

Varsity Blues

by Tony von Richter

UNB's sporting landscape will look quite different next season as the Varsity Reds announced last week that six teams – including men's and women's cross country, men's and women's wrestling, men's swimming, and women's hockey – have been stripped of varsity status. Beginning next season, they will be classified as “competitive sports clubs”.

The announcement came as a shock to most individuals involved with these programs, though Athletic Director Kevin Dickie says the process leading up to this decision has been going on for the past 14 months. The decision to cut programs was not made until

lence. For us, the one in particular was AUS competition.

“The other one is something called support. Support would be community support, attendance, alumni support, media support. Presumably sports that bring support from the greater community have more to bring to the university's overall image and perspective than those that don't.

“Another one usually relates to the financial aspects, the cost-benefit. To what extent is a team able to raise revenues to offset the costs? So if one team is very costly, is it able to raise revenue?”

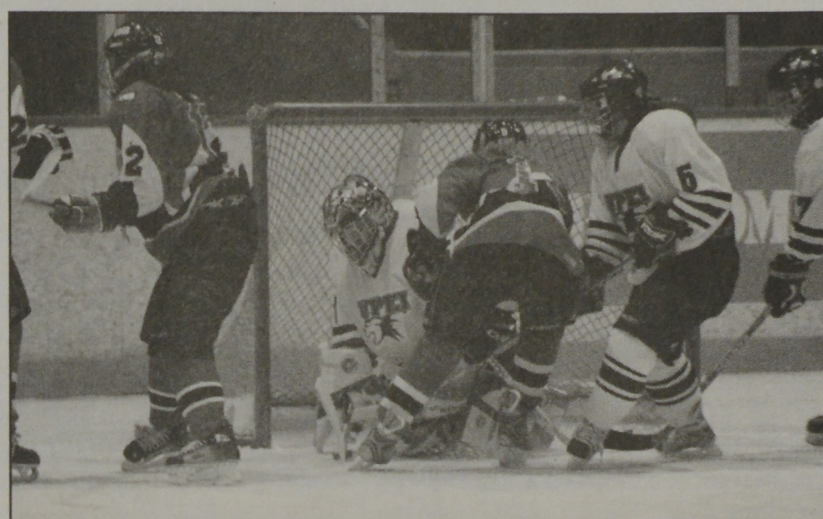
Haggerty added that the Varsity Reds expect to save about \$150,000 per year with this decision.

sports on the Varsity Reds scale, so last year we received \$2,200 from the University of New Brunswick Athletic Program.”

This decision effectively ends women's hockey at UNB, as the team's budget was over \$100,000 this past season. The drastic cutback in funding, combined with the fact that without varsity status the team cannot compete in the AUS,

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- Sylvia Bryson, Assistant Captain, Women's Hockey



Jennifer McKenzie / The Brunswickian

the middle of February, with specific decisions about the affected teams being made just before the March break.

In a press release sent out last Wednesday, which The Brunswickian received before the teams were notified, Dickie said, “Many universities are investing more time, money, and human resources in fewer varsity teams. If UNB is to remain a strong competitor and if our varsity teams are to continue to excel, we must adapt to the changing environment and adjust our current varsity athletics program.

“This review is part of the long-term vision for the athletics program and is reflected in the program's new slogan, ‘Champions of Academic and Athletic Excellence’.”

The handling of the announcement has been widely criticized, as teams losing their varsity status were not informed until after the press release had already been distributed to the media.

“Officially, nothing was ever told to us,” said Terri Ryerson, goaltender for the women's hockey team. “Kevin Dickie neglected to say anything [prior to the announcement].”

Some, including swimming Coach Paula Crutcher, were never informed. Instead, says Crutcher, she found out on the radio on Thursday morning.

According to Terry Haggerty, Dean of Kinesiology, the decision to cut teams was based upon a ranking of the Reds teams on 14 different criteria including things like funding, fan support, and performance (Editors Note: A comprehensive list of the criteria is included on this page).

“One relates to part of the mission of athletics would be athletic excellence. Some [schools] take a look at competitiveness in the league, competitiveness nationally. Winning isn't the important thing, but in terms of pursuing excel-

“If your program's not sustainable, and it wasn't, the revenues that were available did not cover the expenses and we ran a deficit last year, I believe. Looking ahead, we don't have a credit card that could pick up \$50,000 a year, so how are you going to balance your budget?”

The decision was made in part because of what Kevin Dickie referred to as “minimal” effect on the teams, since, with the exception of women's hockey, the student athletes would still be able to compete in the AUS and CIS.

“Every time we go through it we're going through 'how does this affect the student athletes or the coaches, what can we do that doesn't affect them as bad?' We've been able to find a way for cross country runners that are excellent to be able to compete; we've found a way for the men's swimming team to still be able to continue at the AUS and CIS level, even though that club means that they have to engage their alumni to do scholarships themselves.

“We've thought about everything to minimize the impact.”

