

Future of Ridgeway Gym uncertain

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With Suffolk University's plans for the 20 Somerset St. building, the school has deemed the Ridgeway building up for sale. Suffolk will likely move the Communication and Journalism department to another building, but there has been no announcement regarding what the school will do to replace the Ridgeway gym, home to three of Suffolk's sports teams as well as the athletics department, since opening in 1991.



Before Ridgeway opened, the men and women's basketball teams played their games at the Cambridge YMCA in Central Square. One of the main movers and shakers that brought the gym to Suffolk was Athletic Director Jim Nelson, a process that took more than two decades of his career.

"For 22 years I was involved in negotiations with the Beacon Hill Civic Association into converting what was an old supermarket into what is now the Ridgeway building. It took 22 years to finally have the Ridgeway building but I don't think it will take another 22 for a new facility," Nelson said.

Nelson explained that he has only talked "peripherally" with President McCarthy and other Suffolk administrators about what the school would do to replace the gym in the event of Ridgeway selling. It has been indicated to Nelson that Suffolk would like its new gym to seat about 500 people.

"There's a committee being formed with input from trustees, coaches and administration," the Athletic Director said.

Despite redesigning the gym with new logos, banners and LED lighting for the backboard just two years ago, Suffolk University seems content with the idea of losing its only athletic facility, or at least losing sole ownership of it.



"The president indicated there would be access to a gym [if Ridgeway was sold], most likely the current gym. They want a contracted agreement with whoever buys the building for Suffolk to use the facility," Nelson said.

The announcement of Ridgeway being on the market has not affected men's basketball head coach Adam Nelson however; whose team uses the gym for all of its home games and practices.

“Right now, I’m just focused on this season,” said the head coach.

That doesn’t mean coach Nelson has no feelings for the underground facility though, saying, “It’s been awesome. I think it’s one of the best home courts in New England. One of the reasons we were able to knock off Albertus Magnus was because the place was packed,” Nelson said.

The head coach also cited the gym being one of the best around for shooters, believing the home court has a little something to do with why his team has led or finished second in the GNAC in scoring six of the past eight seasons.

Athletic Director Nelson also has a fondness for the facility, saying “I was at the university for 25 years before we had our own facilities, so the ’91 opening was special for me as well as the student athletes.”

Nelson explained that he realized Suffolk had outgrown the Ridgeway building athletics-wise four years after the original opening, but that doesn’t mean it lacks charm.

“It provides a unique home court advantage given the limited seating capacity and the uniqueness of being underground. Often times when a new opponent visits, they don’t believe we have a facility being in the heart of Boston. They’re always amazed when they come out of the elevators by the creativity of the place,” said Nelson.

Head coach Nelson echoed similar feelings, saying “It’s been the lifeblood for us recruiting. We bring recruits down and they see it’s a well-maintained gym that we’re proud to show. It’s been a great home court and I hope in some way it still can be.”

Where athletics would call home with the new Somerset project becoming reality is unclear, but it appears its tenure at the Ridgeway building may soon be coming to a close.