

Breakfast with Dickie

athletic director chimes in on unb sports

The Brunswickan's Brian Munn sat down for breakfast with UNB Athletic Director Kevin Dickie to talk about the ups and downs of a great year in UNB athletics, and the director's hopes for the program moving forward.

by Brian Munn

The Brunswickan: I think the best place to start is to give me your thoughts on the year that was in UNB athletics.

Kevin Dickie: The one thing we always do very well is academics; we're very good, and quite a few of our student athletes are Academic All-Canadians.

Being a student athlete, you should have fun, but at the same time you have an invisible jersey on all the time and have to act accordingly. I think our people do a great job with that.

From an athletic perspective, we do a sort of "power ranking" where we evaluate our program as compared to the other programs [in the AUS]. This year we finished fifth out of 11. That's okay, but we want to be, athletically, one of the top programs in Atlantic Canada on a perennial basis.

In the end we had some things that were outstanding, some other things that weren't outstanding, and some other things that were somewhere in the middle.

B: One of the highlights of the season, at least here in Fredericton, was the CIS Women's Volleyball Nationals. What was your take on UNB's first crack at the tournament?

KD: It was a huge success.

I was a part of the [women's] basketball nationals here a couple of years ago, but we only had it for one year and you can't really do something like that for one year. Your work, overhead, and financial investment pay off in the second year.

We just did such a tremendous job, and there's no question in my mind that the crowds will be even

sooner than later. I wouldn't say that I've been in the periphery of the Currie Centre discussions, because I'm involved were I need to be from an athletic, performance court, and locker room perspective.

The turf field, we got up and running on October 3 and we got everything out of it that we needed to this year. Our indoor dome showed up in early January, but by the time you clean off the snow on that part of the field, get the [dome] in place and heat it, we couldn't make the business plan work for four months.

So the dome is here right now, and it'll be up and running next November, so we're excited. You'll see a lot of changes in the infrastructure of the turf field here, and that'll actually start as soon as the snow goes away.

B: Speaking of changes, one of the major changes for the Varsity Reds will be on the bench for the men's basketball team. How is the coach search going?

KD: There has been a lot [of recruiting for the position]. We went through the same thing with our women's basketball coach. Jeff Speedy was interested in the position, but make no mistake, there was a recruiting job involved in the process. It was a proactive one to let him know that we're interested in him being here. He gave up what is arguably the top women's program in the country [the University of Regina Cougars] to come out here.

We were prepared for anything, but we've had some tremendous candidates here for our men's position. We're going to have a good coach, there's no question about it. We've got until Friday for that position to close. We identified some people across the country but at

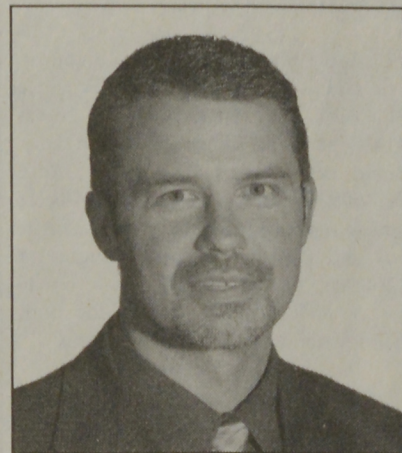
It's important that people understand the distinction between [club and varsity status], but at the same time, when it comes to competing in the varsity events, they will be Varsity Reds for sure. And we'll recognize them. We expect golds in the future.

B: Will the same be true for the cross-country and swimming teams?

KD: Absolutely.

B: The other team affected, obviously, was the women's team. I think we have heard enough about the decision itself, but was the response in support of women's hockey something you had anticipated?

KD: Yeah, it is. It really is. The tough part for me is that around here, I'm known as an Athletics Director, but if you get outside of here, I'm known as a hockey guy. My whole life has been about understanding hockey, understanding what makes it tick, and understanding why people are passionate



our role in varsity athletics. I think the Faculty of Kinesiology has a role, and that's why we have the continuing of sports and athletics within the faculty's program.

