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'Noles get Ferrari of swimming facilities  
Team's new home lures recruits  
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Concrete steps and steel hand railings lead to the highest point of the new home for the Florida State University swimming and diving teams.

Up here, about 33 feet or 10 meters above everything at the Morcom Aquatic Center, tall trees limit the panoramic view from the highest diving platform at the center.

Here at the center's Pottsdamer Road address, near Lake Bradford Road in southwest Tallahassee, there is only the sky, the trees, the WFSU antennae and the short-game practice green at the Seminole Golf Course.

The hum of the pool machinery, soft chip shots offered up by the occasional golfer and quick shouts from a diving coach sitting on a folding chair are some of the sounds that come with the surroundings on any given day.

More than anything, this \$11-million facility, which the FSU teams will use for the first time during the 2008-09 season, punctuates the program's escalating prominence at the national scale.

FSU head swimming and diving coach Neil Harper says he could sense that from the day his swimmers and divers christened the swimming pool and diving well last month.

"When they dived in and swam, they knew they were in a different league," Harper said. "They just knew there was a difference.

"It confirms the athletic department's and university's commitment to providing our student-athletes with one of the best facilities in the country."

Other than perhaps the Georgia Tech pool, the pool used during the 1996 Summer Olympics in Atlanta, Harper considers the new FSU facility the best among Atlantic Coast Conference schools.

In comparison to what he calls the "Big 3" swimming programs of Auburn, Georgia and Florida, Harper says FSU is on par in terms of facilities.

Of the three, he adds, FSU boasts the best outdoor facility.

To be sure, this will make a tremendous difference in recruiting potential FSU swimmers and divers. Harper has already secured one recruit who said the facility made a huge difference in his decision to sign with FSU.

Actually, one of the reasons the program began exploring a facilities upgrade was related to comments made by 2004 FSU Hall of Fame inductee and swimmer Brendon Dedekind, a two-time Olympian from South Africa. When asked if he would have come to FSU had he been able to make a recruiting visit, Dedekind said he would have gone elsewhere because facilities were subpar compared to other schools.

"When you go to the bigger programs, the top 10 in the country, how things are dressed up and where you live matter," Harper said. "Kids are into facilities. Sometimes it can be a deal breaker."

In his nine years at FSU, Harper has plenty of stories about recruiting challenges posed by the facilities, particularly for diving.

On one occasion, the dispersed diving facilities compelled FSU diving coach Patrick Jeffrey to pass on recruiting a top-level diver.

"I didn't think it was fair," Jeffrey said. "I've had to pass on some great platform divers, some who were on track to become Olympians, because I didn't think I could provide for them or develop them as well as they could have been developed."

No longer will Jeffrey and his divers need to travel 65 miles north to Moultrie, Ga. twice a week to train on the 10-meter diving platform.

Current FSU team member and NCAA champion diver Terry Horner says the facility provides all the tools he'll need to develop his skills further. The diving well, a separate pool just for diving, has two springboards each at 1-meter and 3-meters, and platforms for 1-meter, 3-meter, 5-meter, 7.5-meter, and 10-meter dives. In addition, the diving well has a system that allows the coach to press a device which releases a large bubble just before the diver breaks the surface, thereby cushioning the diver's impact and reducing chances of injury.

"It's going to make it a lot easier to train," Horner says. "It's going to really help with recruiting. I've already talked with some potential recruits who are excited about the pool and about seeing it."

The swimming pool can be configured so laps can be lengths of 50 meters, 25 meters or 25 yards. Rather than the 12 lanes available to them at the Leach Center, FSU swimmers will have 30 lanes at the collegiate distance (25 yards).

This pool is one of the pools used during the 2005 World Championships in Montreal and constructed by Italian manufacturer Myrtha Pools. After the championships, FSU bid and purchased one of the pools for the new aquatic center. The center has offices for the swimming and diving coaches, locker rooms and office space for an aquatics director and lifeguards.

The facility honors Russ and Genie Morcom, who provided the leadership gift necessary to build the facility which will serve both athletic and academic uses. Russ Morcom is a retired Indiatlantic businessman who is past Chairman of the Seminole Boosters, serves on the University Foundation Board and the board of directors for FSU athletics.

"It's going to be a facility people are going to enjoy coming to," Harper said. "I've already been hearing from people that they are noticing it. It's outdoors and healthy. You get to breathe fresh air. It's quiet out here. The pool's bigger; it's deeper. It's like being at a world-class facility."