Despite Dickie's contention that the effect will indeed be minimal, many student athletes and coaches are unsure about what the future will hold.

Don Ryan, head coach of the men's and women's wrestling team and a UNB coach for the past 20 years, emphasized that it's unfortunate that his and other teams lost varsity status.

“To be honest, I'm really not sure what the changes will be. I'm trying to digest it and trying to talk to different partners and different people to try and figure out what's going forward,” said Ryan.

“The only definite change going forward from where we were last year and the last few years to next year is the name. We were one of the lower-tiered

leaves the women's hockey team with no money and no place to play.

Details about the decision have been sketchy at best, leaving players unconvinced about the effectiveness of the Varsity Reds plans. Moreover, as former Varsity Reds women's hockey captain Cheryl Hamilton said, players are feeling betrayed.

“I do not feel that we have had much support from the athletic department at all. No attendance at our games, not even a ‘good job’ or ‘nice try’ when seeing someone from the department,” said Hamilton.

“That was mainly because they did not even know who most of us were. One of the players commented after the meeting Wednesday that that was only her second time encountering our athletic director.”

Haggerty acknowledged that the women's team was under funded for the past few years. In a half-hearted attempt to justify not only the decision, but the poor treatment of the women's team over the past few years, Haggerty claimed that “If you can't do it right, maybe you shouldn't do it at all.”

No matter the reason, the members of the women's hockey team are furious with the decision. In particular, the timing of the decision leaves players unable to apply to transfer to a different school, and many have already signed leases or made living arrangements for next year.

“I personally made plans for staying an additional year at UNB purely for hockey. My program is four and a half years, and rather than leaving in December, I enrolled in the TME Diploma for an additional 5 courses that would allow me to stay for an entire fifth year. UNB is the only school east of Ontario to offer Geological Engineering so in a sense, I'm stuck here,” said Sylvia Bry-

son, assistant captain of the women's hockey team.

“Since Wednesday I feel like I have been stripped of my title as an athlete, as if I've been punished for something beyond my control. I'm overwhelmed at the thought of not being a part of the Varsity Reds community next year.”

Some team members think that the timing of the announcement was intentional, and that there is a more sinister reason for it coming so late in the academic year.

“I think it was [intentional]. I'm not completely clear on the situation that happened in Saskatchewan, they heard they were going to be cut, they took it to court and won. We were told that's it, it's over, the decision's made, the plan's done, that's it. We have nothing to fight – there's no time to fight. I do think it's intentional. Why was women's hockey the last to find out? People knew before we did,” said Ryerson.

“We feel that because Kevin [Dickie] left this so late, he wasted a lot of individuals' time. Had we known even months previous that there were going to be cuts, we probably could have realized that there was a good chance that we would be cut. I feel that had he told us, we would have been able to prepare for it,” added Ryerson.

The next step for the six former varsity teams is to prepare to make the switch to competitive sport club status and all that involves, which could include changing the team name, acquiring new jerseys, and becoming acquainted with the regulations of the campus recreation system.

The press release mentioned that a “transition plan” was in place to help the teams. As of press time, however, neither Dickie nor Haggerty were able to outline the structure or the details of the plan.

What are your thoughts on your team being relegated to club status?

“[It] hasn't really sunk in yet. I'm still trying to digest it...”

- Don Ryan, Head Coach, Wrestling

“The team is very disappointed in the move but I am trying to look at ways to make it as positive as possible.”

- Tim Randall, Head Coach, Cross Country

“There is no relegation in my mind. They are still UNB Swimming and will compete.”

- Paula Crutcher, Head coach, Swimming

“I'm glad that I got to finish off my career here, but I'm disappointed that I can't say the same for my teammates.”

- Cheryl Hamilton, Captain, Women's Hockey

“We feel [Kevin Dickie] neglected us, neglected other athletes in the school and I can't speak for everybody, however I feel that he has let down a lot of people.”

- Terri Ryerson, Goaltender, Women's Hockey



Andrew Meade / The Brunswickian

14 CRITERIA USED TO RANK UNB'S VARSITY TEAMS_

- > AUS COMPETITION LEVEL
- > PAST SUCCESS - AUS & CIS
- > RECRUITED STUDENT ATHLETES
- > PAST ACADEMIC SUCCESS
- > ATTENDANCE
- > COMMUNITY INTEREST
- > MEDIA COVERAGE
- > SUCCESS OF TEAM GUARANTEES NATIONAL EXPOSURE
- > HISTORY AND TRADITION
- > STRENGTH OF THE SPORT IN NEW BRUNSWICK
- > LOCAL & REGIONAL YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN SPORT
- > PRESENT ALUMNI INVOLVEMENT
- > EXPENSE/REVENUE BALANCE
- > HUMAN RESOURCE/ADMINISTRATIVE NEEDS
- > ENHANCEMENT OF CAMPUS LIFE AND OUR FACILITIES