We knew we needed to invest a significant amount [of money] to get the women's hockey team to a high-performance level. We're talking an extra \$120,000 per year on top of what we already put into the team, and we're just unable to make that happen.

B: Keeping with hockey, obviously the men's team didn't achieve (I guess) the anticipated result this season. What was your take on the team?

KD: [Men's hockey] is just a great

kevin dickie on...

...women's volleyball nationals

"We just did such a tremendous job, and there's no question in my mind that the crowds will be even bigger next year."

...filling the men's basketball coaching vacancy

"We've had some tremendous candidates here for our men's position. We're going to have a good coach, there's no question about it."

...the support for women's hockey

"When you're passionate about something you've got to fight for it."

...the decision to cut six teams

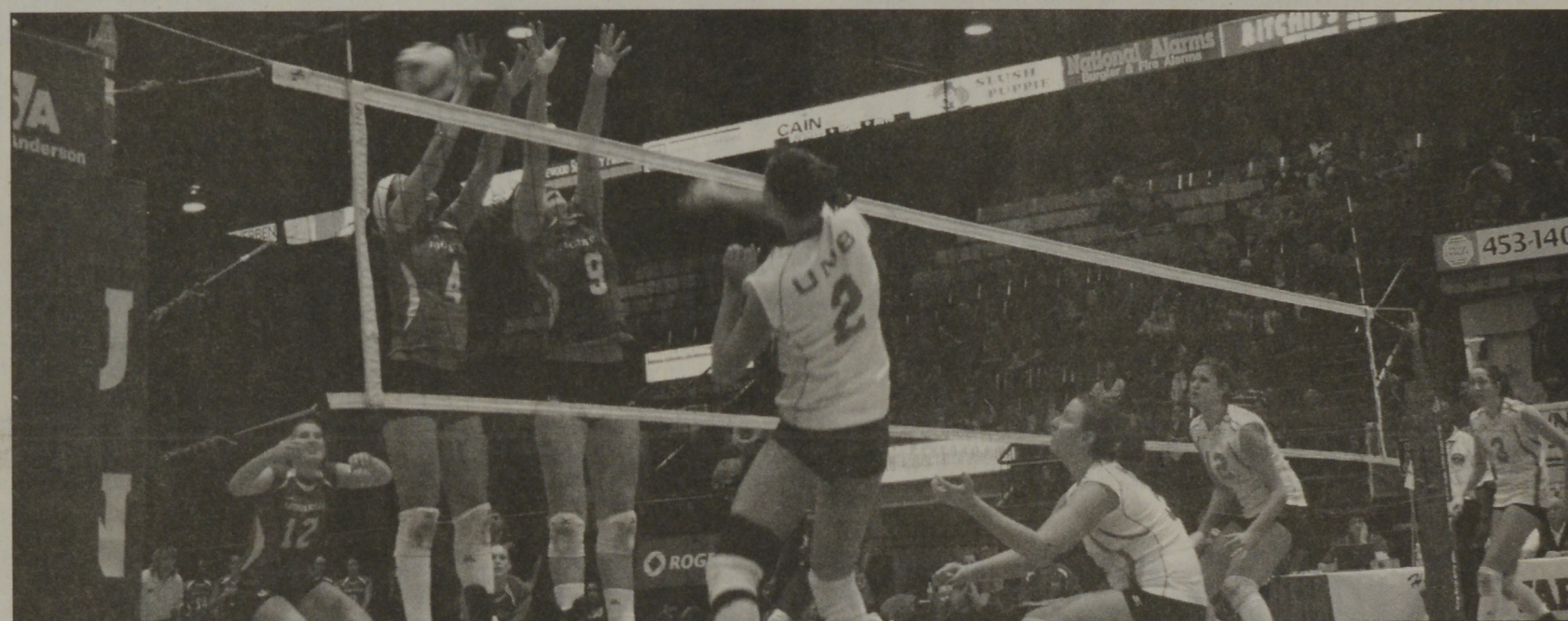
"The bottom line for us is that all the things [I've mentioned before], whether it be turf fields, whether it be men's hockey, or whether it be hosting CIS championships, we can't do that anymore and pay the bills of the day."

