

# JMU Nation gets a facelift

Dukes' fans can bring the Purple Pride to three updated athletics facilities

By DAVID J. BIANCAMANO

Remember sitting on the hillside near the train tracks below D-Hall watching JMU football but instead bragging about the Marching Royal Dukes? You couldn't hear the stadium play-by-play announcer, so you and your friends may have been listening to the radio. Remember the sparse game-day tailgating at Godwin Field, which at that time resembled a ghost town?

In those days, JMU football fans could wait until game day to decide whether they would attend a game and still be able to get tickets at the gate.

It has been 37 years since then-JMU track and field coach Challace McMillin built the first JMU football team from scratch. JMU alumni, students, fans and supporters now circle all home football game dates on their calendars, so it's no surprise that games consistently sell out. Now on game days the smells, sights and sounds of JMU Nation tailgating electrify campus.

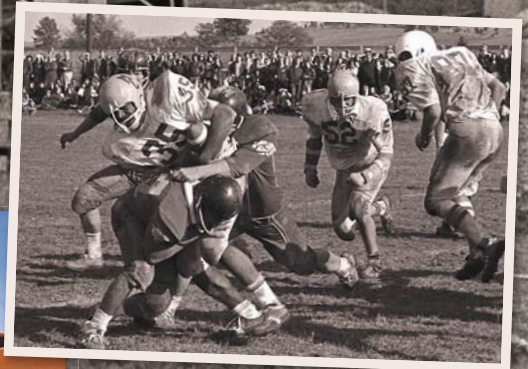
Yes, the perception of JMU football has changed. The program has grown and the game day atmosphere continues to change.

Now, that perception is about to change again.

An enormous undertaking begins this month to make Bridgeforth Stadium a complex that will reflect Madison's past, be Madison's present and foretell a Madison future that will thrill Dukes' fans for years to come.

"We envision Bridgeforth Stadium becoming a state-of-the-art facility by 2011," says JMU Athletics Director Jeff Bourne. "It will be a new front porch for our university." One goal of the 20-month project is to change how those outside the JMU Nation perceive JMU and its football program.

However, before that can happen, that front porch needs a facelift.

