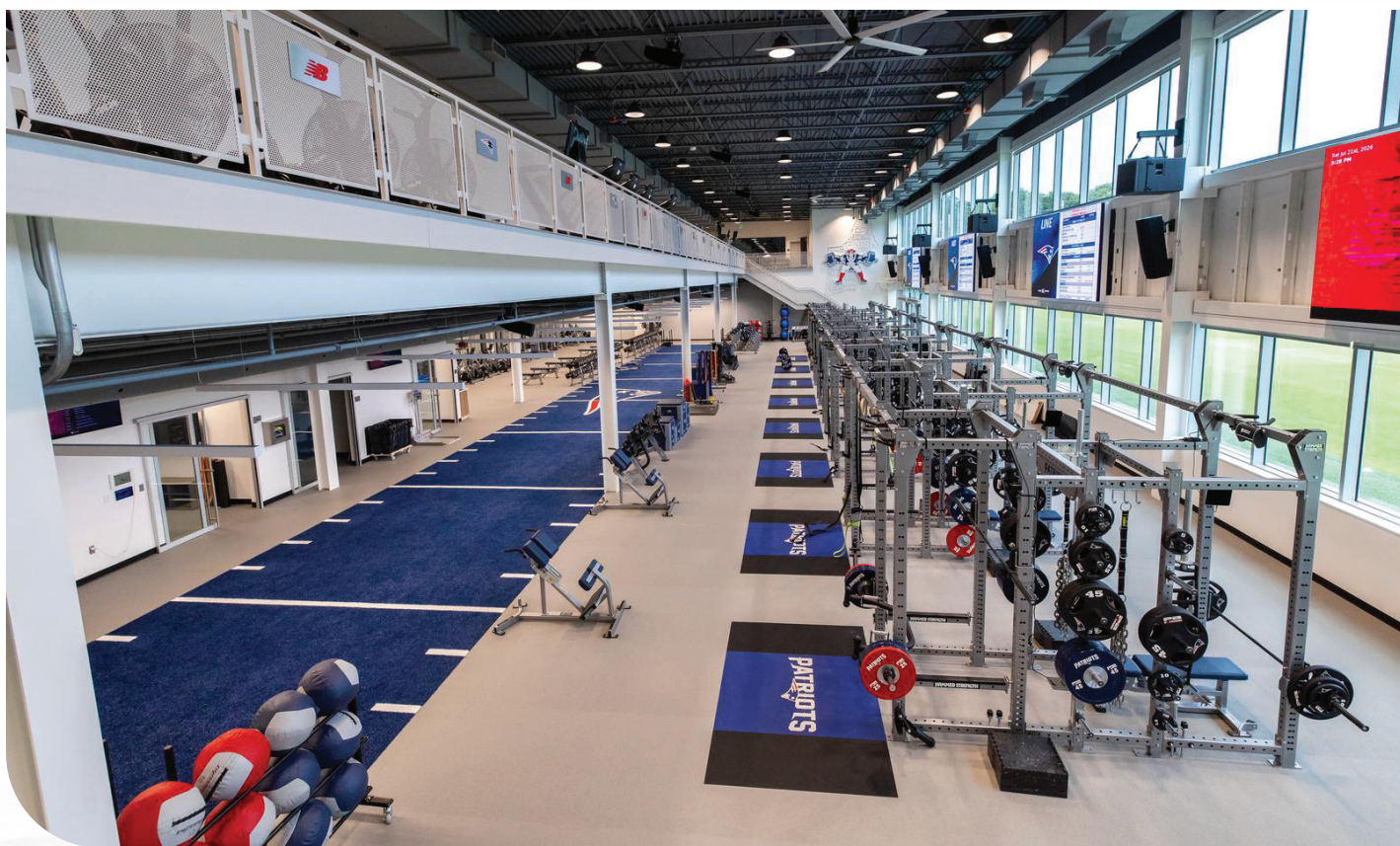


'26

New Balance Athletics Center **SYMBOLIZES BIG AND BRIGHT FUTURE OF NEW ENGLAND PATRIOTS FOOTBALL**

THE NEW ENGLAND PATRIOTS UNVEILED ITS STATE-OF-THE-ART TRAINING FACILITY,
THE NEW BALANCE ATHLETICS CENTER, ON AUG. 12, 2026.

