

YOUTH SPORTS

‘The IMG Academy of the North,’ an \$83 million youth sports complex, will soon break ground in Stow

By [Michael Silverman](#) Globe Staff, Updated July 30, 2025, 26 minutes ago



Peter Masters shows plans for the sports academy he intends to build on the former Bose property in

Youth sports in New England is about to take one adult-sized step into the future.

At a moment when the business of youth sports is booming, college student-athletes are being paid to play, and NIL is trickling down to high schools, Masters Academy International, a private \$83.8 million multi-sports academy, will soon break ground on a sprawling 82-acre campus in Stow.

When MAI opens in the fall of 2026, its founders expect it to become the destination for families who want to send their children to a boarding and day school where the pursuit of athletic excellence is viewed, unapologetically, as important as receiving a top-flight education.

Had it been around just a couple of years ago, it's the type of place that might have kept an elite New England talent such as [recent No. 1 NBA pick Cooper Flagg of Maine](#) or [future NBA top pick AJ Dybantsa of Brockton](#) much closer to home rather than have to finish high school in Florida or Utah.

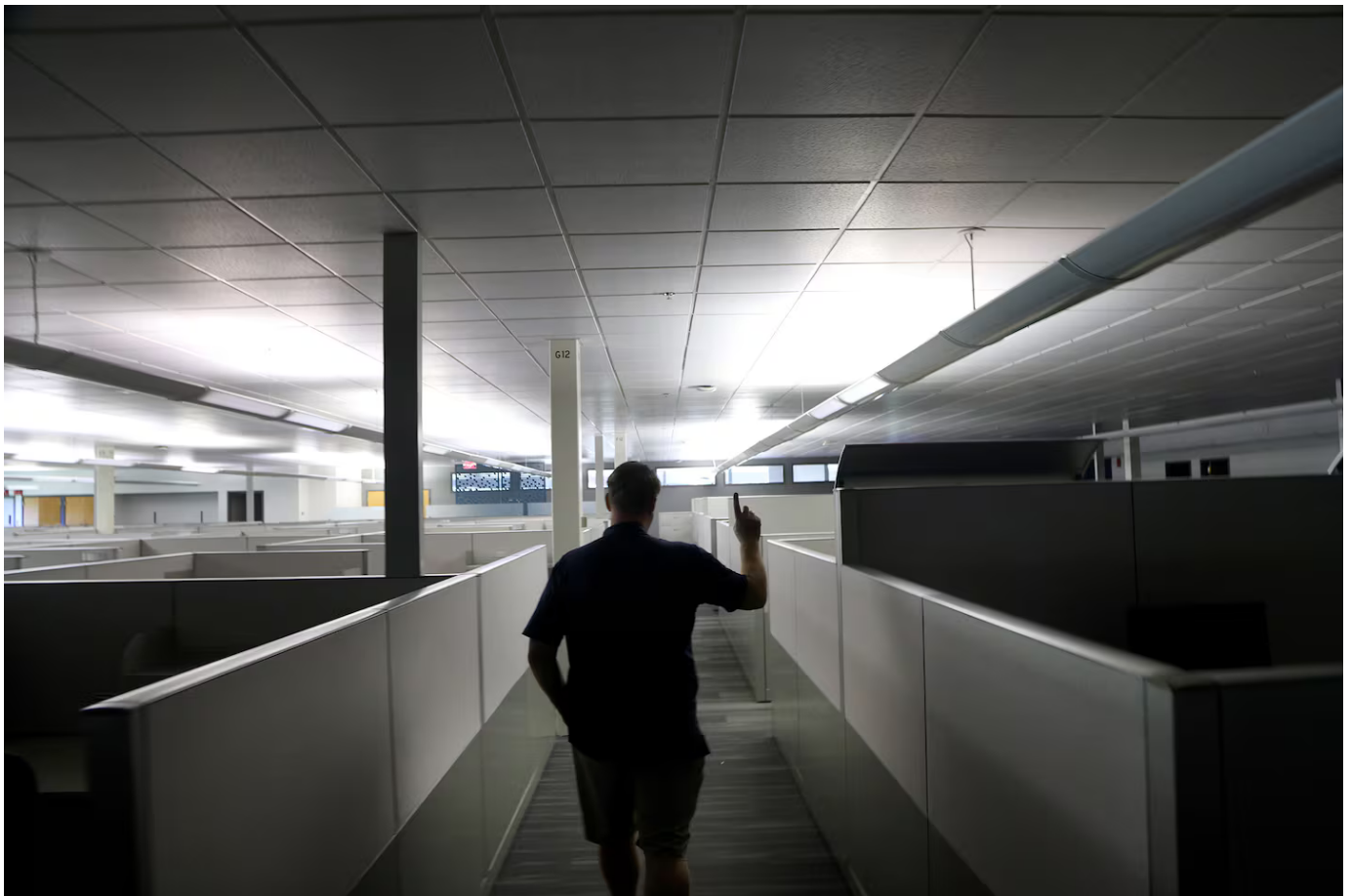
It's a model proven by the pioneer in this realm, IMG Academy of Bradenton, Fla., which for decades has consistently sent top-flight athletes to the college and pro ranks.

