Scott Young
Staff Writer

The Jacksonville State University Student Recreation and Fitness Center is now open for business almost two years after the JSU Board of Trustee’s approved its construction. The RFC launched a “soft opening” beginning Monday featuring limited hours, with the new facility open to students and the paying public between 5-7 a.m. and 4-7 p.m. throughout the week as the new venue is broken in.

The facility is scheduled to have a grand opening on January 28.

Spanning over 100,000 square feet, the facility features recreational gymnasiums, a weight and fitness area, a wellness center, an elevated walking track, racquetball and basketball courts, a small leisure pool and whirlpool, a 40-foot indoor climbing wall, group exercise studios, and locker rooms.

“It will establish a new gateway experience for campus visitors and make JSU more competitive for student recruitment and enrollment,” said JSU President John Beehler.

Gamecocks head into Belmont game with milestones on the line

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STATE

Rebuilding update: Ten months after the storm

Photo Courtesy of JSU

The worst day in the 135-year history of JSU may also be its most beneficial.

On March 19, 2018, an EF-3 tornado ripped through campus, causing millions of dollars in damages, including significant damage to 50 of the university’s 70 buildings. Merrill Hall and the Alumni House were total losses. Other buildings – such as Mason Hall – are still undergoing major repairs.

But the mantra of “JSU Strong” came to fruition. Not only did classes resume sooner than anyone expected, spring commencement was held in May allowing seniors to graduate on time. Looking back, it’s hard for David Thompson, JSU’s director of Capital Planning and Facilities, to put those first few hours and days into fair perspective.

“It was nothing short of an act of God,” Thompson said. “It was not a flood from a building that had a broken water line or a fire in a building from a space heater. We had an F3 tornado come through the heart of our campus – there’s no other way to describe it.”

But if the March tornado was an act of God, what’s happened since is nothing short of miraculous. While the clatter and rumble of chainsaws and heavy loaders were still echoing across campus and the City of Jacksonville, JSU officials were meeting with insurance claims adjusters and FEMA representatives, as well as those from the State of Alabama, all determined to get JSU up and running better than before.

Now, ten months removed from the storm, JSU’s campus has been the sight of an extraordinary recovery. And that’s not just the opinion of those like Thompson and JSU President John Beehler.

“Because of this disaster, we have many professionals from many different viewpoints tell us that what we’ve been able
The roof work has been completed.

The facility is located next to Kennamer Hall on the southeast side of the campus. For more information on the recreation center, be sure to visit http://www.jsu.edu/recsports/.

Another example is Mason Hall. The tornado came through, ripped the roof off and tore all the HVAC units out of the walls. There was severe water damage inside the building all totaling “in the neighborhood” of $3 to $4 million, though Thompson is cautious, saying that these numbers are not exact.

Repair bids came in at $6.2 million. Insurance will cover 20 percent of that. JSU has committed to completely gutting the entire facility—keeping only the structure and the roof-TOP HVAC units and building a new Department of Music that will have all new elevators and wheelchair accessible restrooms, the performance center will have permanent fixed, seating and theatrical lighting, even a loading dock—everything better than it was before.

“We are going to completely modernize the Department of Music,” Thompson said. “For $7 million, JSU is going to get an all new center for music. If we had to do that from scratch, it would be no less than $20 million.”

Thompson has high hope that Wallace Hall, which houses the School of Health Professions and Wellness, will qualify for FEMA’s 50 percent rule and will benefit much as Merrill Hall did. “All things considered, maybe we spend $10-15 million out of pocket,” Thompson said. “But we’re going to get probably $200 to $300 million worth of work. That just doesn’t happen.”

Finally, there’s Pete Mathews Coliseum, where JSU has committed to upgrade everything on the interior of the building, of which insurance will pay three-quarters. As with Mason Hall, Pete Mathews will get modernized with new locker rooms, training rooms, referee suites, a swimming pool and auxiliary gym. It’s also getting a new roof and HVAC units. The basketball portion of the building reopened and began hosting the gymnastics again in December.

“Every time you build a roof of that magnitude, it’s going to brand new when we walk away at the end of January,” Thompson said. “For that, we’ll pay a little out of pocket—say, maybe $3 million. Normally, a brand-new Pete Mathews Coliseum isn’t our penny less than $40 million.”

