

Loving the light: Vandal fans cheer the University of Idaho's newly illuminated Kibbie Dome

By Holly Bowen Daily News staff writer

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Bob Haynes has been attending football games at the University of Idaho since 1953.

So the Coeur d'Alene resident undoubtedly noticed a difference when he visited the Kibbie Dome for Saturday's home game against San Diego State University.

The dome's west wall has been partially replaced by translucent fiberglass panels, part of a \$10 million life-safety improvement project that began this year.

From the outside, the panels appear opaque and off-white.

However, when viewed from the inside, they let in 22 percent light illumination.

That makes a difference even on a cloudy day, Haynes said.

"It's improved the atmosphere in here a great deal," he said. "There's much more light."

Nancy and Garth Sasser of Moscow saw the new paneling for the first time Saturday and said they were impressed by how much light it let in.

Nancy said she has been going to Vandal games "as long as the dome's been here" and said the renovation was "well done."

"I like it very much," Garth added. "It's a lot more light. It's attractive."

UI graduate student Sean Bradburn was more concerned with the Vandals' performance on the field.

The electrical engineering major didn't see the new wall making a huge difference and looked forward to when all the dome's renovations are complete.

"It'll be nice when it's finished," he said.

Ladd C. Arnoti of Cottonwood, Idaho, has been attending Vandal football games since 1978.

He agreed that the renovations will be the most helpful to the team once they are completed, but he was pleased with the progress made so far.

"It's great," he said. "I think it's a very good move."

Vandal receiver Daniel Hardy said the football team also gives a thumbs-up to the new dome.

"We love it. It's almost too bright," he said. "The design is amazing. It brings light to the dome and it feels more energized."

The dome's new west wall is in stark contrast to the existing east wall, which retains its original wood paneling.

UI Athletic Director Rob Spear said the east wall will eventually be replaced once there is enough money to do so.

As for what else could be done to improve the dome's aesthetics and draw more attendance to UI athletics, fan reaction was mixed.

Nancy Sasser said she'd like to see mats put on the dome's seating to make it more comfortable, while Arnoti said parking at the dome is currently too congested and needs to be better organized.

Haynes said he thinks the recent renovations plus the eventual completion of the east wall will help the Vandals bring in more spectators, but he remained realistic about what makes a team popular.

"Winning would help a lot more," he said.

The Vandals had that part covered Saturday, winning 34-20 over San Diego State. The team's next game in the newly illuminated Kibbie Dome will be Oct. 3 against Colorado State University during Dad's Weekend.

Daily News staff writer Sandra Kelly contributed to this story.

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