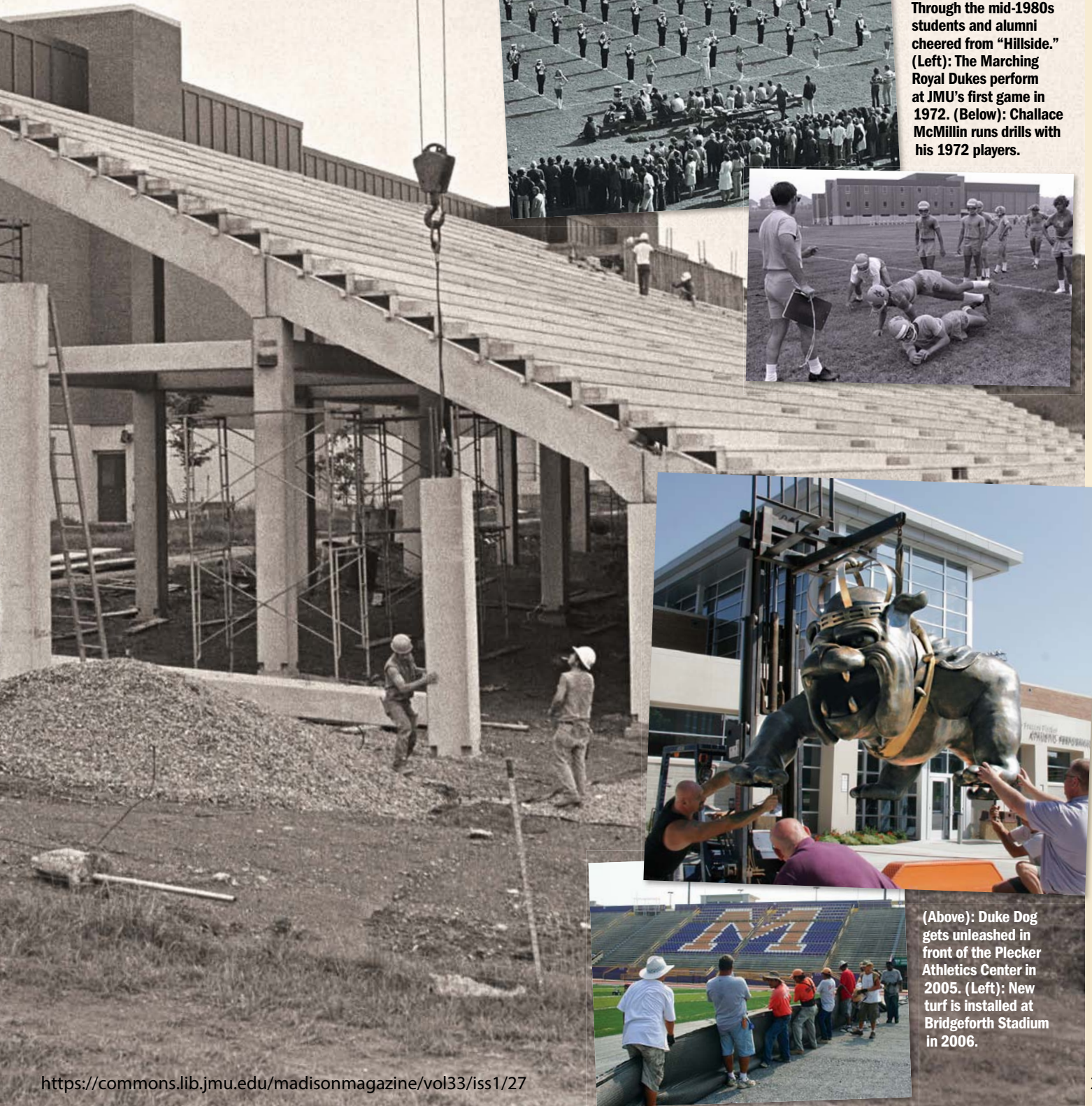


(Background): Construction begins on the 5,200-seat Bridgeforth Stadium in 1975. For the team's first three years, fans sat on the sidelines or on "Hillside" to cheer on the Dukes. The expansion of Bridgeforth Stadium, which begins this month, is the first significant work done to the venue since 1981.





Through the mid-1980s students and alumni cheered from "Hillside."  
(Left): The Marching Royal Dukes perform at JMU's first game in 1972. (Below): Challace McMillin runs drills with his 1972 players.



(Above): Duke Dog gets unleashed in front of the Plecker Athletics Center in 2005. (Left): New turf is installed at Bridgeforth Stadium in 2006.





## BRIDGEFORTH STADIUM BY THE NUMBERS

### Elevations after expansion

Stadium height **132** feet  
 Press Box **109** feet  
 Upper concourse **67** feet  
 Suites level **52** feet

### Seating capacity

Currently **15,500**  
 After expansion **25,000**

### Club level

**8,000**-square-foot club box  
 Outdoor club seats **1,006**  
 Outdoor club terrace with bowl view  
 Banquet space for **500** people  
 Premium food and beverage services  
 Flat-screen televisions throughout

### Suite level

**15** hospitality suites  
**12** outdoor and **4** indoor seats  
 President's suite  
 Athletics director's suite

### Press Box

Expanded working press area  
 Enhanced TV and radio areas  
 Enhanced coaches' boxes  
 Improved camera locations

### Up-to-the-minute stats

[www.jmu.edu/news/campus/Construction.shtml](http://www.jmu.edu/news/campus/Construction.shtml)

updated stadium expansion timeline,  
 Web cam construction shots, and  
 news about game-day parking  
 and campus bus routes.



Madison Stadium was built in 1975 with a seating capacity of about 5,200. Additional seats were added in 1981 to bring the seating capacity of what was by then known as JMU Stadium up to a capacity of more than 12,000. The current expansion of Bridgeforth Stadium seating and amenities will be the first significant work done since 1981.

