WITH THE LATE JULY MOVE INTO THE NEW JEFFREY AND KIMBERLY Yordon Center in the north end zone of Huskie Stadium, Northern Illinois Athletics has truly entered a new era.

Student-athletes don't crowd into a tiny computer lab using reconditioned computers, or sprawl in the hallways of the Convocation Center to attend study table. The athletic trainer's taping tables aren't located in the hallways next to concession stands. NIU's football video department has moved out of the closet they used to call an office, and the entire team can meet as a group without going across campus. Assistant coach Greg Bower and his tight ends no longer meet in what used to be the racquetball courts in Huskie Stadium. And, for the first time in his 11 years as head coach of Northern Illinois Huskie football, Joe Novak can look out of his office window.

With their leadership gift of $2.5 million toward the construction of NIU's long-anticipated academic and athletic performance center, former Huskie football player Jeffrey Yordon, '70, and his wife, Kimberly, became the largest donors ever to NIU athletics. The Yordons are also the first to name a privately funded athletic facility at NIU.

From the "smart" classrooms in the Frances and George Wilkins Academic Support Center to the state-of-the-art rehabilitation pools in the athletic training center to the expandable storage area in the equipment room, everything about the Yordon Center screams "first class."

It is a building Huskie student-athletes deserve, says NIU Associate Vice President and Director of Athletics Jim Phillips.

"The number one priority since my arrival has been to build an infrastructure that allows us to support the dreams and aspirations of our student-athletes," Phillips said. "This facility helps us accomplish that goal, and is a huge step forward in providing our students with a world-class experience."

To Novak, the dream of a facility like the Yordon Center has been just that—a dream—for most of his tenure at NIU. The man who has led the Huskies to seven straight winning seasons, still can't quite believe the building is a reality.

"I still can't picture myself, and our team, in the building," Novak said as he and his staff officially moved in and began preparations for training camp. "At first, we just wanted to get new offices, but this is beyond our dreams and expectations. Our kids will have a chance to develop academically, socially and athletically, because it's a place they're going to want to be. It will be a tremendous boost to our program."

The first floor of the Yordon Center is devoted to the student-athlete support units. The Frances and George Wilkins Academic Support Center will serve all 485 NIU student-athletes in 17 sports programs. The large classroom area is equipped with "smart" consoles that allow instructors to use audiovisual aids and can be split into two rooms. Multiple tutoring rooms and small group areas are available, while the spacious computer lab features all new equipment and an inviting atmosphere in which to work.

Just down the hall is the 15,000-square-foot Strength and Conditioning Center where multiple teams can now work out at the same time. New weight equipment, branded with the Huskie logo, awaits the
student-athletes who also have use of a four-lane, 40-yard sprint track.

The Huskies' athletic training room is truly "state-of-the-art" and includes an X-ray room, doctor's office and two rehabilitation pools with video monitors. The central area is more than twice as large as the Huskie Stadium athletic training room and will allow NIU's athletic trainers to serve more student-athletes more efficiently than ever before.

"As a student-athlete, when you walk into the Yordon Center—to the academic center, the training room, the weight room, the locker room—you are able to see and to know that this university and this athletic department is committed to the welfare of the student-athlete," Novak said.

For the first time, the Huskie football team will have a home locker room large enough for the entire team. The large area in the center of the room provides a perfect gathering place where the strains of the Huskie Fight Song will be heard after every NIU victory. Jumbo-sized lockers in black, red and silver are adorned with the names of the current player using the area, as well as a former player and/or donor.

Donors are recognized throughout the building and especially on the second floor, where the position and offensive and defensive coaches' meeting rooms, coaches' offices and the 150-seat tiered meeting room are all named, although additional naming opportunities remain for lockers and meeting rooms.

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—Joe Novak, Head Football Coach

"The response we received from the Yordon, Wilkins, and Roberts families, and all of our incredibly generous donors, has been wonderful," Phillips said. "The completion of this facility and its quality is a credit to the people on campus, from President Peters to Executive Vice President Eddie Williams, [university project manager] Jeff Dauer and the NIU Foundation. So many people have worked extremely hard and contributed a great deal to make this dream a reality; words cannot express our sincere gratitude."

Every room on the second floor is equipped with comfortable seating and new furniture and best of all, large windows along both sides of the building that allow light to flow into the central areas as well as into every coach's office.

"For me and our coaches, just to have a window is amazing," Novak raved. "Everyone feels better. Everyone wants to be in that facility. Our video equipment is updated, our meeting rooms are comfortable; computers and projectors in those rooms are wired into the video server. As coaches, we have the tools to get the job done. It's a dream."

For Phillips, true satisfaction comes from seeing hundreds of Huskie student-athletes begin to use the facility daily. "We have been counting down the days to moving into the Yordon Center," Phillips said. "When I saw the completed project, my jaw dropped open. To be certain, I cannot wait to see the reactions of our student-athletes when they return to campus this fall and that building truly becomes their home."