

Academy names field house after first black graduate

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The Naval Academy held a groundbreaking ceremony Saturday for the Wesley Brown Field House, a planned 140,000 square-foot facility which will cost about \$45 million.

The field house is named after Lt. Cmdr. Wesley A. Brown, Class of '49, the Naval Academy's first African-American graduate.

"This world is changing very quickly," said Adm. Mike Mullen, chief of naval operations and guest speaker at the groundbreaking ceremony. "But when you think about change with respect to diversity in our Navy and in our nation, and you hearken back to the time when Wesley came to the Naval Academy, what a heroic step, what a courageous move, and what a long lasting and historic contribution he made ... That contribution will continue to impact the important issue of diversity in our Navy and in our nation and is something for which we will all be eternally grateful."

The new field house will sport facilities for physical education, varsity and intramural athletics, club sports and personal fitness. It will also offer a centralized medical facility within close proximity to outdoor athletic fields.

"Navy athletics is on the rise," said Vice Adm. Rodney P. Rempt, the academy's superintendent. "This groundbreaking to me marks another step on the path of excellence that we are embarked on."

Vice Adm. Rempt said with the revitalization of the academy's athletic facilities, midshipmen are demonstrating a renewed enthusiasm in athletics across the academy. The 30 varsity sports programs have nearly a 70 percent winning average this year and have an 11-6 win-loss record in competitions against Army.

"We are hopeful that this new building we are about to build will further the catalyst and keep that success going," said Vice Adm. Rempt. "Athletics are not just about physical conditioning, strength, and stamina. Athletics teach midshipmen how to win, and what it takes to win, and how to keep going when the chips are down."

"It teaches teamwork, leadership, determination, and all those characteristics that we are looking for in young officers. It teaches our midshipmen how to be combat leaders and how to persevere. It is fitting that this new field house be named after a man who epitomizes the spirit of perseverance."

Brown went through more than the usual conditioning criteria of a Plebe Summer. As the first black graduate, Brown was subject to some unusually harsh treatment.

"(Brown) is here today to help break ground on a building that is long in coming, one that will signify equal treatment of a path that he broke for thousands of future officers, and for our Navy and Marine Corps, and in fact for our nation," said Vice Adm. Rempt.

The groundbreaking culminates more than six years of planning and evaluating the needs of midshipmen in various academy sports programs. It was also an honor for Brown.

Brown said the groundbreaking was one of three special days in his life. The other two days were when he married his wife in 1941 and the day he graduated from the academy as an ensign in June 1949.

"It doesn't happen very often to have a building named for you while you are alive," said Brown. "And for that I certainly am thankful. I decided as a matter of perseverance that I would last until the building was completed. I am not going to spend a lot of time here, because I want to get the contractor started."

When completed, the field house will be a state of the art facility that will be dedicated to the physical development and training of future midshipmen. The Wesley A. Brown Field House will play a central role in physically developing the future combat leaders of the Navy and Marine Corps while honoring the very best ideals of service embodied by Brown.

"This building represents the continued dedication of the academy to promote diversity and also the promotion of the physical mission," said Midn. 1/C Yasmin Sauls, co-captain of the women's track team. "I am honored to be able to witness this momentous

part of history. Congratulations, Cmdr. Brown. I will always appreciate the opportunity you have given me to be a midshipman."

The construction contract was awarded to Hensel Phelps Construction Company of Chantilly, Va. The project will take about two years to complete.

"We are committed to the same end result as you are," said Robert E. Daniels, executive vice president of Hensel Phelps Construction Company. "We are committed to the Navy and specifically the reputation of Lt. Cmdr. Brown. We will deliver a successful project on time (and) within budget ... and when we are done we are going to stand here and shake hands and say it was a wonderful process in honor of a wonderful individual."

"I think it will promote a sense of pride and the attitude of 'you can do it,'" said Midn. 1/C Cayanne McFarlane, women's track team co-captain. "Brown has come a long ways and has proven himself a success. This should be encouragement for others to train hard and stay mentally strong regardless of your situation. Hard work pays off in the long run."