

Chuck Ash, Troy University's head athletic trainer, discusses rehabilitation schedule with full-back Sean Dawkins as student trainer Michael Hawkins looks on.

— Photo by Donald Norsworthy



# New Surroundings

Improved athletic training facilities provide opportunities for better learning, treatment

*By Clif Lusk*

Chuck Ash pauses for just a moment, gazing across an expanse filled with students. It's just a moment's hesitation, but it's long enough for him to see what everybody's doing.

Sitting behind his cubicle's desk he can watch the reception area. It's his room. It's his students' classroom, but for scores of athletes and community members, this room is the road to recovery.

The design of the University's new athletic training and sports

medicine facility in Movie Gallery Veterans Memorial Stadium isn't one Ash, TROY's head athletic trainer, dreamed up on his own.

It's the culmination of miles on the road, miles of film and miles of questions.

"We took pictures, and we asked what they like the most in their training rooms and we took a picture of that," he said.

The result: a hodgepodge of creative concepts developed from universities across the nation.

From Virginia came the concept for TROY's training tables. A dishwasher in the training room was a Kentucky idea, as was a training room with a great view — Maryland contributed to that idea, too. Cubicles instead of hard walls was a concept developed from NCAA headquarters in Indianapolis.

Contained in the 6,000 square feet of training room and administrative space are 16 treatment tables, five muscle stims, ultrasound equipment, diathermy

treatment, balance and proprioception equipment, two 1,000-gallon SwimEx spas – one hot, the other cold – and a computerized injury tracking system.

The “academic side” – self-contained classrooms and laboratories – is about 3,500 square feet.

“I like it a lot,” said Rachael Dockery, a junior athletic training student from Tuscaloosa. “The academic area is separated from the training room – not like in Eldridge Hall, where we had to walk through the training room to get to the classroom.”

Dockery, like Ash and John “Doc” Anderson, TROY’s program director for athletic training education, can compare the results of the program in its former home in Eldridge Hall and its new environs.

“We made Eldridge Hall unique by bringing the academic and clinical sides together,” he said. “We didn’t want to lose that in a new facility, but at the same, time we needed to create an academic atmosphere that is more conducive to learning.”

It’s in the “meat room,” as Anderson calls the training room, where his students are ultimately tested on their classroom learning.

“The set up lends to better learning and better treatment. We turn out good practitioners,” he said. “That’s why people hire our kids.”

Dockery believes the new facility is a marriage of the best elements of academic and clinical training.

“I definitely think [being in the new facility] will improve the educational results,” Dockery said. “... There were so many distractions to learning in

Eldridge. Having the academic side separate from the clinic will help the students and those in rehabilitation. I think it will help us stay focused in the classroom – we’re not in their way [in the clinic].”

Not all in the facility is new, however. Dockery likes having the old training tables from Eldridge in the classroom rather than on the training room floor. It allows students the flexibility to have a laboratory without having to upset clinic space and time.

None of that would have been possible, Ash admits, had it not been for the creation of lasting partnerships.

“[The money] all came from outside funding,” he said.

A five-year lease agreement with Champion Sports Medicine for a 3,000 square-foot clinic formed the base that allowed the floor to be created. Beyond that, however, the support of alumni, former fellows and the Troy community gave Ash and Anderson the shot in the arm needed to accomplish the project.

A 10-month long fundraising effort “let us purchase all the bells and whistles that make this training room an extraordinary facility.”

For a “young” profession, as Ash calls athletic training, the outpouring of support from alumni was overwhelming.

“Our graduates know that we continue to help them in their jobs. It’s a close-knit profession. We didn’t ask for specific amounts, but asked for their help,” he said.



**Left, two 1,000-gallon SwimEx spas – one hot, the other cold – also are a part of the new facilities. Above, the facility also feature weight machines helpful in rebuilding strength following injuries.**



**Contained in the 6,000-square feet of training room and administrative space are 16 treatment tables, five muscle stims, ultrasound equipment, diathermy treatment, balance and proprioception equipment and a computerized health information system.**

“If it was a \$20 donation, I was thankful,” he said. There weren’t many like that however.

“I would open an envelope and pull out a check just far enough to see the name, and then guess what the amount would be,” he said.

“A lot of times what I thought would be a \$50 donation would be a \$100, or a \$100 donation would be a \$1,000 donation,” he said. “Our alums gave as much as they could. It was amazing.”

The fundraising drive is still on-going and Ash quickly points out that support from the community has helped create one of the most advanced training facilities in Division 1 athletics.

“People from the community really helped us too. We couldn’t have done it without their support,” he said.

Combined with the alumni and community fundraising drive, building partnerships with the private sector has been a key to the building program’s success.

“This wasn’t something that was an athletics thing,” Ash said. “People didn’t give us money because of athletics. We received [financial] support because we aggressively pursued fundraising and partnerships to improve our overall academic program. Other academic departments ought to be looking for opportunities to build similar partnerships that will have a lasting impact on the quality of education our students receive.”

One partnership with the Alabama Sports Medicine and Orthopedic Center and the American Sports Medicine Institute has married technology with training in the new facility.

Dr. Jeff Dugas, a Birmingham orthopedic surgeon, is orthopedic consultant for Trojan athletics. Through his commitment to the program, Ash said the installation of the Sparrow System was made possible.

Sparrow is a medical information system that links TROY with Birmingham and allows both physicians and trainers to share information about Trojan athletes. The only other university in the nation to use the system is Duke University.

Such investments set TROY’s athletic training program ahead of similar programs at other institutions.

“The first priority for the training room is the health care of our athletes, providing a clinical site for our students’ education, and a place for them to gain physical therapy experience with the Champion clinic,” Ash said. “With this setup our athletic training students get experience with hands-on sports medicine in a training room environment and [classroom] instruction is all under one roof.”

Still, at its most elemental level, athletic training and sports medicine aren’t about the facilities, new training tables or high-tech equipment. It’s about people.

“What makes a facility work is its people,” Anderson said. “You can put in the latest and greatest in equipment, but producing quality people to work in that environment is what will make the facility work, will make the program successful. We work our students hard, but it’s very meaningful – if they have sweat in it, they respect it. When you work hard in it, you respect [the education] you get,” Anderson said.

*Lusk is a University Relations coordinator.*