

Text

Paper

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Athletics

San Antonians remember, cherish iconic Alamo Stadium

Built in 1940, it got its second wind in 2014

By Terrence Thomas STAFF WRITER

Kathleen Lovejoy was fresh out of college in 1962 when then-San Antonio Independent School District Athletic Director Claud H. Kellam hired her as a secretary.

A Providence High School graduate, Lovejoy had “no connection” with Alamo Stadium. But her appreciation for the place started to grow that fall in what seemed like an innocent excursion.

“You could go up to the press box and see the city,” said Lovejoy, who has worked for the district for almost 53 years. “It was warm, comfy. I know that’s a silly description of a football stadium, but it had character.”

Nearly 75 years after its completion as a part of the Works Progress Administration (WPA), Alamo Stadium still has a special place in San Antonio’s heart.

The facility, which was built for \$477,000 and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places, recently underwent a \$35 million renovation.

The improvements included a new playing surface and track, a state-of-the-art video board and spruced-up locker rooms, bathrooms and concession stands.

“It’s a wonderful upgrade,” Lovejoy said. “I have mixed feelings. I remember it as it used to be.”

Old or new, Alamo Stadium — affectionately dubbed the “Rockpile” because it was constructed with limestone and built on the site of a former quarry — has been host to countless enduring memories.

It’s where Bracken-ridge’s Warren McVea and Lee’s Linus Baer put on a duel for the ages before 20,000 fans — and a live, local television audience — in a 1963 playoff game that Lee won 55-48. It was called the greatest high school game in Texas history.

Former President George H W. Bush jogged at the venerable facility during a visit to San Antonio. Soccer games, track and field meets, professional football and the annual Battle of the Bands have been contested there.

“I remember the history,” Lovejoy said. “It was great for its time.”

On Sept. 20, 1940, Alamo Stadium opened with a high school football doubleheader. Corpus Christi defeated Jefferson 14-0 in the first game, while Brackenridge topped Houston Reagan 19-2 in the nightcap.

The event sparked a love affair that made Alamo Stadium the city’s epicenter of high school football for more than a half-century.

Jefferson was a powerhouse in the 1940s there. Judson launched its dynasty there with a 10-7 win over Churchill before more than 21,000 in 1982. Roosevelt defeated Flower Mound Marcus 17-10 to win the 1995 Class 5A Division II state championship there.

And before he was Texas Tech’s head football coach, Kliff Kingsbury, then a senior quarterback, led New Braunfels to a regional title in 1997 with a win over MacArthur there.

“We played in the Astrodome (in Houston), we played up in Dallas, we played in Memorial Stadium (in Austin),” said former Judson coach and Athletic Director Frank Arnold, who coached at the school from 1980-83 and led the Rockets to the first of their six 5A state titles in his final season. Arnold, a Burbank graduate, also coached at SAISD schools Sam Houston and Jefferson.

“But every chance we had to come here (to Alamo Stadium), we wanted to come here. There’s a culture and an aura here — it’s like none other. I love the old place. This is home to me.”

But not all has been good for Alamo Stadium.

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The city's crown jewel of stadiums during the 1980s and 1990s — when playing late-round playoff games was almost a rite of passage — it lost its appeal thanks to a deteriorating infrastructure: cramped locker rooms and bathrooms and outdated plumbing.

Led by then-SAISD athletic director Gil Garza, voters approved a \$35 million bond in 2010 that would give Alamo Stadium a much-needed facelift.

The SAISD had a rededication ceremony on Aug. 16, and Central Catholic and Lanier played football on Aug. 28, 2014, in the first game at the venue since construction began in December 2012.

“For us, the important thing was to make something that is as good as anywhere in the city for our kids,” said Barbara Wise, SAISD assistant athletic director. “It was definitely something we needed to showcase. There are so many great stadiums in this city, but we wanted our kids to be able to have pride and to have a great place to say, ‘This is our home.’ ” tthomas@express-news.net
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Alamo Stadium Section THE M LIGHT Alamo Stadium Section
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Opening & Dedication

ALAMO STADIUM

Dedication Program

The program for the dedication ceremony at Alamo stadium...
 1. Prayers...
 2. Reading of the Field...
 3. Presentation of the Stadium...
 4. Presentation of the Stadium...
 5. Presentation of the Stadium...
 6. Presentation of the Stadium...
 7. Presentation of the Stadium...
 8. Presentation of the Stadium...
 9. Presentation of the Stadium...
 10. Presentation of the Stadium...

Alamo Stadium's opening was big news in Sept. 20, 1940, site of two games that day.

Courtesy photo



Tom Reel / San Antonio Express-News

Guests arrive for the stadium's rededication in 2014. The facility closed when construction began in December 2012, and stayed closed in 2013 for renovations.



Tom Reel / San Antonio Express-News

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Cheerleader Bianca Caballero performs with the Edison High School band.



William Luther / San Antonio Express-News

Alamo Stadium is seen in an aerial shot in 2014. U.S. 281 is on the right.