

Celilo: Mini-pitch court very much needed for youth

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Access to a place to play can be a lifeline for kids growing up on reservations and, in the case of this area, the tribal fishing access sites that line the Columbia River from Bonneville to McNary dams.

Concerns regarding substance abuse and the dangers of idle time were ongoing concerns shared by speakers at the unveiling ceremony.

Terry Heemsah Sr. is the Yakama Nation Sergeant at Arms. He was one of the keynote speakers during the unveiling ceremony held in Celilo.

He spoke of the instructions of his elders—to always protect the children. The need for safe healthy spaces to play and exercise was one of the main focal points for all the speakers at the event.

Karen Jim, Celilo Village elder expressed her gratitude for the community’s support of the youth and their strong involvement in physical activity. “Out of every five students, four are in sports year-round,” she said.

Ms. Jim praised the children for being active in sports, as well as cultural practices like singing, dancing, fishing, hunting, and food gathering. She believes that the new facilities will provide an important outlet for the youth, keeping them engaged in healthy, positive activities.

Ms. Jim also acknowledged the supportive role of parents, who are committed to attending their children’s games. She expressed her gratitude to everyone who helped make the project a reality, believing it will play a key role in shaping the future of Celilo’s next generation.

Introducing the community to the world’s most popular sport

During the ceremony Zeulner, Jim, and Heemsah repeatedly spoke of basketball; how-



Celilo community members provided event organizers and speakers with canned salmon caught from the Columbia River. Celilo is an in-lieu site in the Columbia Gorge, designated for tribal fishing and cultural practices following the loss of traditional fishing grounds due to dam construction.

ever, basketball is only one part of the mini-pitch: The other half of the opportunity of this court is soccer.

This aspect is one BIA Director Bryan Mercier, of the Grand Ronde, is most excited about on a personal level.

A lifelong soccer player, Mr. Mercier spent 1996-2003 playing semi-professionally in Germany and Spain, where he gained an appreciation for how sports can connect people across cultures.

His love of the game mixed with his commitment to use his position to improve the quality of life for those on the river have made this project especially important to him.

Mercier is well-acquainted with the youth of the Columbia River fishing site communities. Before becoming the BIA Director in September of 2024, he served as the Pacific Northwest Director since 2019. Over those years, he has spent time taking a closer look at the conditions along the river and became determined to do what he could to improve them.



Lane Meanus, left, led local youth in opening Washat songs for the mini-pitch unveiling in Celilo Dec. 15. Meanus, who lives in Celilo, and the drummers joined the rest of the community in breaking in the new court after the ceremony.

Mercier hopes access to soccer and basketball will expand opportunities for youth, foster connection, provide healthy activity, and encourage personal growth by learning a new sport.

“Native youth will always have basketball as their first love,” said Mercier, “but I hope soccer will become a close second.”

A place to practice

To help introduce Vil-

lage youth to the sport, Whitman College soccer players drove more than two hours from Walla Walla to participate in the unveiling ceremony.

Youth from the village were able to have one-on-one time with the soccer players and get an introduction to a new way to play.

Many of the youth had played soccer in the past, but most had not had extensive experience beyond PE class, and many had

never joined a team.

One of the youth speakers and residents, Alma Compo, 14, said she is excited to have a field of their own.

“This court means a lot to me,” she said, “because I play basketball at my school and now I can practice at home. It’s also really important to my family because we can all do activities together.

“I am also glad that we have a soccer court too and can play multiple sports. I’m thankful it brought our community together from Wishram and Celilo.”

While the court is considered condensed, there is still room for families and the community to play together. Measuring 50 feet by 104 feet, the modular mini-pitch features durable acrylic surfacing, LED lighting, galvanized steel fencing, built-in goals, ADA-compliant access, and lockable storage.

Maintenance costs for the court have been addressed, with a 10-year warranty covering all the court, the lighting system, and structural elements. This ensures that no additional expenses will burden the community for upkeep during this period.