"We're trying to create the IMG Academy of the North," said Peter Masters, the founder of MAI. "New England has the best private school market in the world and so many students that are heading to private schools are just looking for better athletics than their public schools can offer, but all the schools are still doing the same training that they've been doing for the last 80 years — three

sports, three-month seasons, shorter schedules, history teachers and admissions directors as coaches and they don't have full-time professional people.

“You cannot, over a four-to-six-year period, compete with kids who are doing 4,000 to 6,000 more hours of sports. Just anecdotally, I can tell you that's impossible.”

Masters spoke after giving a tour of the grounds and the 312,000-square-foot former Bose headquarters where classrooms, dorms, dining halls, a robotics lab, esports, and strength and conditioning spaces will eventually be filled with more than 600 students.



Peter Masters, founder of Masters Academy International, gives a tour of the former Bose property. SUZANNE KREITER/GLOBE STAFF

In Year 1, MAI will offer majors in ice hockey, basketball, baseball, soccer, lacrosse, figure skating, golf, fencing, and esports to a class size of around 300 students, a mix of boarders and day students of middle school and high school age.

For each sport, the school has hired sporting directors with established résumés, a list that includes former Northfield Mount Hermon coach John Carroll for basketball, and Mike Anderson and Topher Bevis, who are both coaches in the Boston Junior Bruins program, for hockey.

A separate basketball pavilion, turf fieldhouse, baseball diamonds, soccer and lacrosse fields, and a pool will be built.

Plus, USA Fencing is moving its main operations from Colorado Springs to Stow in order to have its own high-performance training center for aspiring Olympians located far closer to the sport's primary Northeast recruiting grounds.

A typical school day at MAI will feature three hours devoted to skill-building and internal competition in a student's sport, with another hour for strength and conditioning, both the physical and mental variety.

This intensive multi-sports component to MAI is what will distinguish it from any of the private boarding and day schools in the region.

Given New England's deep academic roots, Masters and everyone connected to MAI understands that the academy also has to offer a comparable education to every other school before any family commits to shelling out an estimated mid-\$50,000 a year for day students and low-\$70,000s for boarders.

To that end, MAI has brought in Rich Odell, the head of school at IMG Academy from 1999-2016, and Michael Schafer, head of school at The Newman School in the Back Bay, to collaborate and advise on creating a five-hour-a-day curriculum and hiring faculty.

“We have to have a really good academic program. The New England area is the hot spot of education, and hence we have to do the best to get the best and stay the best,” said Odell.

The school also plans to be sensitive to the reality that not every MAI student will graduate with the ability to make an athletic impact at the college or professional level.

An exterior view of the former Bose property where Masters Academy will be located. SUZANNE KREITER/GLOBE STAFF

“We have to look at ways to make sure that they are being stimulated in the value of having that sport focus, which comes to a piece that I’ve not done elsewhere and we’ll be doing here, which will be the nonplaying sports majors,” said Odell. “Sports medicine, sports psychology, sports management, which are all similar in terms of time commitment to actually playing the sport. A student will be instructed in that through a partnership with universities who offer sports management majors and with professionals in the Boston area.”

Schafer sees MAI as filling a new niche for parents already paying plenty, a la carte style, to get their child maximum exposure to their sport without sacrificing a college-preparatory education.

“Walnut Hill School for the Arts, for example, is a school that is basically for high-level performing artists, and they have a specific high school curriculum for those students — and there’s ski academies, soccer academies, hockey academies,” said Schafer. “I think a lot of schools would like to lean into more of this but they’re afraid to give up the integrity of their mission.”

Like other private schools, MAI is not cheap. Making it affordable for those who need help is part of the plan.

“There’s a significant number of people in New England private schools that are paying the full rate, but we know that if we want to compete on a national stage, we’re going to have to have a strong financial aid program,” said Masters, who said MAI’s financial assistance offerings will be at similar levels of comparable local institutions.

Masters and his brother, Chris, are co-owners and directors of the Junior Bruins. They have first-hand knowledge of hockey parents, as good of a sports parent cohort as any when it comes to understanding the lengths families will go to to provide their kids with the best possible athletic experience.

When the brothers decided to explore creating a multi-sports academy, they already knew that the business of youth sports was in growth mode.

