium, besides providing a place to play football, was intended to serve as a facility for public gatherings,
Bronco Stadium was built entirely from cash donations, bond sales and donated materials. Early in 1950, the Atomic Energy Commission provided more than 500,000 board feet of lumber from its Hanford, Washington, site. The commission required that the university transport the lumber to Boise. The Idaho Statesman donated $90,000, Idaho Power contributed $10,000, and the college raised $45,000 for the construction of the dressing rooms, ticket booths, concession stands and playing field. Other companies and individuals made private donations. The Jordan-Wilcomb Construction Company donated a new scoreboard. The Morrison-Knudsen president H. W. Morrison and the Boise Cascade Lumber Company also donated to the stadium project.

W. L. Gottenberg, vice president of Boise Junior College, directed the project. Hummel, Hummel & Jones designed the stadium, and J. H. Wise and Son of Boise was the contractor. The Idaho Statesman underwrote the contract for the college in return for a share of non-interest-bearing debenture bonds. Construction of the stadium began on June 1, 1950. The field, located on Broadway, was placed at a 45 degree angle from the sun. The angle, calculated for 3 p.m. in mid-October, kept the sun out of players' eyes. The structure took three months to complete. Six huge poles carrying fifty-four 1,500-watt bulbs were added for night activities. Earl Haroldson from Idaho Power threw the switch for the first time on September 12, 1950.

The new stadium was completed in time for the 1950 football season. Fans eagerly purchased 4,368 season tickets out of 10,000 on the first day of sale. They paid $6.50 for a season ticket for five home games. The gala opening of Bronco Stadium on September 22, 1950, drew a sellout crowd as the Broncos defeated the Pirates from Modesto Junior College.

Charlie Brown, the indispensable custodian and groundskeeper for Boise Junior College, wrote President Chaffee in 1951 concerning the need to upgrade the stadium. Brown recommended — and received approval for — additional lighting in the entry ways and lights in the ticket booths.

Bronco Stadium served the college and the community for 20 years. The University of Idaho Vandals played an annual game in the facility, beginning with the University of Utah on September 23, 1950. Boise High School rented the field for track and football events and for its annual homecoming celebration. In good weather, the field hosted civic events, fireworks, band concerts and the Shrine Circus.

Gottenberg coordinated the use of the stadium and contributed to its success as a center for community activity and a source of civic pride. As manager of the stadium, Gottenberg recruited faculty members to operate the ticket booths and serve as ushers as well as timekeepers, scorer's table officials and chain gang crew members. Former faculty member Hazel Roe recalled that members of the business department, including herself, Helen Johnson and Dorothy Albertson, received $10 a game for selling the tickets. Other faculty received two complimentary tickets in the student section for their work.

Students and student organizations ran the concession stands located under the bleachers on each side of the field. Income from rental and public use of the stadium financed the retirement of the debenture bonds sold to build the stadium. The bonds were retired by 1962.

In 1954, a successful bond election provided funds for additional buildings on campus. Money was allocated for a new science building and for a much-needed gymnasium that seated 3,500 fans. In the spring of 1954, the Jordan-Wilcomb Construction Company began work on the brick gymnasium. Construction took 18 months, and the
facility, built entirely by money raised in the bond issue, provided the junior college its first arena for basketball. Besides a playing floor and bleachers, the new gymnasium contained classrooms, offices, dressing rooms, showers, a weight room and an equipment storage room.

The first Bronco basketball games in the new gymnasium were played the weekend of January 13, 1956, against College of Southern Utah and Dixie College. The Broncos won both contests and went on that season to win the ICAC championship and earn a berth at the NJCAA tournament in Hutchinson, Kansas. The gymnasium accommodated a variety of needs, with space for physical education classes, public concerts, basketball, wrestling, gymnastics, commencements and state high school basketball tournaments, as well as college registration each semester.

Increased enrollment in the 1960s put a strain on the existing facilities for classrooms and laboratories. The athletic department also needed to expand. Already the gymnasium was too small to hold the crowds the basketball team attracted. The college needed special purpose rooms for women's dance, weight training and the expanding wrestling program.

In February, 1968, the college submitted a plan for its growing building needs to the State Board of Education. The first phase of the approved building program included a gymnasium annex that contained a physical education room, wrestling area and large swimming pool, as well as dressing facilities. The school and the city of Boise had outgrown the stadium, but more important, the State Department of Labor warned that the old wooden structure was in danger of collapsing. Plans circulated to build a new facility.