The original stadium was constructed in three phases. A synthetic playing surface was installed in 1973–74, east-side stands (near Godwin Hall) in 1975 and west-side stands in 1981. A new scoreboard was erected in 2005; the Field Turf playing surface we see today was installed in 2006. The Robert and Francis Plecker Athletic Performance Center opened in spring 2005 as the first step in a transformation toward a top-of-the-line facility. There has been no major structural work done within the stadium for almost 28 years.

The first phase of the two-phase Bridgeforth Stadium expansion project will be com-

pleted by late summer 2010. That will clear the way for a seating capacity nearly the same as the current stadium for the Dukes' 2010 season. Second-phase expansion will begin at the end of the 2010 season and be finished in time for the 2011 football season.

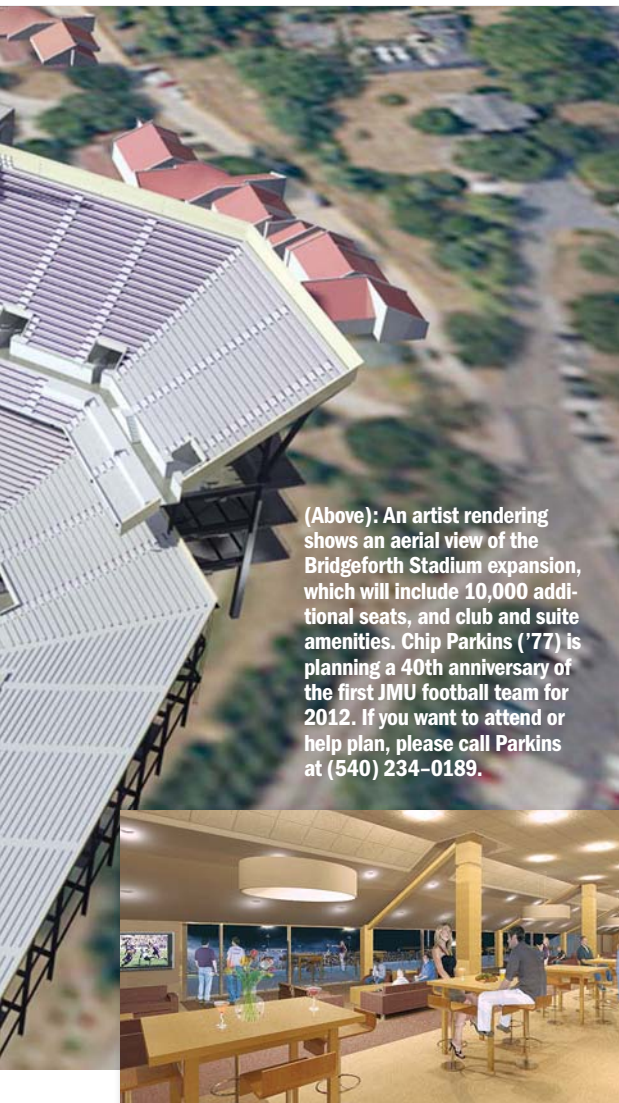
The \$62 million expansion project will begin with an additional 10,000 seats for the west side and north end zone. This area will have permanent bleachers, a club and suite level, and a new press box. The north end zone is the area where, in the '70s and early '80s, many students sat on the hillside to watch football games.

"The hillside experience was the best part about football games back in the day," says Scott Thornhill ('78), a member of the JMU Alumni Association Board of Directors. "We enjoyed sunshine on the hill with friends and foam and an occasional train obstructing our view. It was like we were having a party and a football game broke out!"

**'The Hillside experience was the best part about football games back in the day.'**

**Scott Thornhill ('78)**, alumni association board member





(Above): An artist rendering shows an aerial view of the Bridgeforth Stadium expansion, which will include 10,000 additional seats, and club and suite amenities. Chip Parkins ('77) is planning a 40th anniversary of the first JMU football team for 2012. If you want to attend or help plan, please call Parkins at (540) 234-0189.