The Aspen Institute estimates youth sports in the US brings in \$40 billion in revenue a year. As a point of comparison, the NFL generated \$23-plus billion last year, according to Sports Business Journal.

The brothers quickly learned that the real estate aspect to the project was easily

the highest financial bar to clear. The Bose campus features the main building, a modern warren with a utility infrastructure as well as lights, chairs, tables, white boards, dining hall equipment, and even its own water treatment plant.

Dorms still have to be built, but having a virtually turnkey building at the Masters' disposal meant the project could dodge expensive start-up construction costs.

Last May, MAI purchased the 82-acre parcel for \$2.2 million.

Last month, Cognita, a London-based global schools group owned by private equity firms, closed on its lead investment in the project, which will join MAI with more than 100 other Cognita schools around the world.

"We are incredibly proud to be a founding partner in Masters Academy International," Frank Maassen, Cognita's Group Chief Executive Officer, said. "MAI embodies the Cognita spirit — combining world-class education with real-world preparation and personal ambition. With its focus on academics, athletics, life skills, wellbeing and leadership, it offers a truly holistic education that nurtures the whole student."

Individual co-investors comprise the remainder of the ownership group.

If future planned phases pan out, the total investment at MAI is expected to exceed \$100 million.

For Phil Andrews, CEO of USA Fencing, MAI came out on top in a competition among New York, Bradenton, Fla., and Salt Lake City to become his sport's new home because it had everything going for it.

“There isn’t really a high school right now, or middle school for that matter, in the US that balances really high academics and really high-end fencing training,” said Andrews. “We have some very high-level coaches in the area, which gives us a racing advantage here, we like the style of the project that’s being put together by Peter, Chris, and Rich, we like the location, the financial agreement works well for us and ultimately, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, through Lieutenant Governor Kim Driscoll, has made us some commitments that they will make every effort to really embrace fencing.”

When Bose shut down its operations in 2020, the town of Stow lost its biggest employer and taxpayer.

Other entities, including industrial warehousing, affordable housing, and a nonprofit school, expressed interest in the property, but MAI was the best match, said Denise Dembkoski, town administrator of Stow.

“I joke that Peter rolled in here four years ago and I have not let go of him,” said Dembkoski. “This will put us on the map a little bit, maybe more than a little bit. I think USA Fencing is going to put us on the national map.”

Property taxes, as well as tuition taxes, paid by MAI are expected to eventually exceed the nearly \$300,000 annual payments from Bose, said Dembkoski, who hopes that the school also will help spark new businesses in the town and region, from restaurants, ice cream shops, and barber shops to perhaps even a hotel.

When Bose shut down its operations in 2020, the town of Stow lost its biggest employer and taxpayer. SUZANNE KREITER/GLOBE STAFF

“It’s such a benefit to this community,” she said. “It’s like a jackpot for all the benefits we’ll see. There will be some growing pains with school traffic or fencing traffic, but that’s really it. There’s not a lot of downside.”

The 190 full-time jobs MAI says it will create caught the attention of the state. This summer, MAI was one of eight projects the Massachusetts Economic Assistance Coordinating Council approved for participation in the Economic Development Incentive Program.

Over five years, the school will receive \$2.85 million in tax credits.

State Representative Kate Hogan of Stow, along with Driscoll, helped steer state support to MAI, citing it as one of the “strong private-public partnerships that are critical for the Massachusetts economy.

“It’s a project that will have a transformative effect for my small town and also will be an incredible asset to the Commonwealth. It’s all good, and we know in this economy and where we are right now that wins are important, and this is clearly a win.”

The notion that MAI or another academy like it could have kept a talent such as Flagg, Dybantsa, or a top prospect from any sport from leaving the area is not purely hypothetical.

Carroll led the acclaimed basketball program at Northfield Mount Hermon for decades before leaving three years ago.

He heavily recruited Flagg, but in the end, as Carroll knew and Flagg’s parents confirmed to him, the Montverde Academy near Orlando offered more

basketball opportunity than Northfield Mount Hermon could.

“We were close, but in reality, in the end it wasn’t close because the opportunities for him to really chase basketball were just more available to him at the other school than it was at mine,” said Carroll, speaking the same day Flagg was picked No. 1 in the NBA Draft by Dallas.

When Carroll heard about MAI’s mission and philosophy, he understood immediately how the academy could fill a vacuum.

“The market is telling us that they want a higher level of access to academics and athletics without apologies, and I think that’s what Masters is going to offer,” said Carroll. “It’s going to offer the highest-end athletics-academic combination on the terms of our market, and I think it’s going to be really well received. I think the timing of it is perfect for what’s happening in college athletics, what’s happening in professional athletics, and the opportunity to really see a return on investments that families are putting into their child.”

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