

## GUEST COLUMN

# Mitch Henck: Friday Night Lights Controversy

*November 18, 2018*

What could possibly be more controversial than Edgewood High School playing football games on its own field?

Not much.

Neighbors have expressed heated opposition in recent weeks. Edgewood, on Madison's Near West Side, is seeking to amend its 2014 master plan with area neighborhood associations to add as many as 1,200 seats to the Goodman Athletic Complex. Edgewood also wants to install lighting that high school president Mike Elliot says would only cover the property and not blur or spill into surrounding neighborhoods.

Edgewood wants a custom-made sound system Elliot says would only be amplified into the seats and not onto Monroe Street. The renovation would cost about \$1 million. He says traffic on Monroe Street at night would be less busy than peak times, and 560 parking stalls are on campus. So, no problem.

But wait, here come the neighbors.

The Dungeon/Monroe Neighborhood Association put out a statement of opposition, saying: "Recent upgrades to the field's surface have already led to levels of noise and frequency of usage that are disruptive to local residents. Larger crowds, lighting and amplified sound would all increase that level of disruption."

Egads!

Rachel Fields, the association's vice president, goes further. She says Edgewood was only going to have physical education classes and practices under the master plan. The group wouldn't have supported the plan if it knew games would be allowed.

But Elliot insists Edgewood hasn't broken any promises.

"The 2014 master plan allows for an amendment process," he says, "and we are working within that process."

For decades Edgewood has had to play home games at other high schools in Madison or at Breese Stevens Field. Elliot says Edgewood gets the last pick of those fields and often is forced to play on weeknights.

“It’s no fun hosting parties at somebody else’s house,” says Edgewood athletic director Chris Zwettler. “It’s our turf. Students go to school here 180 days a year. It’s our home. There is pride in walking from your locker room to a field that says ‘Edgewood.’”

Edgewood wants to host football, track, lacrosse and soccer at the Goodman Complex. The school is hoping Madison approves the project in January. It would be ready for football next fall.

But some neighbors are passionately opposed. Margaret Marriott wrote in a letter to the editor that Edgewood is acting more like “Germans marching through Belgium in World War I” than good neighbors.

You are welcome to roll your eyes with me. The neighbors of Madison Memorial, Middleton, Monona Grove and La Follette high schools don’t seem to mind much when athletes compete near them. Perhaps Monroe Street is home to more Friday night book clubs or scrabble parties. Edgewood alum and *Madison Magazine* columnist John Roach points out that Edgewood schools already provide more green space than other schools. And Roach asks where was the neighborhood outrage when Camp Randall added thousands of seats and luxury boxes?

The Vilas Neighborhood Association has yet to post a final position on the proposal. I agree with Edgewood that sports are critical to forming discipline and confidence in young people. Let’s hope Madison officials will put down their cappuccino, say “no” to the neighbors and let the kids play.

*Mitch Henck is a Madison, Wisconsin based commentator, broadcaster and standup comic. Watch Mitch’s video, "Two Minutes with Mitch," weekdays on YouTube. Listen to his podcasts on [MadisonTalks.com](http://MadisonTalks.com), and Wednesdays at 6 p.m. on Facebook Live.*

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