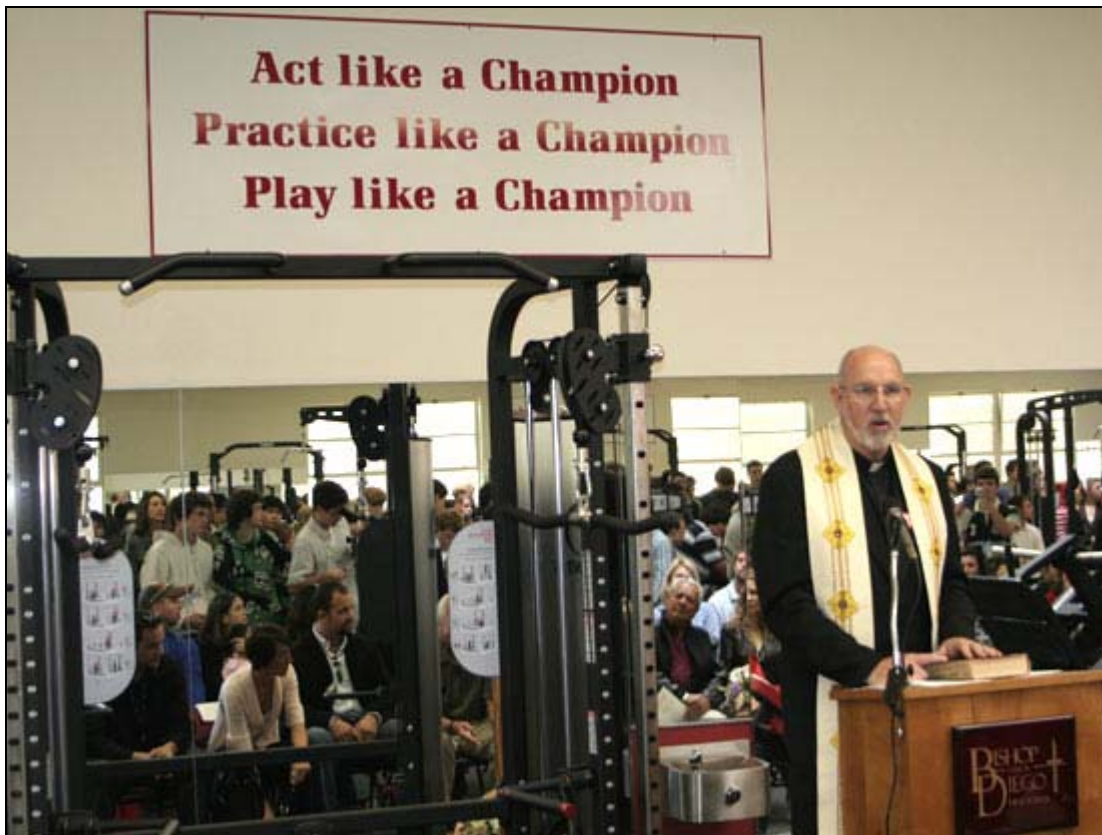


Donors Lift Bishop Diego's Weight Room to New Heights

By ROB KUZNIA, NOOZHAWK STAFF WRITER

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In 1991, Bishop Garcia Diego High School's weight room consisted of a few dumbbells and some dated machinery inside a cramped classroom.

How things have changed.

Now, thanks to generous donors, Santa Barbara's only private Catholic high school owns what could be the finest high school weight facility in town.

On Wednesday, Bishop held a re-dedication ceremony to celebrate its upgraded weight

room, which was built in 1992 and named after two students who died in a car accident.

An anonymous benefactor donated \$50,000 of the \$112,000 project, and other local donors contributed tens of thousands of dollars. The upgrade added state-of-the-art equipment that rendered the facility more accessible to boys and girls of all 16 sports at the school, as opposed to primarily varsity football players.

“Not one cent of tuition money paid for this project,” said Bishop’s principal, Fr. Tom Elewaut, although he added that the school still needs to find \$25,000 by year’s end to finish paying for the renovation. “It’s classy, it’s inviting, it has state-of-the-art equipment. We’re just so very grateful.”



Student Patrick Torrellas opens the re-dedication ceremony with a prayer.

The weight room’s namesake students are Roberto Najera and Dane Erik Schmidt. In 1991, during the summer before their senior year, the football players set off on a road trip to the East Coast to check out a college. They died in a traffic accident while on the trip.

Despite the inadequacies of the weight room back then, Najera and Schmidt were accomplished body builders: They could each bench-press 300 pounds, and had taken first and second place in the school’s lift-a-thon.

That summer, Tim Tremblay, then a coach at the school, came up with an idea to raise money for a weight room in their honor. He approached Najera’s father, Roberto Sr., president of [Anacapa Concrete](#). Najera was able to procure loads of donated materials, and a weight room was finished within nine months.



Gary Schmidt, father of Dane Schmidt, in whose honor the weight room is named.

“We had a huge weight room for this little dinky school,” said Tremblay, one of the donors for the upgrade.

That same year, the little Cardinals football team that had been struggling for wins advanced to the finals in the CIF playoffs, and finished second.

Wednesday’s ceremony was emotional for the fathers of the two former football players.

At times during the ceremony, both Najera and Gary Schmidt had to dab their eyes.



Eli Orosco tries out the new equipment.

“When they were looking at schools, the first thing they looked at was the weight room,” Najera said while eating a plate of food in the gym during the post-ceremony luncheon. “Last December he would have been 34 years old. My wife and I celebrated our 35th wedding anniversary, and he was in our minds all the time. ... We are a happy family, a

very united family. But something is missing.

“Roberto and Dane’s spirit is still here. ... Wherever they are, they are probably happy to see these kids.”

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