The lighting system features state-of-the-art LED technology, keeping even light distribution while minimizing glare and preserving the surrounding night environment. Lighting will be automatically scheduled annually for evening hours, making the space accessible year-round for activities and gatherings.

The condensed size of the soccer field also introduces a fast-paced style of play that differs from traditional large fields.

Kirby Van Der Kamp serves as a Soccer Market Representative for Musco Sports Lighting, a Clackamas-based company specializing in sports and field lighting. A key collaborator in the project, he remarked:

“This smaller pitch helps kids learn the principles of street soccer. It’s quicker, it’s more dynamic, and it

Like the others, the mini-pitch court at Simnasho would follow the Celilo model, combining basketball and soccer to offer multi-sport opportunities while fostering connections to culture and community.

allows them to focus on their technique and decision-making in a way that larger fields don’t offer.”

Although Van Der Kamp and the partners are new to collaborating with tribes, the company aims for this to be the first of many such partnerships.

Representatives at the unveiling expressed hope that this innovative project aligns with their mission to create new athletic opportunities for youth.

Petroglyph designs

The mini-pitch is decorated with reproductions of petroglyphs from the Columbia River area.

CRITFC Communications director Jeremy FiveCrows commented:

The petroglyphs along the Columbia River are such powerful reminders that people have lived here for thousands of years.

“The designs connect us with these ancestors and so it felt like a good fit to include them on the new field where the next generation can see them every time they use it.

“And I like to think that those ancient ancestors are happy seeing their descendants laughing and playing like children have since time immemorial.”

Looking ahead, the Wave Foundation is working with the BIA to expand this initiative, with plans to build ten courts in Native communities throughout the Pacific Northwest.

The next mini-pitch is slated for Simnasho on the Warm Springs Reservation, with installation planned for spring or summer 2025, pending funding.

~ Student lessons for the classroom ~

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Numu ~ Paiute

UNIT: Greeting Conversations Unit

LEVEL: Beginners

LESSON: Like/Don’t Like

By: Numu Tunedyoidu, Roxanne Kelly and Salena Cooper

FOR: All Schools and Community

TIME: 30 mins at a time

GOALS: The students will learn to introduce what they like or don’t like to others. Especially if someone was to ask a question, they will be able to answer it.

OBJECTIVES: The students will be able to:

1. Say what they liked, for full control
2. Say what they don’t like, for full control
3. Respond to a question with a correct answer, for full control

PROCEDURES:

1. Introduction:

The teacher will draw on the board two webbs and in the middle of the webbs it’ll have a question in Paiute of “What do you like?” and “what do you not like?”

2. Implementation:

Stage 1:

The teacher will read and say the questions from the middle of the webbs but in the numu language.

Hema u pesa soopedya?

Hema u ki soopedya?

What do you like to do?

What do you not like?

Stage 2:

Then the teacher will tell the class that these webb lessons will teach them how to answer the question. The teacher will have one of the answers in the webb, example “I like to swim” and will say it in the language.

Nu pesa pahabena soopedya.

I like to swim.

And will also write this phrase on the bottom of the webb on the board the phrase on how to say “I like ____.”

Nu pesa __ soopedya.

I like to ____.

The teacher will do the same for “I don’t like ____.”

Nu ki __ pedzape.

I don’t like ____.

Stage 2:

The teacher will write conversations on the board. The student will look, listen, and repeat. Then the student will write the conversations in their books.

Stage 3:

The student will practice these conversations with each other in pairs.

3. Closure:

The student will practice in a chain-conversation around the class or around their group, asking either for the next person’s English name or Indian names along with their age, as they choose.

4. Follow-up:

Students will share with their friends or family how they can say their names and their age in numu.

RESOURCES:

- “Fill-in” blank webb handouts
- “matching” handout
- Memory game/matching game
- Drawings of: pictures
- Word-list and phrase-list in Paiute with key words and phrases
- Blank drawing paper for creating books
- Crayons, markers, etc.