

Comments on Clarke Stadium proposed Field Changes from the Junior Football Perspective



The Edmonton Huskies and Edmonton Wildcats play junior level football - players aged 18-22 - as members of the Canadian Junior Football League. The CJFL has been in existence since 1883. The City of Edmonton, and Northern Alberta, has been blessed to have these two Junior teams offering their programs since 1948 playing in the Prairie Football Conference of the CJFL with the other Conference teams in Calgary, Saskatoon, Regina and Winnipeg.

Currently there are only two available facilities in Edmonton that meet the CJFL field criteria and are available to Junior football:

Commonwealth Stadium and Clarke Stadium. Without access to a CJFL approved field, Junior football in Edmonton no longer is a reality and that 65plus year history is lost. A permanently lined football field is our preferred option and that is supported by the survey that City administration recently conducted.

Including players, coaching staff, administrators, and trainers, both Junior teams have nearly 200 people participating in the delivery of Junior football. Our combined rosters of 130 players stay in Edmonton, adding value to our Community as they mature into diligent hard-working young men reflecting virtually every walk of life - fire fighters, Police officers, teachers, engineers, trades people, lawyers, medical personnel, entrepreneurs, and so on; not to overlook professional football players, 5 of whom are on the current Edmonton Eskimo roster. Eventually many raise their families here and virtually every high school football coach has a connection to Junior football.

We all remember the hey-days of Clarke Stadium with the likes of Jackie Parker, Johnny Bright, Rollie Miles. Now add Bill Smith (our former Mayor), Fred Dunn (former Provincial Auditor General) and about another 100 CFLers who played Junior football at Clarke.

On top of that you add the thousands over the years that called Clarke home who, while not cracking a CFL line-up, became some of the strongest citizens we have seen; people such as Jack Agrios – a prominent Edmonton Lawyer and Civic Booster; Don Hamilton – former Provincial Ethics Commissioner; Jack Rutherford – former General Manager Alberta, Western Canada Lottery; and the many small and medium enterprise business owners throughout the city and across the province who add to the strength and fabric of our community.... and there are more in the making each year.

The economic impact Junior football has on Edmonton, using the industry recognized tourism economic impact model, can be conservatively estimated to exceed \$125,000 annually. These numbers cover basic food and beverage and accommodation only; fuel, retail purchases etc. would only increase the basic economic impact. And that's not taking into account the value-added component of all the players staying in the City after their football careers and contributing to our economy.

Combined team expenditures for equipment, supplies and honorariums as well as other team expenditures, add an additional, again conservatively, \$200,000.00 directly into Edmonton's economy.

The challenge the two Edmonton Junior football teams have in scheduling centers around the adjustments required to accommodate stadium availability in three of our PFC partner teams - Calgary, Regina and Winnipeg - who have to arrange their schedules around their respective CFL teams as all three use their CFL facility. An additional factor is to accommodate travel arrangements for the four out of town teams and quite often Saturday is designated by the League as a travel day with games held on Sundays. This isn't easy.

This year, for example, after taking into consideration the Edmonton Eskimos and FC Edmonton's schedules, there are only 9 suitable dates to fit in 8 Junior home games in Edmonton. This very restrictive option for developing a home schedule means the clubs may have to play at less desirable times, resulting in fewer paying customers and creating a financial hardship. Any disruption to field access at Clarke simply exacerbates those challenges.

Should Clarke Stadium, for whatever reason, be problematic in helping the Junior teams schedule their games efficiently then having access to Commonwealth Stadium, at the same rate, will mitigate that however we would need absolute assurance, in writing, that this would be the case.

Should either or both Edmonton Junior teams be in the position to host a playoff game, a Conference Championship or a League Championship, having a league-sanctioned field is imperative. It would be a tremendous black eye on Edmonton if such a game could not be held in our own backyard because we do not have access to a field on which to play.

I'm sure this is not how we want to position the City of Edmonton to our fellow Western Canadian neighbours, all of whom are able to accommodate their Junior football teams and do so with enthusiasm.

This is not an issue of esthetics, what looks pretty on television; this is about amateur, volunteer-driven Not-For-Profit organizations needing access to and efficient use of a City-owned, tax-payer supported facility in order to survive. We ask you to look at the big picture, the history and the future, and consider carefully the consequences of your decision here as our amateur organizations cannot bear any more added costs or lost revenue opportunities. Thank you.

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Submitted to City of Edmonton Community Services Committee; March 3 2014
by John Wojcicki, President Edmonton Wildcat Football Club
On behalf of Junior Football in Edmonton ~ Edmonton Wildcats & Edmonton Huskies