While the university and its students, faculty and staff continue to recover from the traumatic spring break tornado, Thompson is in awe at the good that has come out of the catastrophe. He said, “We are getting amazing results out of a truly terrible thing.”

JSU News
Starting January 4 and ending January 10 there was a round of spectacular performances put on by several JSU Gamecocks in the production of Peter Pan. Talent could be found in every aspect of the elegant recreation of the tale we all grew up hearing about time and time again. There are several key elements that blend to form a successful production, one of the most compelling being centered on music. The musical component of any production is crucial—it can change the dynamic, and add so much to the storyline. The musical component draws out the emotion, and makes you realize just how deep and sincere moments truly are. The Peter Pan production, which took place at the Oxford Performing Arts Center, had every element of a successful musical locked into place right off the bat. It is often understood that great music calls for a great conductor. Jacksonville State’s very own Matt Davenport, a music education major, has proven this even more by conducting the musical aspect of the production. Matt was originally just filling in as conductor at rehearsals while Dr. Benson was in Italy with the Marching Southerners. Benson ended up offering Davenport the opportunity to conduct the entire thing all by himself. When asked how the overall experience was working with the cast and crew, Davenport said, “The show was such a wonderful experience for me; rewarding and challenging in the best possible ways.”

How does one begin to appreciate music enough to dedicate so much time and energy into it? If you were able to peek into the life of any musical genius you would most likely be able to find out that they were taught by incredibly talented music directors, who not only taught them how to play instruments, but encouraged them as well. Matt continues to share how grateful he is for those musical opportunities that his high school band program had presented him.

“Tonight was crazy, man. We fed off the crowd’s energy all night. They crowd just kept on lifting us, and we kept turning it up.”

“The crowd was great, and I can’t thank the students enough for showing up like they did. If they’ll keep coming back, and coming in those numbers, this could be a huge home-court advantage and one of the toughest home-courts in the league. That’s what it’s all about if you’re going to have a chance to play late in the year.”

That’s what JSU Head Basketball Coach Ray Harper said after Thursday night’s 69-62 win over Eastern Illinois in Pete Mathews Coliseum. Harper says JSU could have a tough home-court advantage, and there’s no reason it shouldn’t be packed every game. Especially during conference play.

The thing is, people are going to come see you if you win, so we’ve just got to keep winning.”

JSU is in the midst of unequivocally their best stretch of basketball since joining Division I. With an OVC Tournament win, NCAA Tournament appearance, a school record for single-season wins, and four-straight wins over the OVC’s historically best program in Belmont, Ray Harper and the Gamecocks have done their part in the last three years. Now it’s time for students and JSU fans to keep up their end of the deal.

The Gamecocks go for five-straight over Belmont Thursday night. See you there, Gamecock nation.

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Bird Box: don’t take off the blindfold

Breihan Dryden
A&E Writer

As a movie lover, I try not to go into films prepared to hate them. In fact, it’s quite the opposite, I try and find the best in all things (as you might have learned from the previous films covered). Bird Box, which I went into with zero knowledge of its existence, outside of some interviews that I had read months earlier on a couple of the horror sites I frequent. With a premise that sounds vaguely interesting (think The Happening meets A Quiet Place, except not as entertaining) and a, uh, weird to say the least cast, I was happy to sit down and watch this movie with my fiancé on a rainy night. Ohhhhhhh boy, I hope you’re ready to read me ripping this film apart.

First off, let’s start with some positives. The acting in this film, for the most part, is pretty solid. Sandra Bullock is always a treat and is very believable in her role as the protective mama bear of her unborn child. John Malkovich is wonderful in his usual John Malkovich-y way, and Trevante Rhodes is a pretty good backbone character to the story. It’s treated as some big loss for the group, not to spout exposition (about things we already know) and try and find the best in all things. Miss America is one of the leading friendship organizations for women in the world. Miss JSU, 1st alternate, and 2nd alternate all received scholarships towards their pursuit of education at Jackson-ville.

Bird Box is a tense, taut thriller. Sandra Bullock is an incredible lead, and the chemistry between her and John Malkovich is really great. The film is shot in a really unique way, with sensory deprivation and a lot of silent moments. It’s a really effective way of creating a sense of tension and unease.

