

St. John Arena Turns Into Workout Facility Amid Pandemic



With the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic came a variety of challenges for Ohio State past just the cancellations and the postponing of games across multiple sports, and one of those challenges came with workouts for student-athletes.

As athletes in various sports needed more distance to stay with the state and national health guidelines, the Ohio State Department of Athletics needed to get creative with how to spread out these players and allow them to continue to workout.

With that came the idea to turn St. John Arena into a temporary workout facility. Named the SJA Powerhouse, the facility opened on the week of Sept. 7 and features, according to the press release, “27 racks, six complete sets of dumbbells, eight power blocks, four combination cable pulldown-row machines and four glute-hamstring benches.”

“At the time, I was assessing all of the facilities and the weight room in French Field House had 676 student-athletes training out of a 3,816-square foot weight room,” Ohio State senior director for sport performance Heather Mason said in the release. “We knew Schumaker wouldn’t cure all of our space problems so I created a proposed layout for St. John Arena to facilitate training our larger teams with a marketable increase of trainable space and square feet per student-athlete to help accommodate all of our sports.”

Moving all the equipment and machines into St. John took 18 hours and needed all of the strength and conditioning coaches, as well as a licensed technician, to accomplish. It also needed Shelaine Warren and Kevin Gibson, who were building coordinators at St. John and are “the real MVPs,” according to Mason.

“It really was a great project and we all learned a lot about each other. All equipment is aligned by the inches to make sure we comply with the COVID guidelines,” Mason said. “To see that vision, you had to have a very open mind. They chose to take this concept to completion. When you have more than 1,000 athletes deserving of equal training space, you have to think differently and change your operational business plan.”

In the SJA Powerhouse, the racks are separated 10 feet apart, while the dumbbell racks are 15-17 feet apart. All strength coaches in the facility still have to wear gloves and masks, and there is an electrostatic disinfectant sprayer to clean the equipment after use. Student-athletes are also required to have their temperature and symptoms checked before working out.

“We are all so grateful to have the opportunity to be training at a time like this and love having this facility as our home,” Emma Maltais, a senior for the women’s ice hockey team, said in the release. “Having the resources to train and remain safe speaks volumes about the University and the efforts to not only better student-athletes but also to insure our health and safety. We are hoping to come together in this crazy time and we are thankful we have the facilities to do so.”

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