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All-Stars Ready to Get to Work

MARQUETTE-Come Monday, graduating seniors from high school football teams spanning the Upper Peninsula will converge on Northern Michigan University for the Second Annual U.P. All-Star football game.

The date for the game was changed; the event had previously been scheduled for the last Saturday in June, to accommodate the installation of Northern Michigan University's new artificial playing surface at the Dome. The All-Star game will be the final football event held on the turf, and the new surface will be installed following the game, and will be completed in time for NMU's season to begin.

"The turf's still in great condition and the Dome is such a great facility," East coach Paul Jacobson said. "We'll get to play on the new turf next year."

Jacobson added that the change in schedule didn't affect anything at all for the East team or what they plan to do.

Players who were invited to the All-Star game will be preparing with a week's worth of practices, drills, and will also partake in a number of other activities including a skills competition, youth coaching camp, a media day and an All-Star Banquet.

One of the more popular events preceding the game is the skills challenge, where players will compete in a number of different events such as fastest man, strongest man, best receiver, best quarterback, best kicker and best punter.

The owner and president of main sponsor Xcel Sports Training, Todd Goldbeck, said that the challenge is one of the most fun things that the kids do all week.

"It's so much fun for the players, and it's a nice break for them in the middle of the week," he said. "These kids have been away from football for a while so getting back into two practices a day is a lot."

Practice will start for the two teams on Monday, and the players will have to get back into a two-a-day mentality.

"We have a general practice schedule, and we'll lay out what we want to do in practice when we all meet," Jacobson said. "It's going to be two-a-day practices most days, with a short day on Monday and we're going to want to take it easy on the guys on Friday.

"We have a lot we want to get accomplished in a short amount of time. The way things are with East and West, one will be inside while the other is outside and vice versa, so it's nice as long as the weather is good," Jacobson added.

With all the activities and preparation, Goldbeck said that the skills challenge is a chance at a small reprieve from the grind.

"We really put a lot of pressure on them as far as doing the charity work and all of the other activities," Goldbeck added, "so Wednesday afternoon is a good time for them to kick back and have a little fun."

The All-Star Banquet will take place on Thursday from 6-9 p.m. at the YMCA in Marquette. The guest speaker will be Dave Carl.

"The banquet is also a fun time, and it is a motivating time for players," Goldbeck said.

Goldbeck, who started the All-Star game in 2008, said he did so because U.P. football players don't get the recognition they deserve on a state-wide level.

"A big part of this game is providing these kids the recruitment opportunities that they otherwise might not get," Goldbeck said. "We hope that this game sheds some light on Upper Peninsula football, which is a good brand of football."

"It's a great fun week for them, and that's really the bottom line. It's about the fun for the kids, allowing them to make new friends, and learning to give back to the community," Goldbeck added.

For Jacobson, being involved in the All-Star game is all about opportunity.

"I'm just grateful to be a part of this game," he said. "It's going to be something that's going to happen every year from here on out, and it's a great opportunity, not only for myself, but also for the kids involved. Todd Goldbeck and Xcel Sports Training have done a tremendous job, and that's why it's good, because of the preparation that goes into this week for the kids."