...what's next for men's hockey

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B: What about the impact of the tournament and the success of the volleyball programs on the community?

KD: I've got two boys that are 12 and 15 years old, and they play volleyball now. And I think they play volleyball because of our volleyball programs here at UNB. I think it has become a thing to do, whether it be beach in the summer or it be CIS volleyball; it has become kind of a cool activity to be a part of.

I think that our two coaches and our two teams have done an outstanding job. Women's volleyball was tremendous: We won the AUS Championship. Men's volleyball, on a Sunday night in Game 2 [of the AUS Finals] against Dal, the gym was rocking unlike people have seen going back to the mid-'80s.

I think volleyball was just a really good story this year.

B: Obviously a huge part of UNB's athletic success is going to be dependant on our facilities moving forward. What is the status of the Currie Centre and the dome for Chapman Field?

KD: With the Currie Centre, I think ground is going to break

the end of the day, a couple of the people that we were very keen on have applied.

B: As with any major organizational shake-up, there have been rumors and such about the final status of the club teams. What can you tell me about the decision, and where do those teams stand?

KD: I think that we're all a part of the miscommunication; if you take a look back, maybe with our communication we could have tightened a couple of things up. I think from a media perspective, things get distorted at times – not by fault, but they do.

I think this is a good way to put it: without question, wrestling will be one of the sports that will become a club program. But at the end of the day, we'll continue to have the Vince Cormiers' and the Krista Betts' of the world out there as Varsity Reds at the CIS events. When they're not doing that, they're involved in their club program.

Truth be told, there are only about two or three varsity events for our Varsity Reds [wrestlers] to attend every year. And so if you take a look at what the majority of the time is spent on, it's a club program.

about it. When you're passionate about something, you've got to fight for it.

No, none of that is a surprise. It's too bad it got personal at times, because there was never anything for me that, from my perspective, was a personal decision. In fact, I was just part of a process.

The bottom line for us is that all the things [I've mentioned before], whether it be turf fields, whether it be men's hockey, or whether it be hosting CIS championships, we can't do that anymore and pay the bills of the day.

When you look at women's hockey, the bottom line is that we were investing more on a net per-team basis than any other program on campus, and we weren't investing enough. We only had one option – can we invest enough to get [the team] to the level of the STU, St. FX, the two Halifax teams [Dal and SMU], and the Moncton team? But we just couldn't.

B: As a hockey guy, do you feel as though women's hockey has been set back because of the decision?

KD: It is not our responsibility to invest a significant number of dollars to develop a sport. It is not

story right now. The two toughest things in sports to do are to repeat [championships] as a team, and the second toughest thing is to overcome the "sophomore jinx".

So for our team to come back and run the table this year, I don't remember seeing anything like it. You can think about the [Miami] Dolphins in '72 and the [New England] Patriots of this year... there's really something special about what our guys accomplished this year just in terms of mental toughness and just to have that focus.

If you ever had a "Get out of Jail Free" card, this was the year to have it, and [the team] just never let their foot off the throttle. I think it's unbelievable.

B: Is there anything you would have done differently, or a different direction you'd take moving forward?