However, there are some issues with the film. The pacing is slow at times, and there are some plot points that aren’t fully explained. The ending is also quite confusing and leaves a lot of questions unanswered.

Overall, Bird Box is a solid thriller that will keep you on the edge of your seat. But it’s not without its flaws, and it’s definitely not for everyone.

The Happening is a tough one, because it is a pretty good backbone character to the story. It’s treated as some big loss for the group, not to spout exposition (about things we already know) and try and find the best in all things.
Red Dead Redemption II is the game that transcends video games

Taylor Mitchell
A&E Editor

Red Dead Redemption 2 is the 2018 prequel to the 2010 game Red Dead Redemption. Both games were developed by Rockstar Games, which is mostly known for their Grand Theft Auto series. Grand Theft Auto admittedly, has very little to do with this series. Instead of stories about crime, with hints of clever parody of American culture, this is a story about the death of the Wild West. It’s a very different story than one might expect from Rockstar, which makes it worth taking a look at.

The gameplay is, in many ways, as expansive as the story. The game is filled with things to do that the player can either choose to deal with or not. Players can rob banks, trains and stagecoaches, or just go hunting or fishing. Like any good American culture, this is a story about crime, with hints of clever parody of American culture, this is a story about the death of the Wild West. It’s a very different story than one might expect from Rockstar, which makes it worth taking a look at.

The game is set in 1899, 12 years before the first game, though it primarily features a setting to the east of the first game. It is a region where modernity is fast approaching, but has yet to truly take over. Players take the role of Arthur Morgan, a member of the infamous Van Der Lind gang. This is the same gang that the first game’s protagonist, John Marston, belonged to during his outlaw days. Players get to see this period during this game. Arthur is the right hand man and protégé to the gang’s leader Dutch van der Lind (an antagonist from the first game). As the game opens, the gang is on the run after a job gone sour, lost in a snowstorm in the mountains. Players follow Arthur as he continues with his life of crime and the gang's fortunes continually spiral down the drain.

Probably the most interesting part of the story is how the unavoidable realities of the changing times slowly make charismatic outlaw-philosopher Dutch crack and fall down a path of violence and dogma. As Dutch falls, so does the fortunes of Arthur and the rest of the gang, and in the end you are left with the thought that maybe this was what Dutch, and possibly the world itself, always truly were to begin with. The first game was the story of the Old West’s death, this game is too, but it is also much more of a personal story about the death of the gang’s normal and preferred life. As the gang fractures, the game does a very good job of showing that these people’s entire lives are heading down the same road.

The true brilliance of the game comes from the setting. The world feels so alive, almost like it doesn’t require the player to exist at all. It feels like a world made to be a world, not just for the player to interact with. It also does a very good job of presenting the game as a Western. Everything works towards that and it is marvelous how it does it. It really feels like a Clint Eastwood movie, or dime novel that you get to play. It is a wonderful thing to experience. The game just feels extremely like you think it should and that all just culminates in the best way possible.

One thing that cannot be overlooked with this game is the utter beauty of it. Every single pixel is rendered in the sharpest detail. Its honestly its the most stunning I have ever seen a game look. I reviewed this using an original launch Xbox One, so I fully admit my console didn’t do it justice. If you have a Playstation 4 Pro or Xbox One X, you owe it to yourself to pick this game up just so you can see how good games can look now. I normally don’t sweat hardware limitations but the development work it took to get it looking this good really makes it worth it in this case.

This game is a masterpiece. It transcends its genre and even its medium. I realize I am not the first to say this, but I truly believe it. I have made the argument several times that videogames are art, and honestly I think this game is the newest evidence to this fact. So instead of basing my recommendation on any one element as I usually do, allow me to just say, play it. I don’t think you will be disappointed.

Courtesy of reddead.wikia.com

Left: Arthur Morgan (Roger Clark) Protagonist of Red Dead Redemption II
Right: John Marston (Rob Wiethoff) Protagonist of Red Dead Redemption

Courtesy of IMBD.com
Trivia Answers: November 29th Edition!

