In early November the University announced that it had exceeded its original fundraising goal for the Home Field Advantage (HFA) project, with $6.8 million raised to date. This amount includes a $700,000 challenge grant from The Kresge Foundation.

“Reaching our HFA goals is a real tribute to our donors, who came from all segments of the University community: regents, alumni, faculty, staff, students, and friends. What they all have in common is that they love the University and appreciate the role athletics plays in young people’s lives,” said University President Walter Harrison in making the announcement.

“The Kresge Foundation Challenge spurred us all to give to this campaign and build our capacity for future fundraising efforts,” continued Harrison. “Generations of University students—and youth from throughout the Hartford community—will benefit.”

Of the more than 800 donors who have given to the HFA project, 47 percent have been alumni. Thirty-six donors gave gifts and pledges of $25,000 or more, led by Tom and Suzy Reich of West Hartford, who pledged more than $2 million.

The University broke ground on the HFA project in April 2005, and construction is essentially complete on Phase I, which included renovations to the Al-Marzook Field (soccer/lacrosse) and construction of new baseball and softball diamonds. The final stage of Phase I will be adding a press box at Al-Marzook and installing a press box and bleachers at the baseball and softball fields. Phase II of the project, which will include a running track surrounding an all-purpose field, is in the planning stages.

“The completion of the HFA project opens a new chapter in the history of our institution and its athletics and wellness programs,” said Director of Athletics Pat Meiser. “Not only will the fields provide quality opportunities for our student-athletes, but they will allow us to engage all students, faculty and staff, alumni, and the Greater Hartford community in ways we’ve never been able to do before.”
Women’s Soccer Nets America East Championship

Following a slow start to the season (2-8-0), the Hartford women’s soccer team roared to a dream finish, remaining undefeated in its last 10 games (8-0-2). The team captured the America East Championship and earned a berth in the 2006 NCAA Women’s College Cup.

Although the Hawks, who finished 10-8-2 overall, were eliminated by Rutgers in the first round of the NCAA tournament, the team made extraordinary strides this season. Head Coach John Natale, who guided the team to its first winning season under his three-year leadership, is pleased with the significant and rapid progress they made.

“When we first came in, we had to rebuild the program,” Natale says. “It was a very emotional year. We went from being at a very low point at the beginning of the season to being at an extreme high. We accomplished in one year what it takes a lot of teams three or four years to do.”

The Hawks captured the 2006 America East Championship on Nov. 4 by beating the University of Maine 1-0 in a home game at Al-Marzook Field. Junior Meagan Riemer, America East Striker of the Year, clinched the title with her team-leading eighth goal of the season.

The America East Championship was the first for the Hawks since 2002. It was the 13th time the team made an overall NCAA appearance, placing Hartford in a tie for 12th place on the list of most appearances by a single school.

A young squad, the Hawks will only lose one player this year to graduation. Winning the championship and making the NCAA appearance gave the team a jolt of confidence that Natale predicts will result in even more success next year.

“The players believe in themselves, in the program, and what we are trying to teach them,” Natale says. “They are willing to push themselves to reach the next level.”

Former Hawk LAX Stars Drafted by NLL

Hawks lacrosse coach Peter Lawrence is not surprised that three of his former players—Josh Wasson ’06, Matt Holman ’06, and Tim Chisholm ’06—were selected in the 2006 National Lacrosse League Entry Draft in September.

Sounding like a proud father, Lawrence says he believes Wasson, Holman, and Chisholm deserved to be selected and will have successful careers as professional lacrosse players. He adds that the young men possess the dedication and talent required to excel in the NLL.

“All three are great kids, very good lacrosse players, and super-hard workers,” Lawrence says. “They all definitely have the skills.”

The NLL draft took place at Madison Square Garden’s Theater Lobby on Sept. 13. Wasson, Holman, and Chisholm were each the first pick of their respective teams in a draft that featured 77 players. Wasson was drafted in the first round, and 12th overall, by the Chicago Shamrocks. The Portland LumberJax selected Holman in the second round, and Chisholm was drafted by the Toronto Rock.

“I saw them the day after they were drafted, so I was able to congratulate them in person,” Lawrence says.

The coach describes his former players as important team leaders throughout their Hartford careers. Wasson and Holman were team co-captains in 2005 and 2006. Both were four-year letter winners with reputations for their scoring prowess, and Holman also earned several All-America East Conference academic honors. Chisholm, also a four-year letterman, was known for his defensive expertise.

The National Lacrosse League is North America’s professional indoor lacrosse league, featuring 13 teams playing in major markets in the United States and Canada.