The Bridgeforth expansion will improve sight lines for all west-side seats (parking deck side) and includes a 1,000-seat club level and 15 hospitality suites with seating for 16 people. Also, moving the existing stadium wall nearly 40 feet closer to the field means fans will be closer to the action. To understand the enormity of the project, the press box will crest the top of the upper deck at nearly 130 feet, or 13 stories. For comparison, the Champions Drive Parking Deck, near Newman Lake, is about 55 feet tall.

"It is going to be a beautiful facility that offers a lot of amenities that we have not offered before, and it will put us in the limelight with other institutions in terms of the quality of what we are building," says Bourne.

**'When you add the expanded stadium to our existing facilities [Plecker Center], we will have one of the best complexes in all of the Football Championship Subdivision.'**

**Mickey Matthews**, JMU head football coach

"With more graduates and a greater demand for seats, it will definitely be filled."

The expansion will also enhance JMU's commencement exercises each spring beginning in 2011.


"I can just imagine the Marching Royal Dukes playing to a screaming crowd of 25,000 and offering an expanded Parade of Champions event in the renovated stadium," says Carly LeDuc ('08), Centennial Duke and former trombone player for the Marching Royal Dukes.

Elevators and escalators, housed in the west-side concourse, will move alumni, parents and fans to the climate-controlled club, suites and upper levels of the stadium. There, fans can enjoy a high-end experience and watch a game or graduation.

Club seating will be exclusively for Duke Club members at a minimum giving level, and those season tickets are on sale at a discounted price through Dec. 31, 2010. Club patrons can enjoy high-end food and beverages served in the club lounge from pre-game through the third quarter. From the clubroom fans can choose to walk directly to their seats to enjoy the outdoor atmosphere or remain inside. Suites will feature premium furnishings and two flat-screen televisions as well as a modern living area with indoor and outdoor viewing space. The stadium expansion will also benefit the community, as banquet facilities will be available with catering and seating for 500.

One of the individuals most excited about the project is JMU Head Football Coach Mickey Matthews. "When you add the expanded stadium to our existing facilities [Plecker Center], we will have one of the best complexes in all of the Football Championship Subdivision," says Matthews. "This will help us even more on the recruiting trail in the coming years."

Students are also getting in on the action. This winter, student volunteers will participate in focus groups to provide input and feedback on student seating locations and game-day activities. The results will help shape the student experience in the renovated stadium.

The JMU Nation can certainly look forward to the 2011 season with great pride. When the new stadium lights brighten the Harrisonburg sky for a Saturday night game, and the Dukes take the field, perceptions will change again. 

**\* See photos, videos and a timeline of the Bridgeforth Stadium expansion project at [JMUports.com](http://JMUports.com). Click the Capital Campaign menu bar in the left column and select "Bridgeforth Stadium." Then share your thoughts about the new stadium at the official JMU Facebook page at [www.facebook.com/jamesmadisonuniversity](http://www.facebook.com/jamesmadisonuniversity)**

## Dukes' scorecard

Current and former JMU football players are chiming in about the Bridgeforth Stadium expansion.

Tell us what it means to you at [www.facebook.com/jamesmadisonuniversity](http://www.facebook.com/jamesmadisonuniversity).

### University commitment

This project shows the university's continued support of the



football program that we all are so proud of. Not only will this project enhance the overall setting

and enjoyment for Dukes' fans, it will also allow coach Mickey Matthews and his staff to keep recruiting the types of student-athletes we need to represent JMU both on and off the football field. A project this size could definitely not happen without the whole university community being involved, and President Rose and Jeff Bourne should be commended for such effort.

— **John DeFilippo** ('99)

*former JMU quarterback  
assistant QB coach for the N.Y. Jets*

### Confidence-boosting crowds

It looks cool, it looks too real to be true and very big for the space



where it is going to fit. The crowd does a lot for us. This is the best crowd I've ever played in front

of, considering on the road and at home, it has done a lot for me to hear them cheer for us, win or lose. It's great that there will be more tickets for our friends and family. And playing in front of a large crowd gives us more confidence to play that much harder.

— **Pat Williams**

*sophomore linebacker  
Virginia Beach*