1. In the Harry Potter series, what is the name of Harry’s pet owl?  
Answer: Hedwig

2. Which book was famously rejected by 12 publishers before finally being accepted by Bloomsbury?  
Answer: Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone

3. Who directed the movie “Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban”?  
Answer: Alfonso Cuarón

4. In what year was the first Harry Potter movie released?  
Answer: 2001

Video Game Trivia:

1. What was the first console video game that allowed the game to be saved?  
A. The Legend of Zelda  
B. Advanced Dungeons & Dragons: Pool of Radiance.  
C. Base Wars - Cyber Stadium Series.  
D. Final Fantasy

2. Nintendo is a consumer electronics and video game company founded in what country?  
A. China  
B. Japan  
C. Germany  
D. Ireland

3. The first person shooter video game Doom was first released in what year?  
A. 1990  
B. 1996  
C. 1992  
D. 1993

4. In what year was the Nintendo 64 officially released?  
A. 1994  
B. 1991  
C. 1997  
D. 1996

Riddle of the week...

There is an island with exactly 201 residents, 100 with blue eyes, 100 with brown eyes, and the island leader (who has green eyes). To leave the island, one must know their own eye color. There are no reflective surfaces on the island and no one can communicate with each other other than the leader to the residents. No one on the island knows how many of each eye color there is. Everyone on the island is a perfect logician, meaning that if there us a solution they’ll find it. Every morning the leader gives anyone a chance to leave the island by guessing their eye color. One morning, the leader gathers all 200 residents to make an announcement, he says “at least 1 person on this island has blue eyes” How many people leave the island and in how many days after the announcement?
JSU MEN’S BASKETBALL

Gamecocks welcome OVC-favorite Belmont with milestones on the line

Daniel Mayes
Editor-in-Chief

Ahead of the second matchup in just two weeks with preseason Ohio Valley Conference favorite Belmont, the Jacksonville State Men’s Basketball program enters the meat of their conference schedule with a heap of accomplishments already behind them.

The Gamecocks took down the Bruins 84-74 in their first matchup on the road in Belmont’s Curb Events Center, and, just two weeks later, JSU welcomed the OVC-Power into Pete Mathews Coliseum Thursday night with several program milestones on the line:

Undeveloped in OVC Play

The Gamecocks entered the game already riding their best start to their conference schedule since joining the league in 2003-04. Jacksonville State has claimed a victory in their first four OVC games, which is their best start in any conference since starting 6-0 in the Atlantic Sun in 1999-00. With a win, the Gamecocks would extend their program-best start and keep at least a share of first place in the Ohio Valley, as Murray State and Austin Peay also share of first place in the Ohio Valley.

The Gamecocks have rattled off five wins in a row since the defeat at the hands of the Mountaineers, and another victory would give the Gamecocks their longest win streak since 2008-09.

Win Stead over Belmont

The Gamecocks have won four straight games over the class of the OVC in Belmont, dating back to the 69-65 JSU victory in the semifinals of the 2017 OVC tournament as the Gamecocks made their run into March Madness.

Jacksonville State swept the two Women’s programs matchup at 5:15. The game can be viewed online by subscribers of ESPN +, and Mike Parris will have the call on 91.9 WLSI and 97.9 WVOX.

JSU WOMEN’S BASKETBALL

Late struggles lead to 51-47 home loss

Jacksonville State – The Jacksonville State women’s basketball team was unable to hold a fourth-quarter lead, falling 51-47 to Southern Illinois-Edwardsville on Saturday. The Gamecocks (8-7) drop to 2-2 in Ohio Valley Conference play, matching the record of the Cougars who stole their second league win after trailing for more than 30 minutes. A dormant 1-for-17 shooting in the fourth quarter alone plagued JSU to just five points in the final frame as SIUE overcame a double-digit second-half deficit.

Sophomore Taylor Jones was the lone Gamecocks to reach double figures with 11 points. Senior Rayven Harrison led JSU to just five points in the final frame as SIUE overcame a double-digit second-half deficit. Sophomore Taylor

Jacksonville State tip against Belmont is scheduled for 7:15 p.m. Thursday night at Pete Mathews Coliseum after the two Women’s programs matchup at 5:15. The game can be viewed online by subscribers of ESPN +, and Mike Parris will have the call on 91.9 WLSI and 97.9 WVOX.

Jason Burnett leads the Gamecocks in what has already been a successful season.

Jason Burnell leads the Gamecocks in what has already been a successful season.

