

Vikings hope to host high school football games at Eagan practice facility in 2018

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With U.S. Bank Stadium firmly entrenched as the home of the Prep Bowl, the Vikings' new practice facility in Eagan also may soon host high school football.

The Vikings announced their intentions to host high school football regular-season games in the fall of 2018 at a Minnesota State High School League board of directors meeting on Thursday morning.

The games would be played at TCO Stadium, the outdoor stadium at the Vikings' proposed new facility, which is scheduled to open March 1, 2018.

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The field has a capacity of 6,000 people, but can be expanded to hold 10,000.

Lester Bagley, the Vikings' executive vice president of public affairs and stadium development, said the Vikings also could host lacrosse and soccer games.

Included in the practice facility will be a broadcast studio for the Vikings Entertainment Network. Bagley said the Vikings could broadcast games held in Eagan — on Vikings.com and other mediums, potentially even on TV — with the hope that the studio could be an educational tool for high school students to learn how to broadcast events.

MSHSL executive director Dave Stead said the league would want to use the Eagan location as a quarterfinal site for the football state tournament and potentially hold the entire lacrosse state tournament there.

"It looks like the opportunities we have are unlimited with what might be available," Stead said.

But both sides acknowledged there are a lot of logistics to work through between now and whenever the first high school event is hosted in Eagan.

For example, if a regular season rivalry game is played at the Vikings' facility, one school loses a home football game, which equals a loss of revenue.

Stead said he has reached out to roughly 30 schools to see what profits are normally netted for such games, as well as the expected attendance, so the Vikings could both prepare for a certain turnout and potentially make financial compensation to the school losing a home game.

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"We haven't gotten into details about who pays what or if there is even a rent," Bagley said. "It's just early stages of looking into the financials and how to make the business side of the community connections work."

One thing TCO Stadium likely won't do is host the Prep Bowl. Bagley said there have been no discussions to move the football championship games to Eagan's outdoor football stadium. The MSHSL uses U.S. Bank Stadium rent-free for the football and soccer state championship games.

"There's certainly some glamour to play at U.S. Bank Stadium and the home of the Vikings and everything that that

provides for kids growing up in Minnesota,” Bagley said.

During Thursday’s presentation, Vikings chief operating officer Kevin Warren said the goal is to make the Eagan facility the “epicenter for sports, entertainment, technology, media (and) education.”

“We want this to be the place that people, not only in the state, not only in the country, but around the world are talking about,” he said. “When they talk about Minnesota, they talk about Viking Lakes, they talk about the interaction that we have with the community, but also with high school sports.”

“I think this is a partnership that will evolve, but there is definitely an opportunity and definitely an interest from the Vikings, our ownership and leadership, from the high school league, in finding a way to utilize this facility for a public purpose, for community connection and certainly for high school sports,” Bagley said. “There’s a desire on both sides, a lot of details to be worked out, but that’s where we are. We’re rolling up our sleeves to get busy and to answer those questions.”