BY ALEXANDRA FRANCISCO



John "Stretch" Streicher remembers one of his first site visits to the New Balance Athletics Center.

The Kraft Group was well into construction on a training facility for the New England Patriots when he was hired by the team in January 2025, and one of Streicher's first major projects as vice president of football operations and strategy was to ensure the new building fit the needs of head coach Mike Vrabel's football program.

Streicher, Vrabel, and Patriots executive vice president of player personnel Eliot Wolf suited up in hard hats and neon vests, navigated the freshly-poured concrete foundation behind Gillette Stadium, and climbed up some scaffold stairs to take in the view of the practice fields from what would become the coaches' offices.





"It was pretty much just a bunch of beams and some cement, and it was cool to look out and see the view on the second level and look out to the practice field and just envision the space at the time," Streicher said.

"We were so excited for that. Now fast forward to us moving in, thanks to all the work so many people put in, from Jonathan's initial vision and consistent attention to every detail, to the Kraft construction team, led by Dan [Krantz], Woody [Benisek-Beal] and Gail [Titus], to the Populous design team with Evan [Schlenk] and Julie [Reker], to the Suffolk construction crew, led by Allen [Sit], and how rewarding it is to be in a building that is state-of-the-art. It's exciting, and it has a lot of energy. We're all really excited to be here."

The Patriots football operation was able to move into the New Balance Athletics Center ahead of the 2026 NFL Draft, with an official ribbon-cutting on Aug. 12, 2026 – about 20 months after groundbreaking on the 160,000-square-foot facility was announced.

"Since the beginning of Gillette Stadium, since we first opened, there's been a commitment to keeping it state of the art," said Kraft Sports + Entertainment chief operations officer Jim Nolan, who joined the organization in 1996 and had a small part in the development of Gillette Stadium.

"Ownership always has a commitment to being the best. We want to have the best teams on the field, and we want to have the best facilities. This project really started when ownership said we need something new for our players and coaches. We had run out of space. We were no longer state of the art, and it was like, how do we get there?"

Not long after construction wrapped up on the redesign of Gillette Stadium's north end, the Kraft Group tapped into the same team to explore their options.

Populous, a global architectural firm and long-time Kraft Group partner that specializes in sports facilities, would be tasked with designing a cutting-edge training complex based on crucial input from Patriots ownership and every facet of the football operation.

Suffolk Construction, another trusted partner of the Kraft Group since the development of Patriot Place in 2008, would then build it.

"The conversations for this project began, interestingly, at a board meeting for Mass General Brigham," said Suffolk Construction CEO John Fish, who co-chairs the healthcare system's board of trustees with owner and president of the Kraft

Group, Jonathan Kraft.

"Jonathan Kraft sat next to me, pulled out a napkin, and started showing me what he was thinking about with respect to the next development project for the Kraft team, and talking about how important it was for him and his family to invest in the future of the Patriots."

The parties first looked to renovate and expand upon the football operation's existing area within Gillette Stadium.

That footprint was already a maze of different spaces added on over the years as needs evolved. Updating it further, without disturbing the team's operations, would entail many phases of construction and up to four years.

Even then, when the project was all said and done, it still wouldn't hit everything on their wish list. The answer had to be a brand-new, stand-alone training facility for the exclusive use of the football team.

"Ultimately, a new building allowed you to do everything you wanted while not interrupting the football team," Nolan said.

"The football team got to continue to do their thing through the '25 season without any interference at all. And then, when we were done with the project, they moved over in one fell swoop. What I thought was great about it was when the players came back in April, they just came back and moved into a new building. So, they leave at the end of the season and come back to a new facility, a huge upgrade, and they're really excited. For us, it really made the transition seamless."

Blueprints were drawn up for a three-level structure in the southeast shadows of Gillette Stadium with direct access to the practice fields.

