

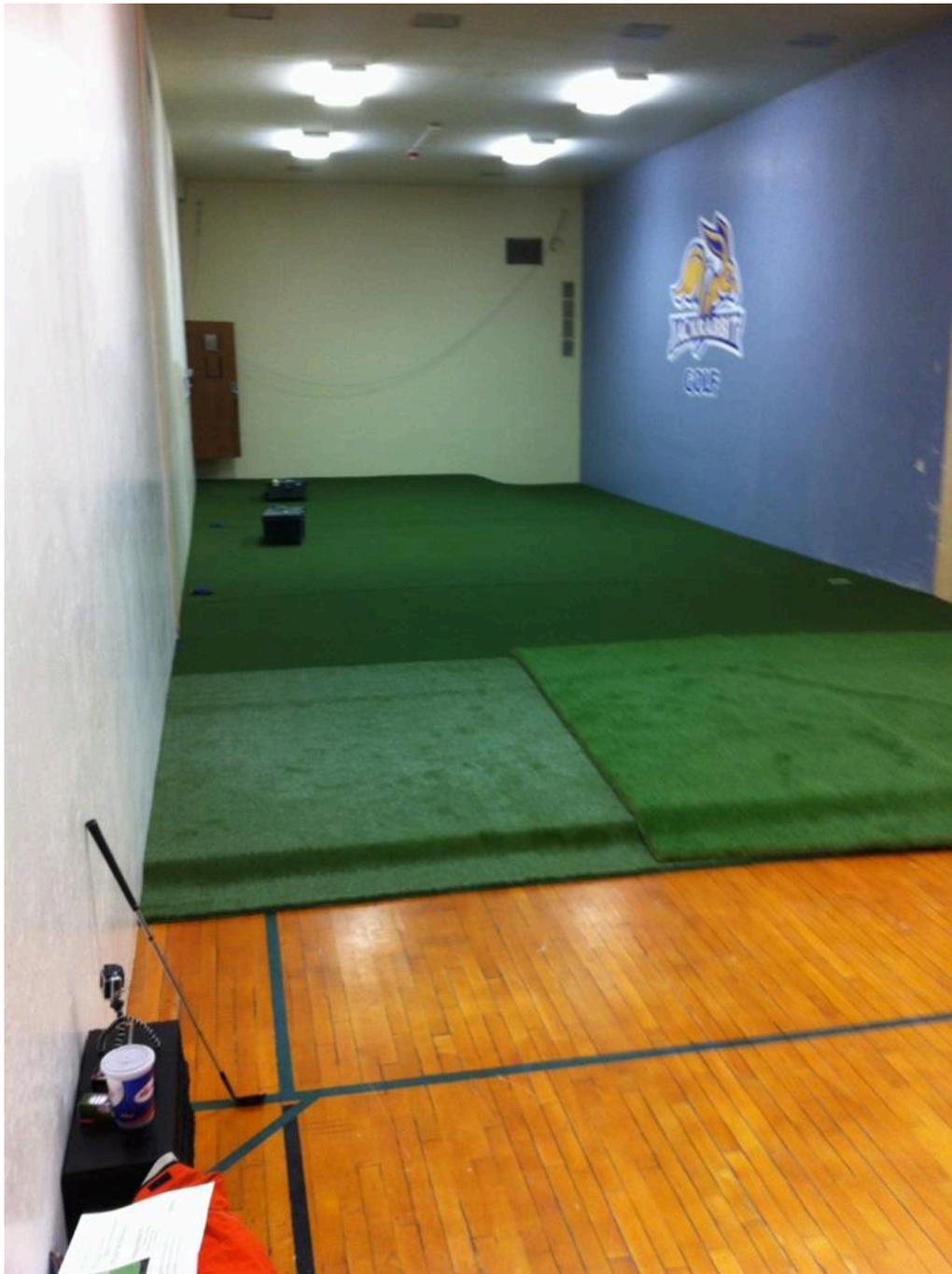


South Dakota State University

Brookings, SD

960 sq. ft.

SG326, SD220, SF351



Indoor practice area complete for SDSU golf

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By SDSU Sports Info

Imagine South Dakota State University hoops star Nate Wolters not having a gym to workout in over the offseason.

He might get a little rusty. That's how things were for the SDSU men's and women's golf teams, according to head coach Jared Baszler, due to unfavorable golf weather in Brookings most of the school year.

"We used to basically shut down for two months out of the year. Two hitting mats and a simple net gets boring," Baszler said.

Thanks to a new \$62,000 indoor facility on the south side of Frost Arena, not anymore. "One of the first questions a recruit usually asks is how many months a year they can golf (in Brookings). From now on I'm gonna say 12 ... anything you can do outside you can do in here," Baszler said.

Baszler, who's been coaching at SDSU since 2003, always had the idea of an indoor facility so his teams could still hone their skills while the courses were under a few feet of snow.

About two years ago, a few of the golfers' parents approached him and got the ball rolling on fundraising for the project. He rounded up support from former Jackrabbit golfers, alumni, other parents of current golfers and just about anyone that ever had any connection to the SDSU golf program.

"Not only did we raise a lot of money, we raised enough money and we didn't have to cut any corners with this facility," Baszler said. Needless to say he did a good job. A great job. The first phase of the Jacks' new facility was the 900 square-foot (48 x 20 feet) putting and chipping area. After \$35,000 and some good old-fashioned labor (a wall had to be knocked out), phase one was completed over winter break. SynLawn, an artificial grass company, installed the indoor putting green in less than two days.

Phase two happened much quicker than expected. "We knew we wanted to do a simulator next and we left some space in our room for it," Baszler said, "We had some donors who really stepped up and stepped up big. So instead of phase two taking two years, it only took a couple months."

The simulator is like Wii Golf on steroids with a little higher price tag (around \$32,000). Simply tee up the ball, pull out the club of choice and pick from a variety of courses or take to the driving range.

One of the biggest advantages of the simulator is the 'launch monitor', a portable black box which can be used indoors or out on the course and keeps data on every swing of every golfer for later analysis. Like watching film for golfers, the launch monitor records data such as club head speed, carry distance, angle of attack, ball spin, etc. The launch monitor and simulator setup were purchased from Foresight Sports - a leader in the launch monitor sector of the golf industry.

And one could argue the investment has already paid dividends: the men's team set the lowest 54-hole score in school history at the Jackrabbit Invitational, the first meet since the fall season, after roughly two months with the putting and chipping area alone.

What's the verdict? "It definitely helped. Looking at my stats from [the Jackrabbit Invitational], I averaged three putts less per round than I did last year and I definitely noticed my chipping was a lot better too. I think it's paid off so far," senior Greg Fehrman said.

"[The simulator's] really cool. You're going to be hard-pressed to find players who don't want to come in here all day, every day. We'll have to divvy up the times because this is gonna be a lot of fun," junior Hudson Carpenter said.

From an outsider's prospective, the facility no-doubt helps solidify SDSU as a Division I golf program, even if it's required some thinking outside the box. Baszler said not many teams in the upper-Midwest, if any, have anything like this unique facility. "If you would've told me a year ago that we'd have this [facility], I would've told you you're crazy," Baszler said.

The coach no longer has to tell his golfers to go in and hit. They're usually there already, some even sleeping overnight at the facility.

"The best take-away for me has been the reaction on the kids' faces when they saw the simulator, when they saw the putting green in January -- it's putting chills down my spine right now. It's pretty neat. They don't feel like they're so rusty, they don't feel like they're having to play catch-up with the rest of the country," Baszler said.