

P L A Y

WE HAVE AN UP-AND-COMING-TEAM, A NEW BALLPARK



B A L L

AND PLANS FOR EXPANSION TO HOST THE PLAYOFFS.

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(right) Mustang catcher Jayson Laws warms up before a game

P L A Y B A L L

IS IT THE CRACK OF THE BAT as it connects with a ball or the thwack of the ball as it hits a glove? Is it the smell of hot dogs, fresh cut grass and oiled leather? What is it about baseball that we love so much?

For Cal Poly baseball fans it's all those things and more.

"The older I get, the more I appreciate the game," said Mustangs Head Coach Larry Lee.

"As a coach, I try to get my players to play the game the way it was meant to be played – to respect the game, as well as your opponent."

Baseball at Cal Poly has changed a lot, and for the better, over the past five years. Prior to 2001, a baseball game hadn't been played on campus since the late 1970s. Fans were relegat-

pare for things other than baseball – like the real world."

It isn't surprising, either, that the high caliber of coaching became a huge draw for talented recruits, and at Cal Poly the recruits are required to have both talent and brains. The good news is that good ballplayers, who are also exceptional students, want to play for Cal Poly and Lee.

With Lee and Weinstein at the helm, the Mustangs have completed three winning seasons and are on their way to a fourth. In 2005 the team tied for second in the Big West Conference – the fifth-toughest conference in the country – and had its highest-ever ranking with 36 wins. The team missed an NCAA Division I playoff berth by only one game. And two years ago,

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ed to watching home games at Sinsheimer Park, they hadn't seen a winning team in years, and team spirit was waning.

All that changed when Baggett Stadium opened in January 2001. Fans attending the first game in the new stadium were treated to 1,734 gleaming new seats, a genuine press box and state-of-the-art training facilities. They also enjoyed the view of the surrounding rolling green hills and mountains.

Two years later Lee was hired as the Mustangs' new head coach. A graduate of San Luis Obispo High School, Lee was former head baseball coach for Cuesta College. He had 460 wins under his belt in 16 years at Cuesta. Mustang fans had high hopes for this son of longtime Cal Poly Coach Tom Lee.

Enter Jerry Weinstein. He came to Cal Poly as pitching coach by way of Sacramento City College with some 830 wins during his 23 years of experience. Lee and Weinstein are two of the top winning coaches in the history of California community college baseball.

That coaching powerhouse isn't wasted on today's players. "It's been a great experience," said junior pitcher Gary Daley Jr. "Where I came from in high school, we didn't have any real coaching. The coaches here are amazing. They help you pre-

the Mustangs set a school Division I record with 37 wins.

Excitement over baseball is building, as evidenced by attendance. The 1,734-seat stadium averaged near-capacity crowds for the first nine home games this season. The three-day, season-opening series against Fresno State was standing room only, with nearly 1,900 in attendance per game, proving Cal Poly fans are loving baseball.

As the fan base grows, the university has plans to cope with increased attendance and to become a venue for regional playoff games. A second-phase expansion of Baggett Stadium is in the planning stages. According to Chris Baker, associate director of advancement for Athletics, phase-two expansion plans include adding between 2,000 and 2,500 new seats, enlarging the press box, adding locker-room space for visiting teams, and expanding concession and restroom facilities.

Baseball at Cal Poly. Coach Lee sums it up: "It's a slow process to build a program that can compete at the highest level. Now we're gradually getting better on a yearly basis, bringing in the student-athlete who represents the university in a positive way. Not just on the field, but in the classroom and in the community. It's a great game." □