Locked into that footprint, collaboration and consultation from every aspect of the Patriots football operation would decide the rest on a fast-track construction timeline – Populous' design plans being finalized as Suffolk prepped the site and laid the foundation.

The Patriots drew inspiration from other NFL teams, college programs, and the extensive list of finished projects from Populous' own archives.

Some of the most impactful consultants were Patriots players themselves.

"We talked to the players and asked them about their day-to-day experience," said Kraft Sports + Entertainment senior director of stadium project integration Gail Titus.



"Where is the first place you go? What is your flow through the day? Where do you start your day here, where do you end it, and where do you go in between? We wanted to try and make sure we laid out the building in a functional way that works for them to do what they need to do."

What the group referred to as "the player journey" became the entire basis for the building's layout.

The information they gathered was that a player's day started and ended with food and hydration. The athletes wanted an easy path of travel from there, to the locker room, to the training area, to the weight room, to the equipment room, to the practice field.

This intel gave them a jumping off point.

After players park their car in the covered garage on the ground level of the building – protected from New England's unpredictable weather – the nutrition center should be the first thing they see after walking up the main-lobby staircase.

Patriots head sports dietitian Ted Harper's team gathered extensive research and had tremendous input into the design of the kitchen and dining room layout.

Immediately to the left, massive refrigerators display water, refreshments, and grab-and-go offerings. There is a coffee and shake station to the right, as that's the first thing most players and staff gravitate to when they arrive.

The nutrition center has a window to place made-to-order meals, rows of buffet chaffers with hot and cold food, a salad bar, sliced fruit, and even ice cream.

"The meal room is definitely a big highlight," Streicher said.

"We wanted to not only have hot and cold lines but really focus on action stations. The players coming from big college programs are used to customized orders and being able to order directly from the chef, so we wanted an area for guys to view what they ordered and see it being cooked. We added more chefs, we opened it up and added a lot more action stations for both cold and hot items every day and for every meal. Just that interaction with your food we felt was critical."

Leaving the dining room, the flow is dictated by the natural paths of travel a player makes throughout his day. Through the design plan, architects aimed to maximize the player experience by emphasizing convenience, efficiency, and community.

Architects then filled in the rest as logically as possible.

"If you have the right player experience downstairs that connects to the right player experience upstairs, that's the

number one priority of this building," Nolan said.

"From there, we need to have everything else. We need to have scouting, we need to have football ops, we need to have coaching, media, video, equipment – all the different departments. But if you have the core right, which is driven toward maximizing the experience for the players, then everything else can fit around it. From a design perspective, that's exactly what happened."

Even then, plans for the layout evolved or changed entirely.

As the Patriots organization underwent a coaching overhaul immediately after the end of the 2024 season, so did the design renderings.

With Suffolk crews close to framing walls, Vrabel and Streicher took a close look at the plans and asked to switch the location of the scouting department offices on the top floor with the coaching department offices below. The change was drastic because that meant the high-tech draft room – and all the electrical and HVAC it takes to power it – had to be moved down a level as well.

Populous' architects and engineers redesigned the layout in days as Suffolk stayed on standby.

"I want to give a bunch of credit to John Striecher," said Evan Schlenk, Populous' project architect on the New Balance Athletics Center.

"He was instrumental in this. He acted as the mouthpiece between football and us, the design team. He had a lot of opinions to pass along to us, and especially in the draft room. It's an important space. It gets heavy use for a very small period of time and it's absolutely critical that everything is working well there on those days."

Communication and weekly meetings were crucial in keeping everyone on track.

With the FIFA World Cup hosting games at Gillette Season, it was imperative that the football department moved into the new building in advance, as FIFA security requirements were not compatible with the NFL's offseason schedule.

"It was important to us as we really got going that we were able to get the Patriots into the building before the World Cup happened at the stadium," said Titus.

Ultimately, most of the construction wrapped up earlier than that. The Patriots were able to move into their new space for the 2026 NFL Draft.

"We had a contingency plan on using the old draft room," Streicher said.



