New arena puts UL at the cutting edge

By JESSICA QUINN

THE University of Limerick has once again proved itself to be on the cutting edge of the sporting world. Preparations are now underway for the first phase of the University Arena, a state of the art multi million pound sports complex.

The university has just begun outfitting the first phase, which will support indoor sports and fitness activities. The arena will cost an estimated £20 million, with the first phase scheduled to be open by October.

It will be the largest multi purpose indoor sports facility ever built in Ireland, at over 145,000 square feet. It will also house Ireland's first indoor 50 metre pool that conforms to specific competition standards.

The pool will be part of phase two of the plan, which will hopefully be completed by this time next year.

At the moment work is underway outfitting the first phase with the latest in fitness equipment. The first phase will include an indoor sports hall, cardio fitness centre, weight training room, aerobic studio, changing facilities and offices.

The sports hall will provide almost 40,000 square feet of space for indoor sports and athletics. It will house four sport courts, for basketball, volleyball, badminton, indoor soccer and other sports. Work is now underway preparing a special double layered maple wood floor for the courts.

There will be four basketball courts, 10 badminton courts and two volleyball courts laid in the sports hall. The hall will also have a six lane 60 metre sprint track and a three lane 220 metre jogging track.

Perhaps most exciting of all, the sports hall is currently being fitted with retractable seating accommodating 1,500 spectators.

The latest in technology will be used in the hall, including a four sided electronic scoreboard and comprehensive sound system.

The cardio fitness centre has been outfitted with over 80 pieces of equipment, including 12 treadmills, 14 bikes and 10 climbers. The cost of this cardio centre alone has been estimated at £230,000. The locker rooms have also been fitted with 370 lockers.

There are also plans to purchase a computerised booking system to manage membership of the arena, with an estimated budget of £50,000.

This innovative system will allow members to book facilities over the Internet.

Announcing the beginning of the outfitting project, Dave Mahedy, director of sport, UL said, "we are now just weeks away from realising a vision that has taken years to develop. All those involved in the project are very excited to be so close to the completion of this first phase."

Rohan West, has been recently appointed assistant general manager of the university arena. Speaking about the facilities available he said, "we're certainly going for decent gear and we will certainly impress when people walk through the door.

He added, "we are all on the verge of being able to use one of the premier sports facilities in all of Ireland and Britain. The range of activities we will provide will be a major boost to sport, health and fitness."

Matron Christina Daly helping out at the St Camillus' Hospital barbecue (LL)

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