

Sports Comment

The future of sport at Dalhousie

by J. Smith

That's right Athletics. The Dalhousie Sports and Physical Recreation Council has been reconvened to review the future of football as a varsity sport. Their decision, however, will necessarily affect the future of the entire athletic program here at Dalhousie.

It is no news to anyone that this university has not, to say the least, fielded a contender in football in recent years, (1-11 the past two years). Under existing circumstances, there is very little improvement to be expected in the foreseeable future; because there are very very few attractive features inherent with our football program for players of the caliber necessary to win titles.

Ideally, a talented player wants to attend a university which has a winning record and good playing facilities, is economical to attend (i.e. minimal travelling costs and tuition), and has the coaching and teaching staff to provide him with the opportunity to obtain a quality education. What can Dalhousie offer? A decade old promise for a sports complex, a combination rock garden/mud bowl for a field, the highest tuition rates in Canada, and a firm policy against athletic financial inducements. If Joel Fornier is still optimistic of recruiting the players necessary to field a contender, as he has recently stated in this newspaper, then I sincerely wish him all the luck in the world!

Other AIFC member universities, namely St. F.X., St. Mary's and Acadia, have resigned themselves to the fact that there is very little native (to this province) talent available and so have embarked on elaborate recruiting programs. Bob Hayes, former athletic director at S.M.U., is quoted in the latest issue of Macleans Magazine as saying, "I

have never known of any straight grants of money to students, nor any form of remuneration or incentive." However, I hardly think players of the caliber of Sanducci and Robinson have, in recent years, enrolled at S.M.U. strictly for academic reasons. In the same issue of Macleans, an anonymous S.M.-U. alumni and former football player says "Bob always did have a short memory." Acadia and St. F.X. are more honest about their position; they admit to offering 'Leadership Scholarships' or something along those lines. These are available to athletes, since they can be classified as leaders. Convenient, isn't it! By the way, where were Acadia's leaders during the College Bowl?

The athletic philosophy of this university originates from the School of Physical Education; most varsity coaches in recent years have also been faculty members of this school. This philosophy emphasizes the intrinsic benefits of participation and competition rather than the more evident benefits of victory. Dr. M.J. Ellis, director of the School of Physical Education, states it this way. "We are not against recruiting, but we are against the wholesale purchase of bodies for the purpose of winning titles." It is not an exciting philosophy. As a matter of fact it sounds almost Boy-Scoutish (shades of Baden-Powell)! But, it is democratic; non-elitist, to coin current 'in' terminology. It is a philosophy aimed at educating people through sports, not exploiting people through sports. The issue then, is whether this university, with its democratic philosophy should continue its membership in the AIFC, knowing that a number of the other members have elitist, machiavellian philosophies. Winning simply is not an

at-all-costs priority of this School. It is a very desirable consequence of play, but not its sole purpose. However, Mr. Bob Thayer, head coach, feels that the football program here at Dal is too "low key". He feels that there is a lot to be said for the spirit building qualities of a winning team. How far should the university have to go in order to obtain a winner? "We are not living in a Utopia. It is a question of being realistic" and being realistic means putting money into a recruiting program. I can't help but admire a man who fights so admirably for a cause which is so poorly supported. The irony of this situation is that this university is very successful in its overall athletic program. Recently three teams; Soccer, field hockey, and cross country, attended national championships. We have also won Atlantic conference titles in tennis and track and field this year. As a matter of fact we are parenially one of the winningest universities in the maritimes if the entire athletic program is considered.

That may just be due to the fact that most other maritime universities concentrating their efforts on the three high exposure sports (football, hockey and basketball). Nevertheless, we are successful.

Football has become a concern in Dal's Athletic philosophy. It is blatantly obvious that we cannot expect to be successful in the foreseeable future. We have been successful in basketball and hockey because these sports are native to this province. This provides a relatively abundant source of talent. Football, however, is played by only 5 high schools in this province, one of which is currently considering discontinuing its program. It just doesn't seem reasonable to me that so much effort and money should be

spent on nursing a plant that was seeded on such poor soil. But losing is embarrassing. And when losing occurs as consistently as it has for our football team, then the embarrassment turns into a subconscious desire to alienate everything concerned with that source of embarrassment. It seems to me that the Athletic department should have the intestinal fortitude to match its convictions. Obviously it is difficult to do this when the CIAU has done very little to fight athletic inducement outside of forbidding athletic scholarships. It is even more difficult when this University offers thousands of dollars per year to 'exceptional' students in the way of academic scholarships. Nevertheless, this shouldn't confound the issue. Football is not native to this province. In order dichotomy to win, recruiting, accompanied by some financial inducement, is essential. The Athletic Department is not prepared to resort to financial inducements because its philosophy is based on pedagogical principles. Therefore, what the HELL are we doing competing (participating) in a league that is increasingly evolving into a professional circuit? We shouldn't be in this league. Not simply because we are embarrassed at our own failure, but because we do not hold the same values; to continue membership is to indirectly approve the other AIFC members position on athletic inducements with regards to competition.

Obviously there are some people who feel that recruiting, with financial inducement, is desirable. If enough people feel that way then the philosophy should be changed and more money poured into the football program. If not, then football should be dropped. But let's stop pissing on the floor while trying to choose a urinal!

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