"We left the magnets up. We were certainly not thinking that we'd be in this building in this beautiful draft room for the draft. That definitely exceeded my expectations on how easily it flowed."

This draft room was one of the bigger risks Populous took in presenting options to ownership. The Patriots were willing to take it, Schlenk says, praising the Krafts as visionaries with fantastic ideas.

It paid off quickly. Thanks to state-of-the-art, high-resolution LED video screens that span the entire length of the special conference room, the old magnets weren't necessary.

"The draft room is probably the most ambitious space," Schlenk said.

"That's a lot of high technology. It's cool, it's flashy, it looked great on ESPN on draft night, right? It's a lot different than their previous space. Having an all-digital draft room was a change and it's something the scouting staff and coaching staff was really excited about."

The technology set the tone for what work would be like for the team going forward. Similar, wall-sized LED screens can also be found in the team auditorium and offensive meeting room.

"This has been a great place, before the players got here, to work through the evaluation process and the draft and the draft room, so it started there," Vrabel said of the transition.

"Then it was meeting with the coaches, and then finally being able to get the players into that mix and realize how great of a teaching environment it is."

Upstairs on the coaching level, offices surround the perimeter with meeting space and virtual classrooms in the middle.

Each position group has its own meeting room that opens to a virtual reality room. The turf classroom has yard lines, big screens, and is the width of an NFL field when it isn't sectioned off between the offense and defense.

"The ability to learn in our new space is going to be great," Streicher said.

"To be teaching in the meeting room and then go right outside it to a big turf area and be able to walk through it – everyone learns differently. We aren't just going to be in meetings for hours every day. We are going to be up, we're going to be moving, we're going to be collaborating with other position groups, and I think that's going to be great. We'll be able to have the big screens that show them a defense or an offense in front of them and be able to react mentally to those changing pictures. That's a new way of learning that we're definitely going to focus on."

Along with these major additions, everything the Patriots already had has been elevated.

Adjacent to the nutrition center is a player lounge with an enlarged, open-space locker room. As players were in and out of Foxborough throughout the offseason, Streicher enjoyed seeing how it positively impacted the team's dynamic.

"I think that's really cool in terms of their connections," Streicher said of the locker room.

"Drake [Maye] and Gonzo [Christian Gonzalez] wanted to



be right across from each other and I think that was for banter after practice. It was cool to place guys in certain spots and see how they live in it day-to-day."

That day-to-day was even considered in building the lockers themselves. There are now 92 of them – enough to accommodate the entire 90-man roster the team maintains throughout the offseason until the final roster reduction. The Patriots no longer need to bring in portable lockers or have players share a locker during the offseason.

Preston Rogers, the Patriots head equipment manager, joined a half-dozen others from the Kraft Group, Populous, and Suffolk to fly to Texas and work with Longhorn Locker Company to customize them. Rogers spoke to players and equipment managers in his network from across professional sports to tailor the lockers to the Patriots needs.

The lockers feature plush seating, cell phone charging ports, plenty of storage, and even drying racks for their helmets, pads, cleats, and gloves.

"You might pull something from the NHL or you might pull something from the NBA locker to make it work for your needs in your current space," Rogers said of the design process.

"You want to have the design built up for the players to use every day whether it's a phone charger with two ports – whatever. Whatever they may need we tried to put it in their locker."

The lounge and locker room directly connect to an expansive weight room. Through floor-to-ceiling windows, sunshine from the practice field illuminates rows of weight racks and Patriots-branded mats and equipment.

A cardio mezzanine is lofted on the second floor, looking out to the grass practice fields or down on the weight room below.

"It's foundational, right?" Schlenk said of the new weight room – a focal point of the new building.

"To the football team, strength and conditioning is so important, and I think early on it was decided that it would be an important showpiece part of this building."

While the weight room is the heart of the building, one of Streicher's favorite features is right beside it.

"The feature to me that I think is really important is definitely the hydro area for the players," Streicher said.

"The hot tub, cold tub, and underwater treadmill, and then the huge custom rehab pool – it's used a lot by the players, and they seem to really love it. That space is more than double the size of



what it was, and with windows that look out onto the practice field. That space feels like a spa to me.”

