



John & Ann Rhoads Softball Complex

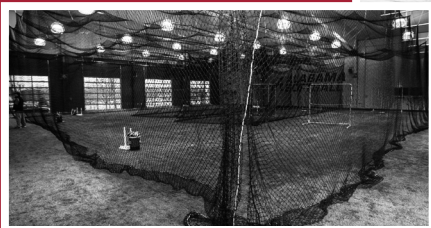
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DONOR SUPPORT HAS PLAYED A BIG PART IN HELPING ALABAMA BUILD SOME OF THE TOP FACILITIES IN THE NATION

Jerry Pate Golf Complex



Softball's Indoor Batting Facility



*Roberta Alison Baumgardner
Indoor Tennis Facility*



His program, which was frequent visitors to Oklahoma City for the Women's College Softball World Series, was already firmly entrenched as one of the country's finest. Yet, at the time, University of Alabama softball coach Patrick Murphy was still searching for his first national title at the Crimson Tide head coach.

"Our huge need at the time was an indoor hitting facility, which we had never had," said Murphy, thinking back to 2011. "If it was raining or too cold or even snowing, we didn't have anywhere to hit."

Murphy talked about his program's need with long-time booster Ann Rhoads, whose name is alongside her late husband, John, on the university's softball stadium. Not long after having the conversation, Rhoads pledged the money for the new facility.

"I can remember shaking her hand, giving her a hug and saying 'OK, you just got us one step closer to a national championship,'" Murphy said.

The facility, a sparkling addition to an already impressive facility, opened in the winter of 2011. The following spring, Murphy's national championship dream became a reality when the Crimson Tide knocked off Oklahoma, 5-4, in the final game of a three-game series to determine the nation's top team.

Coincidence? Not if you ask Murphy.

adjacent to the Alabama Tennis Center, in 2012. The men's and women's golf programs also have a top-notch facilities and have become among the nation's elite programs.

"We just can't do that without private funding from people who are interested in our golf programs," said Alabama women's golf coach Mic Potter. "It's hard to go to the athletic department and ask them for money. Fund raising is important. Fortunately we have people who are interested in what we do and seeing us do it better."

The university's golf facilities were nice issue when Potter took over the women's golf program in 2005. But, the program would have a tough time growing to where it is – nine consecutive NCAA Regional appearances and the national title in 2012 -- without even more growth in where the Alabama golfers work on their craft at the Jerry Pate Golf Center. It includes six indoor hitting bays, two indoor putting surfaces, a full practice range, putting greens, chipping area, six new target greens and much more.

"To land the type of recruits we need to have to compete for SEC and national championships, when they come visit, they have to see something impressive," Potter said.

"What we had years ago was really impressive

people think that's a practice facility," Mainz said. "We've hosted NCAAs the last four or five years and we've ended playing two of those NCAAs indoors. We've hosted the ITA Kick-off Weekend in January, it's a national event, for the last four years. That's a national event that springboards you into the national team indoors. If you look at the tennis calendar, there are four grand slams. Two of them, we've been playing indoors to play in NCAA championships and national team indoors. We play a lot of conference matches indoors."

It's fitting that the program-enhancing facility is named after Roberta Alison Baumgardner, a women's tennis pioneer, who played on the UA men's team for three seasons, beginning in 1963.

"She was always supportive of our program," Mainz said of Baumgardner, who died in 2009. "Her family was very gracious and supportive with their commitment getting the Baumgardner Indoor Tennis Facility."

Across a parking lot sits Rhoads Stadium, which seems a long way from the early days of UA softball, when the team played its home games at Northport's Sokol Park. The Crimson Tide now plays in the country's largest softball stadium, with a seating capacity of 3,940, and annually is at or near the top of attendance in the nation. Season tickets sales lead the

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- HEAD WOMEN'S GOLF COACH MIC POTTER

"A huge reason was that new facility," Murphy said. "I don't think we could have done it without that facility."

Wheel around the athletic facilities at The University of Alabama and it doesn't take long to realize that, as a whole, they are among the finest in the country. Obviously, the centerpiece is Bryant-Denny Stadium but, in reality, that's just a start of top-notch facilities at the center of top-notch, championship programs.

"Basically, it shows a commitment to excellence, a commitment to our programs, it shows that we're strivers," said UA women's tennis coach Jenny Mainz. "We're working hard to provide all of the resources that we can to give these student-athletes the best opportunities we can to be successful on the court (and field)."

The commitment doesn't just come from the university. It also comes from people like Ann Rhoads, a long-time UA supporter. Or the Baumgardner family, who were at the forefront of helping the university build the Robert Alison Baumgardner Indoor Tennis Facility, which is

but as everybody else improves their golf facilities then it's incumbent on us to stay ahead of the curve and continue to get better."

Mainz said the commitment to building the indoor facility helped her program take a large lead.

"We were on the national scene prior to that but that's when we really made a big jump," said Mainz.

Mainz said that was about the time that the commitment was a factor in landing top recruits Alexa Guarachi and Mary Anne Macfarlane, who became an All-American doubles duo and two of the most decorated players in the program's history. It certainly also played a role in coaxing Maya Jansen and Erin Routliffe to campus. Jansen and Routliffe are one of only three doubles teams to win back-to-back NCAA championships and are poised to challenge for a third consecutive title this spring.

However, the facility is much more than just a recruiting tool and building to get the Crimson Tide ready to play.

"We play a lot of matches indoors, a lot of

country every season. The nearly 8,000 square foot indoor hitting facility, which was built on to the team's clubhouse, includes three batting cages, a bullpen and plenty more.

Murphy loves to watch recruits, fans and even opposing teams when they walk into Rhoads Stadium for the first time.

"I compare it to the first time I was in New York City," Murphy said. "Your head's up in the clouds and looking at all the skyscrapers and you're saying 'Oh my gosh. This is New York City.' That's kind of the reaction we get. Opposing teams, when they come here for the first time, the cell phones come out, they take pictures. It's really neat. We get fans from all over the country that, almost set a vacation date, just to come watch us play. They've seen us on TV, they've heard of the Rhoads House, but they want to see it in person. That's one of the coolest feelings that I get when I meet someone from the Midwest or New England or anywhere, really, who has come just to watch a softball game at Alabama."

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