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**All Things Nebraska**

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One of the great, unsolved mysteries in the state has been why the beloved Trev Alberts left his alma mater to become athletic director at Texas A&M.

Alberts was an All-American football player at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, then eventually became athletic director at the school after a successful stint at the University of Nebraska at Omaha.

Seemed like a match made in heaven, and a job Alberts would hold for many years.

But then, suddenly, it was over, and Alberts was trading Husker red for Aggie maroon.

One common theory is that his $450 million plan to renovate hallowed (but aging) Memorial Stadium landed with such a thud with some donors that he split for much wealthier fields in the Lone Star State.

Much of the grumbling about the renovation plan came from season ticket holders who just wanted a wider seat with a back rest and a cup holder — like at every modern sports venue today — instead of the current bench seats, a remnant of the age of leather helmets.

There was much questioning about the need for such an expensive stadium upgrade at a time when results on the field haven’t been, shall we say, exactly bowl worthy, and when the university, overall, is facing a budget shortfall.

Now comes a new, revamped plan to upgrade the 101-year-old stadium from the new AD Troy Dannen, one that seems a little more levelheaded.

The Dannen plan shifts the focus to the East and West Stadiums of the old ball yard, and puts off demolition and reconstruction of the South end zone seats — once planned to begin after this fall’s football season — for several years.

Dannen told the Lincoln Journal-Star that the switch was made because installing nicer seats in the East and West Stadiums means the project could

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“monetize itself” because those are the premium seats that fans will pay premium prices to occupy. A few season-ticket holders might be displaced to

other parts of the stadium, the newspaper was told, which translates to mean, “If you don’t want to pay more for the seats, you move.”

(As a long-time season ticket holder for NU volleyball, I already get a taste of this system. We’re required to give a $250 donation per seat (recently upped from $100 a seat) for the privilege to buy season tickets. The requirement has been in place for several years, but will now be in place on all of those football seats.)

Dannen, in a statement, said he knows Memorial Stadium needs to be “modernized,” but it must follow three principles — does it help NU win, does it help retain talented players and coaches, and can it be done without jeopardizing the athletic department’s financial stability.

The new AD also raised the issue of selling beer at Memorial Stadium, something that’s been hinted at for several years. But it’s always been assumed it would not happen while legendary coach Tom Osborne — not a fan of alcohol at college events — is still around.

Beer sales are now common at major university football games, with 80% of schools now selling brews at ballgames, according to a survey last fall by ESPN.

The reason? Well “money” of course, the driver of all things college athletics these days (and the reason the stadium redo has shifted).

Dannen reported that when NU finally allowed beer sales at Husker baseball games, sales averaged $12,000 per game. That’s a fair amount of suds.

Average attendance at baseball games is about 4,500, much less than at a football game, which varies from 60,000 to 90,000 (actual attendees), depending on the weather and timing.

 So, doing a little math (always a dangerous thing for a journalism grad) using my smart phone (we’re all pretty smart these days because of them) that would translate, over seven home games, into up to $1.7 million a year in extra revenue for a stadium revamp.

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That’s some decent extra revenue. And some studies have shown that allowing beer sales inside a stadium actually reduces binge drinking outside the stadium before the game and at halftime.

I gotta say, I’ve seen no problems, or excessive intoxication, at the Nebraska and Creighton basketball games I’ve attended were beer was sold. (And as a former member of an Irish folk band that played on St. Patrick’s Days, I’ve seen a wee bit of that over the years.)

Dannen said that the renovations wouldn’t begin until after the 2025 season, at the earliest, and told the Omaha World-Herald that any demolition of the South end zone might be conducted in stages.

That would ensure that 23,000 seats in the South Stadium weren’t removed all at once, avoiding a big drop in attendance, and leaving a huge gap in one end zone allowing Nebraska’s ever-present wind to disrupt passes and place kicks.

We’ll see how this goes.

Many fans I talk to say they’re tired of fighting the crowds to attend Husker games when they can watch — sitting in a recliner and enjoying a brew — multiple games at home on TV. So the stadium needs an upgrade.

A few more wins on the field, I’m sure, would make the path for this project much smoother.

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*Paul Hammel has covered the Nebraska state government and the state for decades. He retired in April as senior contributor with the Nebraska Examiner. He was previously with the Omaha World-Herald, Lincoln Journal Star and Omaha Sun. A native of Ralston, Nebraska, he loves traveling and writing about the state.*