

Famed Armory has been around a long time

Daniel Horton, *Havre Daily News*

Tuesday, August 23rd, 2011

Located on the south side of the Montana State University-Northern campus, the Armory Gymnasium, also known as the MSU-Northern Fieldhouse has been a Havre landmark since the late 1950's. Its arched roofline and sloping curves have grown to be almost iconic in this small, sports-loving town. But there are plans for change in the future.

And not all good things must come to an end; sometimes they just need a little updating.

The Armory gymnasium came about in 1957, after almost 20 years of Northern Montana College athletics using the Havre High School gym on Third Avenue. But as the fan base grew and the athletic programs continued to grow, it was fitting that the Northern Lights and Skylights earned their own gym to battle conference opponents and growing rivals.

Now sitting in its same spot for more than 50 years, the Armory has seen its fare share of action, hosting countless volleyball matches, wrestling duals and basketball games. And while thousands of talented athletes have come through the Armory doors, each program continues to grow and find more and more success.

Local athletes such as Evan Hinebauch have brought their talents to Northern, and Hinebauch is coming off of an NAIA National Wrestling Title at 184 pounds. And the Lights basketball team is also on top of the world, coming off of a year that brought the Frontier Conference Championship to Havre, defeating rival Carroll College in the chipper. The Skylights basketball and volleyball teams, as well as the Lights football program also continue to make noise in the NAIA, and are rapidly improving with each and every season.

But if the Armory walls could talk, they would also mention the past National Champions and memorable athletes. A main component of the Northern history books was the women's 1993 NAIA National Championship basketball team as well as the many Northern wrestling national titles — banners that hang proudly from the Armory's unique roof.

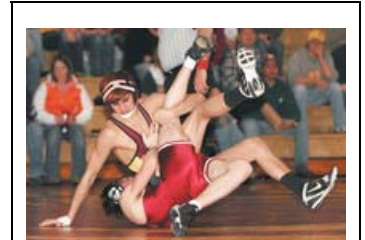
And if there was ever a good time to improve the Armory, now is as good as ever. Each program takes positive strides every year, and the facilities could use some improving.

The rarely used swimming pool that was once located in the lower level of the gym is now filled with wrestling mats and grapplers hard at work. The newly filled space moves the wrestling program from the smaller area upstairs to a much roomier location.

And while some renovations have taken place in the past, Northern has a lot of hopes and dreams for the future.

The wing that was added to the east of the gym added several coaches' offices and classrooms, as well as the outdated locker rooms, training and weight lifting facilities downstairs. But the college is waiting on a fairly large donation from an oil company that would totally renovate that entire area, including the newly acquired wrestling room.

A capital campaign will hopefully take care of the rest.



Havre Daily News/Nikki Carlson
MSU-Northern's Cameron Neiss (top) locks up with an opponent during an NAIA wrestling match last winter at the Armory Gymnasium in Havre. The Armory has been the sight of many historic sporting events, as well as concerts, and many other events over the last 50-plus years. And while the unique building has served MSU-N well over the years, it's becoming clear improvements are needed.

With that money, MSU-N Athletic Director and head football coach Mark Samson is hoping to renovate the gym floor, bleachers, baskets and everything in between, hopefully including the lobby.

“We really have some ambitious ideas,” Samson said. “It is just a matter of getting the money.”

On the top of the list is the poorly lit gym. Right now the Armory gym is dark and under-lit, something that has gotten the ball rolling on up-keeps already.

The plan was to totally redo the lighting system this summer, but with the gym being used almost year round for camps and practices, the date has been pushed back until an uncertain time. The new target is to at least get new lights by the beginning of the basketball season.

“The lighting system will actually go throughout the whole building,” Samson said, “including the wrestling room, weight room and gym. It will take place in the gym first, but it so hard to complete a lighting project when the gym is being used so often.”

So with future renovations in the works and in the planning stages, the proud Armory can be just that — a continued source of pride for Northern athletes, students, alumni and the entire Havre community.

The Armory gym is legendary in Havre. It has brought many people together under one roof for countless events and will continue to do so for many more years to come.