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Mules Baseball officially dedicates new playing surface and honors Jim Crane

(WARRENSBURG, Mo.) – UCM Athletics and Mules Baseball officially dedicated the new synthetic playing surface at Crane Stadium/Tompkins Field before the home opener against Pittsburg State on Friday afternoon.

The new playing surface was made possible by a \$1 million gift from Jim Crane, UCM alumnus and UCM and MIAA Athletic Hall of Fame member. The playing surface is AstroTurf 3D3, which is a mixture of three fibers with a base mixture of sand and rubber and a custom infill to play as the Mules want.

The new playing surface will make the field playable when it otherwise might not be due to inclement weather. It will also reduce the amount of maintenance needed to keep the field playable and will reduce the amount of time that student-athletes have to work on the field.

Crane, along with UCM President Dr. Chuck Ambrose, and UCM Athletic Director Jerry Hughes were on hand for the pregame ceremony to dedicate the field, which bears the name of Crane's coach while at UCM, Robert N. Tompkins.

"Jim Crane is the true definition of what it means to be a Mule for life, where student-athletes form lifelong relationships with coaches," said Ambrose. "Jim's appreciation of that is being recognized here today in the ongoing improvements to Crane Stadium/Tompkins Field. As a member of the NCAA Division II 40th Anniversary Tribute Team, Jim is providing the same opportunities that were afforded to him to the next generation of Mules Baseball players. It is only fitting that Jim Crane's No. 24 is the first number to be retired in Mules Baseball history."

In addition to the field dedication, Crane was honored with his UCM No. 24 being retired. Crane was a standout pitcher for the Mules from 1973-76. He was a two-time All-American and All-MIAA selection and still holds the UCM records for complete games (23),

career shutouts (7) and is third in career strikeouts (215). He still holds the Mules' single-game and NCAA-II World Series record with 18 strikeouts, a feat he accomplished in 2-0 win over Ohio Northern in the 1974 College Division World Series opener. He becomes the first Mules' baseball player to have his number retired.

"Once again, Jim Crane has stepped forward to make the Mules' baseball facilities some of the finest in Division II," said Hughes. "Because of the quality of player he was and because of his unparalleled generosity to UCM Baseball, it's only fitting that we retire his No. 24."

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