Matt Reynolds/JSU

Matt Reynolds/JSU

Matt Reynolds/JSU

Matt Reynolds/JSU

Matt Reynolds/JSU

Matt Reynolds/JSU

Matt Reynolds/JSU
JSU TRACK & FIELD

Poytress debuted in the mile in the 400-meter, while Briar Africa home, ran a 1:01.57. The new freshmen Reagan Cook and Adrian Rock made their debuts for the red and white. The opening meet of the season featured a mix of power programs from the Southeastern and Atlantic Coast Conferences, along with familiar mid-major foes in Austin Peay and Tennessee State. The new faces for JSU included true freshmen Reagan Cook and Uriah James in the 200-meter run. Leandra Custodio, who just arrived at JSU from her South Carolina home, ran a 1:01.57 in the 400-meter, while Briar Poytress debuted in the mile run. Ahead of Poytress in the mile event was sophomore Jazmin Ortega who placed 17th with a time of 5:42.85. Roswell, Ga., native, Ashton Coats, made her Gamecock debut in the 60-meter hurdles. In the field freshman Donna Dunkum competed in the high jump, an event where the Gamecocks had a strong team showing. Jahleah Harris took flight in the long jump and Adrian Rock made her first shot in the shot put and weight throw competitions.

One of the top performances by a first-time Gamecock was freshman Tamaya Mitchell’s seventh-place finish in the triple jump at a mark of 10.46 meters. Overall, junior Madison Rollins led Jax State finishing fourth in high jump clearing 1.64 meters behind a couple of LSU Tigers that took first and second in the event. Teammates Erica Edwards and Briana Caulde reached 1.59 height to tie for sixth. Senior Brittany Cook also had a good start to the 2019 season with a seventh-place spot in the long jump at 5.33 meters. On the track, junior Emily Sorrell placed seventh in the 800-meter run with a mark of 2:19.40, while junior Autumn Rich took 16th in the 3,000-meter event. The Gamecocks return to the Magic City next Saturday for the Samford Invite. 

JSU VOLLEYBALL

Volleyball welcomes transfer Hannah Marchand

JACKSONVILLE - The Jacksonville State volleyball team has welcomed its first new addition for the 2019 season with the arrival of transfer Hannah Marchand. Marchand, a 5-foot-11 middle blocker joins head coach Todd Garvey’s program after spending her first two years at Jacksonville University. The Sturgis, Mich., native started all 29 matches at middle blocker and right side hitter positions. We are really excited to have Hannah as a part of the program and think she will do well in both on and off the court.” Marchand finished 2018 third on the team with 219 kills, hitting .249 on the year and recorded 24 aces. She had 10 matched with double-digit kills, including a career-high 20 at Njit. She matched her career-high with seven blocks against Ohio Valley Conference member, UT Martin. She was a two-time Atlantic Sun Conference Freshman of the Week in 2017. JSU’s newest Gamecock was a native of a state that took the Red and White. In August as JSU plays host to an opening weekend tournament.

JSU RIFLE

Rifle opens 2019 with solid outing against The Citadel

JACKSONVILLE – The Jacksonville State rifle team opened the 2019 portion of the schedule at the Gamecock Rifle Range. The Gamecocks toppled the Bulldogs by 97-point spread with an aggregate mark of 4666. The Citadel turned in a 4569. JSU tallied a 2348 in air rifle and talloned on a 2318 in smallbore. Jax State was led by senior Mekenna Richardson, who combined for a final mark of 1177. Richardson was nearly perfect in air rifle with a 595. The Blackstock, Maryland native added a 584 in smallbore. She claimed top honors in both events. Senior David Sink followed Richardson with an 1172 overall score after posting a 591 in air rifle and a 581 in smallbore. Freshman Mackenzie Van Patten finished third overall with an 1164 aggregate score. Van Patten cased a 583 in air rifle and matched Sink in smallbore with a 581. Senior Trace Hayes and freshman Owen Goud rounded out the top five in the individual standings. Hayes tabulated an 1162, while Goud had his best showing so far this season with an 1155. JSU will return to action on Saturday, January 19, hosting Ohio Valley Conference foe Murray State. It will be the first of two consecutive meetings with the Racers as the two squads square off in Murray, Kentucky on Saturday, January 26.