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For some South Florida high school football teams, no place like (a new) home

A handful of teams will open the new season in new digs

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By **Christy Cabrera Chirinos**, Sun Sentinel
7:02 p.m. EDT, July 3, 2013

For three years, Troy Bottom has played his high school football games on another school's field. That school's fans have been the ones in the stands, and that school's scoreboard has marked wins and losses. But this fall, all of that will change as Bottom and his Pembroke Pines Charter teammates finally experience what it's like to play a home game at home.

The Jaguars are one of a handful of high school football programs from Broward and Palm Beach counties that will open the 2013 season at new facilities. For some, such as Pines Charter, that means a state-of-the-art on-campus stadium. For others, such as Calvary Christian, it means playing games at night as new lights are installed on their existing home field.

"This is really special," said Bottom, who has played most of his high school football games at nearby Flanagan High, which has hosted Pines Charter games for 12 seasons. "At Flanagan, it was always a sense of it being our field, but not really being our field. It was a lot of their kids coming out to watch us play. Now, it will be our fans, our home turf, something for us to protect. It'll make us hungrier as a team because we'll really want to protect what is ours."

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The facility will include an artificial turf field, new bleachers, restrooms, a concession stand, a ticket booth and a rubberized practice track. The field will be lined for lacrosse and soccer, as well as football, and Athletic Director Steve Bruns says he believes the facility can go a long way in continuing to legitimize the Pines Charter program.

"We're losing some of our top athletes to [American] Heritage, St. Thomas and University [School] every day," he said. "Now we have top-of-the-line facilities. We redid our weight room recently. We're an 'A' school. We want to keep our kids, keep our Charter kids, and with this stadium, we can do a great job with that. It's going to be one of the best [stadiums] in Broward for sure."

At Oxbridge Academy in West Palm Beach, there's a similar sense of excitement.

The school, which opened in 2011, will play its inaugural season of varsity football this fall, and like Pines Charter, the team will do it in a new state-of-the-art stadium.

Already the synthetic turf field has been laid down, and construction crews will add bleacher seating for approximately 1,500 throughout July. Oxbridge Athletic Director and football coach Doug Socha says the facility will also have a video replay scoreboard, 25-second clocks and lighting.

Additional seats and a press box will be added in the multimillion-dollar project's second phase.

"The reaction of the kids has been incredible," Socha said. "When they came to Oxbridge in its inception in 2011, there weren't even the sights of a football program. Now, they have a stadium. They're seeing the stadium change as we train. The bleachers coming in, the scoreboard will go up. They know we're all fortunate to be here and build the program from the ground up."

Added football player Tre Gabriel: "We all talk about what it will be like to step on that field. It's going to be a moment we remember for all our lives."

Defending state champion University School will also experience the excitement of playing games at home, though the plans for the Suns' new facility aren't as grandiose as some of the other projects in South Florida.

Athletic Director Paul Herfurth said while the Suns won't have a traditional stadium, they'll have a new field with seating and an artificial turf not far from the school's campus on Nova Southeastern University.

The facility may not be large enough to host some of the Suns' biggest games, which may have to continue being played at Nova High, but the hope is the field will continue adding to University School's growing tradition.

The field will also be home to the Suns' soccer and lacrosse teams.

"We're looking forward to having a place we can call home," said University football coach Roger Harriott. "For us, it'll be extraordinary. It's a new venture and part of the growth process. Our guys, and coaches and students are excited about the opportunity to play in our own backyard."

And at Calvary Christian, the Eagles will experience a first as lights have been added to the school's field, which is going through several phases of expansion. A new track will be poured in November, and permanent bleachers will also be added as part of the \$3.5 million project.

But most of that construction will happen after football season, giving Calvary's football players and fans the chance to escape afternoon games in the sweltering South Florida heat.

"For football, nothing is better than Friday nights," Calvary Athletic Director Dana Ridenour said. "We're going to have a real family atmosphere where the parents can be there, and there will be barbecues before the games. It will be an experience like no other."

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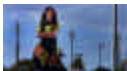


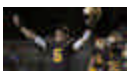



Christy C. Chirinos @BrowardHSsports 18 Jul
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