

# New UI arena will be boost for area - if it gets off ground

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## **Devin Rokyta, Moscow-Pullman Daily News**

For nearly 50 years officials at the University of Idaho have been dreaming of constructing a stand-alone athletic venue for basketball and volleyball near the Kibbie Dome.

Last week, UI President Chuck Staben and Athletic Director Rob Spear announced that may finally happen.

The university outlined plans for the \$30 million project, which will include a 4,700-seat, 70,000-square-foot arena north of the Kibbie Dome. It will be used for basketball, volleyball, community gatherings, academic events, concerts and meetings. The facility will feature a practice gym, conference area, 14 offices, concession stands and locker rooms.

Staben said he hopes to begin construction in February 2018 and have the facility completed and ready for play in 2020, if all goes as planned.

That's great news for the university and the region - assuming the pair is able to see the project through to its completion.

Staben said the university has already raised nearly half of the \$30 million needed to complete the project, and they will now take the fundraising effort public.

Raising the remainder of the money needed for the project likely won't be an easy proposition, as the UI is not exactly flush with mega donors willing to hand over a few million dollars for a new arena. The UI will also have to deal with apathetic fan, alumni and donor bases, many of whom are still a bit peeved about the university's decision to drop its athletic programs to the Football Championship Subdivision and into the Big Sky Conference.

The announcement, however, might be enough to reinvigorate some.

"This is an investment that we at the university, our students and our donors are making in sustained excellence, in this case athletic excellence, but something that compliments the excellence at the university," Staben said. "It takes a little while to get the first person walking into the arena for a basketball game, but this will become a reality."

We just hope we don't have to wait another 50 years to actually see the building completed.