Many ideas concerning size and location of a new stadium were aired. One notion called for a multi-use facility with a football field, track, baseball diamond and playing fields to be built near I-84 in south Boise. Available parking and the need for office space and equipment
storage made a site on campus the most feasible option. On February 17, 1968, the Associated Student Body approved a $60 fee increase, effective January 1, 1969, to fund the new stadium.

Demolition of the old stadium began as soon as the 1969 football season ended. The last game played in the old stadium was against the College of Idaho Coyotes on November 22, 1969. Coach Lyle Smith's presence at the halftime ceremony highlighted the final game. The college sold the lumber from the old stadium, including a portion to Army Armstrong, who used the wood in the interior of his Village Inn restaurant near the campus. More than 250 games were played in the old stadium, including the Bronco's 22-0 win over Tyler Junior College from Texas, in the 1958 national championship.

Construction of the new stadium complex began in late fall 1969. Built at a cost of $2.4 million by the Skyline Construction Company, the new concrete stadium lined both sides of the green Astroturf field and provided seating for 14,000 fans. A complex of offices and dressing rooms was built at one end. The stadium was dedicated on September 12, 1970. An accident marred the opening evening as the Bronco Pegasus skydiving team brought the game ball into the stadium. Wally Benton, club captain, plummeted to the ground when his new Paraplane chute went out of control. Benton never fully recovered from his injuries. As a result of this accident, the college banned skydiving into the stadium. 21

The stadium was expanded in 1975 when a second tier of seats was added on the east side, bringing the capacity to 20,000.

The Bronco Athletic Association, active since 1968, promoted the concept of a preferred seating area to raise funds for scholarships. The University Club Box was built on the west deck of the stadium in 1975. Fans who contributed $1,000 for a pair of football tickets could sit in the box, which was reached by elevator. A smaller

*He was Right*

In 10 years the Boise College campus, facilities, athletic program and backers will far outnumber either of the other two state institutions. The reason is simple: Boise is the hub of Idaho. The state's youth will be knocking the doors open to get in and the only problem will be facilities to handle the numerical expansion.

Ray Giffin
Idaho Statesman, 1965
contribution bought 50-yard line President’s Club orange seats.

A civic auditorium for the city of Boise was discussed throughout the early 1970s. Velma Morrison, widow of construction entrepreneur Harry Morrison, offered financial assistance, and the Boise Chamber of Commerce and the Greater Boise Auditorium District sought support for a combined sports/convention center proposed for a site on the north side of the Boise River across from Ann Morrison Park. A bond issue to fund the project in 1975 did not pass.

Hopes for a regional center all but died until BSU President John Barnes and his administration reviewed the idea of a multipurpose pavilion in 1976. A campuswide committee, chaired by Student Union director Fred Norman, worked on a feasibility study of the project. At the same time, Garden City proposed building a sports complex.
at the fairgrounds on Chinden Boulevard, using donated land. State legislators, seeking a more centrally located facility, put their support behind the campus project.

The feasibility study committee reported that a pavilion was needed to meet the demand for more adequate space for the growing basketball program, for concerts, and for other indoor gatherings. The fairgrounds required tax dollars for maintenance and would not adequately serve the university community, the report concluded.

Conceptual drawings and architectural plans for a new pavilion were completed by September 1977. The administration approved a financial study of the project. Since a pavilion would serve the community and the university, both the State Board of Education and the Bronco Athletic Association agreed that the students at Boise State should not bear the entire projected $14 million cost of the building. The BAA agreed to underwrite $4 million toward the project through the sale of "lifetime" seats. A student fee increase would pay for the remaining $10 million.

Polls taken among the students in 1976 and 1977 indicated that a majority favored an on-campus multi-purpose pavilion. They accepted the possibility of a $20 fee increase, but their attitude changed drastically when faced with a $40 fee increase. By March, 1978, one-half of the students polled registered a negative response to the building. The proposed 1% tax initiative scheduled for a vote that November threatened to further reduce already tight funds for higher education.

When President John Kelser took the helm of Boise State University in the fall of 1978, he immediately confronted the pavilion issue. Opposition stemmed not only because of the fee increase, but also from the "strings" attached to the donation from the Bronco Athletic Association, which initially wanted to market nearly 2,000 seats to finance its $4 million pledge.

