

CONTRA COSTA TIMES

Tuesday, August 9, 2005

Former Oakland A's owner is floating a \$25 million proposal to turn a Concord sports center into one of the biggest of its kind



DOUG DURANT/TIMES

INGRID ALMARAZ, 18, of Concord, and Miled Saadat, 14, of Antioch practice a boxing drill Wednesday during a class at the Community Youth Center in Concord. Former Oakland A's owner Ken Hofmann is proposing a \$25 million expansion to make the site a sports village.

Youth facility plans to expand into big leagues

By Denis Cuff
TIMES STAFF WRITER

CONCORD — A youth center is rolling out a \$25 million expansion plan to become a sports village for teaching gymnastics, wrestling, boxing, judo and other Olympic sports to thousands of boys and girls.

The Community Youth Cen-

ter, created by former Oakland A's owner Ken Hofmann, would become one of the largest youth sports facilities in the nation for individual sports.

Some 2,000 to 3,000 youngsters could take part in recreational and competitive sports programs at the expanded center, backers say.

About 600 boy and girls primarily from Contra Costa County now participate, paying \$20 a month or less if they qualify.

The added 64,000 square feet of space in the new buildings, including a 2,000-seat gymnasium, would make the center a desti-

See CENTER, Page 21

THE YOUTH CENTER

The Community Youth Center at 2241 Galois Court offers sports programs for boys and girls ages 4 to 18. For details, call 925-671-7070 or visit communityyouthcenter.com



BOXING COACH Jody Smith demonstrates a drill Wednesday at Concord's Community Youth Center.

DOUG DURANT/TIMES

Center

FROM PAGE 1

nation for regional and international tournaments and exhibitions, operators say.

The nonprofit center has more than 20,000 square feet of space in an industrial park south of Concord Avenue and west of Highway 242.

"The expansion will allow us to do more of everything we do for youth sports," said Dennis Constanza, the youth center executive director.

"We could host major sporting tournaments, maybe even an Olympic trial for a sport like boxing," Constanza said, "but the most important thing about this project is providing more sports opportunities for kids, regardless of their skill level or income."

Steep costs for coaches and workout rooms have sharply limited American youth participation in individual sports overshadowed by soccer, baseball and basketball.

Cuts in school and city recreational programs also have limited youth sports programs.

To help fill the gap, the youth center proposes interconnected buildings with spaces dedicated

to nine activities: gymnastics, rhythmic gymnastics, judo, wrestling, boxing, tae kwan do, dance, cheerleading and sports-specific conditioning.

A wall around the complex would limit entry to a single gate where parents would pick up and drop children.

To reduce traffic, bus service would be explored as a way of transporting youths from schools to the center, said Dan Wetherell, the project architect.

Youth center operators recently filed a preliminary application with Concord. They said they hope to start and finish the expansion in 2006.

Hofmann, 82, founder of the Concord development company bearing his name, said he's determined to expand the center.

"It's going to happen. It's about helping the kids," said Hofmann, who espouses sports as a way to build character and steer youth away from drugs, crime and violence.

The Hofmann Foundation, a charity the developer formed, will play a major role in funding the expansion, but public and corporate donations also will be sought, officials said.

Robby Smith, 18, of San Ramon, is one of many to benefit from the center.



The 214-pound athlete won national junior championships earlier this year in both freestyle and Greco-Roman wrestling.

"I would never had done this without my coaches, the practice facilities and the other wrestlers at the youth center," Smith said. "The coaches are very high quality."

Smith started coming to the center at age 9.

Youth center athletes took 12 medals for first, second or third in national championships in four sports this year, the center reported.

Winning is not the only thing at the center, though.

Youths from 4 to 18 are welcomed into sports programs re-

Constanza said. Center tutors help members with academic work.

The center isn't the only nonprofit organization talking of a major Concord project for youths. The Salvation Army is in the running for a grant that could be worth more than \$25 million from the Kroc Foundation to build a community center on Clayton Road to provide music and art education programs along with an ice rink.

Salvation Army and Community Youth Center managers say they are coordinating to avoid duplication.

"We plan to focus on different areas," said Wayne McHargue, a Salvation Army planning consultant.

Youth center and Salvation Army officials say they plan to ask Concord and the Mt. Diablo Unified School District to consider paying for bus service to carry students from schools to the two centers, as well as from center to center.

The two centers also are discussing a joint fund-raising campaign for the two projects.

Two years ago, Concord shelved plans for a long-sought community center because of budget constraints, noted Vice Mayor Susan Bonilla.

"This a great example of the private and nonprofit sectors doing what we don't have the money to do," Bonilla said. "It's great timing to fill some of our gaps."

Contact Denis Cuff at 925-943-