The space planning came together like a puzzle, but the end result is a fully integrated performance center for football operations, training, strength, conditioning, recovery, and communication.

It’s evident from the lobby.

An enlarged staircase serves as a central circulation for the entire building. It was designed wide with the hope and expectation of organic conversation between anyone going up or down it. Near the player engagement area at the top landing is a little sitting area to host casual conversation.

The ease of the building’s flow is further enhanced by corridors that were built big enough to still feel large to an NFL player.

Jonathan Kraft made sure of this, as noted by Streicher, who says the Kraft Group owner and president often walked through the structure with a critical eye, hoping to find potential pain points that could be fixed before the project was completed.

“As the facility was being constructed, Jonathan pointed out that the hallway leading from the position meeting rooms to the team meeting room was too narrow and would cause traffic build up,” Streicher said.

“The next day, walls were moved and that area was redesigned. He was correct – that space is very open now and flows perfectly.”

Every detail was intentional, and in many cases, agonized over.

“This building is the ecosystem for Patriots Football,” said Schlenk.

“It’s everything that a player, coach, or staff member might need day-to-day to perform at their best. It’s a dining room. It’s a restaurant. It’s an office building. It’s a conference center. It’s a gym. It’s a pool. It’s a really complex, living building.”

It was also built with room to grow into.

There are more workspace accommodations than currently necessary, and flex spaces throughout the building, unused at the moment, but bound to find a purpose as the Patriots organization, NFL, and technology continue to evolve.

The New Balance Athletics Center needs to work for the team now, but also in 50 years.

“A goal was to create a building that has flexible space moving forward,” said Titus.

“We can build something for right now, but we don’t know what things will look like in five years. We don’t know what the landscape for training or performance or game preparation is going to look like. Creating a space that had flexibility was really important to us. That it had an opportunity for future growth and the ability to give the team more later on down the road and flex as the program changes.”

From his career in New England as a player, and now a coach, Vrabel has seen the impact of that change over the years. That’s

why the new space was intended to be unrecognizable to what the Patriots had before.

“I wouldn’t even compare it,” Vrabel said. “There’s nothing to compare. That would be like comparing the old stadium to (Gillette). That’s how things evolve and organizations continue to grow.”

Certainly, everything is much bigger at the New Balance Athletics Center. It’s also much brighter – the first thing most everyone has noticed.

The most glaring difference from the Patriots former space is the sunlight that beams into almost every space in the new building. Architects designed it to maximize the sun and align with daily ritual.

“What I’m hoping players and staff notice first is the amount of natural light here,” Schlenk said.

“The existing football operation spaces in the stadium were kind of in the bowels, right? There were not a lot of windows, not a lot of natural light or ventilation and stepping into this new space, all of that has improved. Almost every office has a window. If you’re looking at the dining room facing east, that’s getting great natural light in the morning for breakfast. Likewise on the west side of the building. The weight room, cardio mezzanine, hydrotherapy pools – those are getting natural light in the afternoon. It’s just a completely different environment to what folks are used to here.”

That attention to detail and level of collaboration to execute has always set the Patriots apart on the field. Construction, as it turns out, is a lot like football.

With completion of the New Balance Athletics Center, an important aspect of the organization is back above the standard.

“The level of energy and passion Jonathan and Robert put in each and every day to ensure every T was crossed to make sure the players knew that they cared about them, they cared about their families, and they cared about success and future of the Patriots organization,” said Fish.

When players saw the new building for the first time upon reporting back for offseason training, Streicher says he saw an uptick in the number of guys who stuck around to work out. Their reactions have been the most rewarding part of the process for those who worked closely on this project.

It’s another point for the Patriots when it comes to recruiting top talent and retaining the talent they have.

According to Nolan, value of the asset is well worth the investment.

“The value is that we built a new building, we are now state-of-the-art, we’re giving the players and coaches the things they need to be successful,” Nolan said.

“That’s ultimately the value because the value is winning. Everybody wants to win. We want to win, and if we’re doing something that can further that objective, that’s the ultimate success.” III