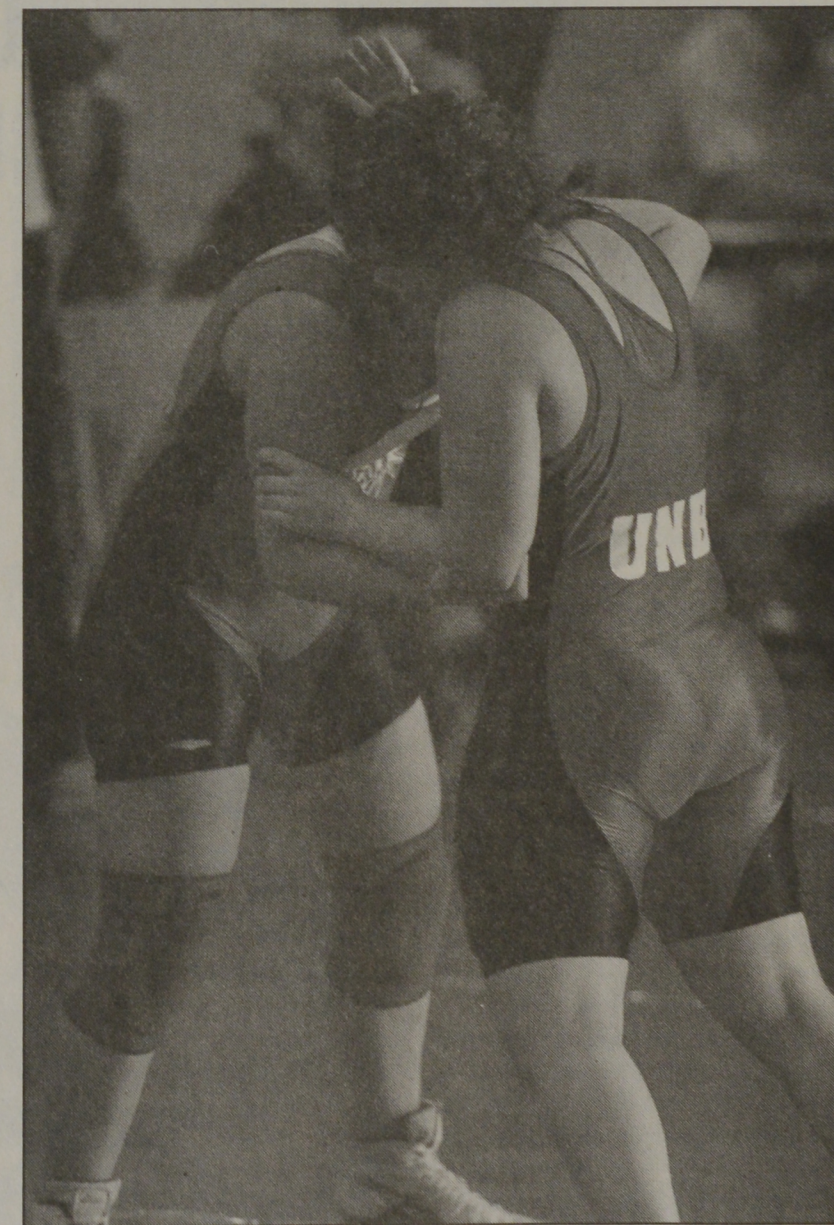
KD: Part of being an AD [Athletic Director] with a great team is you have a good coach, support where you can, and then stay the hell out of the way.

The better you do with recruiting new players, you're going to end up losing the [former V-Red Darryl] Boyce of the world. We did well again this year and we're going to lose players, but one of the things that really slid under the radar was that we had ten new players in the lineup. That's unbelievable.

B: Urban legend at UNB seems to have us perpetually on the brink of a rebirth of the Red Bombers football team, and now the women's hockey budget is going towards that end. Any truth to the rumors?

KD: You know what, I'll answer the question the same way I have for three years. It's not even within the context of what were just went through. In five or six years, we'll evaluate where we're at again. Have we taken basketball to a different level? Has baseball become a CIS sport?

All I care about right now is our program being the best that it can be. We've gone through a month of pain to make that point, and adding



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or deleting further is not even on our minds.

B: So cutting women's hockey doesn't equal a rebirth of the Red Bombers?

KD: No. Absolutely, unequivocally, no.

B: So what kind of hopes do you have for the program moving forward?

KD: I think one of the things we've done through the Strategic Plan is that it has helped us prioritize.

There are three pillars to our program right now. We want to be great academically. We want to continue to be great in the community,

and part of that right now involves re-educating people in terms of this last process with the strategic plan and the changes we've made. We need to re-educate people in terms of why we did what we did, and at least have people understand. I think that's important. And most importantly, we want to get our program to the highest level athletically, and I don't apologize one bit for that. Not one iota. It's what we're all about.

We had seven teams ranked in the top ten in the country this year. We're getting there, but without change, there isn't a prayer that we could.