In the spring of 1979, a student action committee urged students to boycott the fee increase. That protest ended after the State Board of Education ruled that without a fee increase there could be no pavilion. The seating controversy subsided when the BAA announced that it would receive ex-
The Associated Students of Boise State University sought control of the pavilion board of governors. The students lost that bid, and the university administration retained ultimate control over the facility. By the time ground breaking took place in February, 1980, the Bronco Athletic Association had contributed another $1 million, and the students an additional $2 million, bringing the total cost of construction to $17 million.

The BSU Pavilion was designed to meet a variety of needs. Thus, in addition to its 12,000-plus seat arena, the Pavilion includes an auxiliary gymnasium, racquetball courts, weight rooms, offices, meeting rooms and a child care center. The first event in the building was a televised Larry Holmes vs. Gerry Cooney heavyweight boxing match in May 1982. Since then, the Pavilion has provided space for basketball and gymnastics, concerts, circuses and rodeos. Several events in the building have been televised nationally, including a Rev. Billy Graham crusade and

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**Pavilion Magic**

_by Robert L. Hansen_


_Stand ing outside the Pavilion with all its cold, grey concrete and muted painted orange and brown colors, one would never imagine that it occasionally transforms into a living, breathing beast — a beast, if you happen to be a visiting Pac-10 team from Corvallis, Oregon. Surely, the Oregon State Beavers did not anticipate the transformation. Unaware, the Beavers entered the Pavilion averaging 91 points a game. Unknowing, they came to town shooting over 62 percent per contest. Their unsuspecting guard tandem of Gary Payton and Eric Knox showed up with a combined average of 36 points every time they hit the hardwood. Then, something happened._

_With the toss of the first jump ball, the magic began. The Pavilion came to life. It did not just awaken. It ROARED. Each and every one of the 9,965 fans cheered, boomed and screamed as if the Oregon State team represented a reprehensible evil. The OSU players balked. They appeared visibly shaken, and their performance on the night confirmed it. They left the Pavilion with only 43 points to the Broncos’ 53. They shot a paltry 32 percent from the floor, and Payton (a future Player of the Year for _Sports Illustrated_) and Knox combined for a mere seven points._

_The Broncos, on the other hand, fed off the beast that the Pavilion had become. With every good shot, key pass, or great steal, the Pavilion crowd responded in kind with a thundering, and many times deafening, ovation. If the power generated by Bronco fans every Thursday and Saturday night could somehow be harnessed, America’s energy problem would be a fading memory!_  

_The Beavers of Oregon State University arrived in Boise as the 18th-ranked team in the country. They departed, a group of bewildered, confused, and thoroughly beaten players, wondering what on earth they had just experienced. The people of Boise knew: It was the beast that is the Pavilion._

_BSU 53, OSU 43_
three NCAA basketball tournaments.

The Varsity Center has undergone several renovations since it was built in 1970. An addition to house the Idaho Sports Medicine Institute was built in 1984. In 1988, the Simplot Center for Athletic Excellence added to the sports complex a modern weight-training room and a wrestling room. The facility houses Athletic Hall of Fame plaques and the photos of athletic-scholarship donors. The most recent renovation, completed in the fall of 1991, created a new ticket office, enlarged the storage, athletic training and equipment facilities and added space for offices and meeting rooms.

In April, 1991, a major donation from businessman Jerry Boas, and additional money from businesses and individuals, funded the construction of a six-court indoor tennis facility on BSU Foundation-owned land adjoining Contest Avenue.

The six courts are housed in two large inflatable bubbles, separated by a central 3,000-square-foot building with locker rooms, offices and a training space. The bubbles consist of 6.5-ounce woven polyester scrim, coated with sealable vinyl. Several local contractors donated materials and labor to the project. The first event held in the facility, now called the Boas Tennis Center, was the Big Sky Women's Tennis Championship, on April 24-28, 1991. The BSU Pavilion has hosted three NCAA basketball tournaments. Above: Clemson and Arizona in 1989.
Peterson in 1993 funded phase two of this project, which included an enlarged study center and a new training room. The center was renamed the Peterson/Preco Learning Center in recognition of Peterson's gift.

The latest improvement to the athletic complex came in the summer of 1993 when a new 8-lane urethane track was installed in Bronco Stadium. In addition, pits and runways for the jumping events and the hammer throw and discus rings were redesigned. The $600,000 renovation project was done in preparation for the NCAA Track and Field Championships, which were held in June of 1994.