

New era in sport at Dalhousie !?

by Joel Fournier

Once again it's that time of year when a delicious feeling of anticipation is experienced by freshmen and returning students. Another college sports year is about to begin and with it the excitement and color that has traditionally been a part of the university scene for generations.

I use the word "delicious" attempting to convey to you a sensation that is pleasant and enjoyable, and perhaps in doing so I am committing a grave error. Some would argue in certain schools across our country the phrase "delicious feeling of anticipation" should be replaced with something like "a heightened feeling of apprehension" or "a distinct sense of impending disaster." What phrase you ultimately use depends of course on what school you happen to be attending.

Here at Dalhousie for the past few years most students, even the more optimistic of us, would have had to categorize themselves as falling in one of the two least pleasant of the descriptions mentioned above. Having said that, I must immediately qualify the statement by explaining that this

somewhat unpleasant sensation only applied to the "Big Three" sports, namely football, hockey and basketball. Not wanting to offend coaches and participants of all the other sports that are played at Dal (sports incidentally in which we are perennial champions, I want to make it emphatically clear that the "Big Three" are so called simply because of their spectator appeal and not necessarily because they have something more to offer those that are involved with them.

In any case, because of the Tiger's less than golden record in the immediate past there has grown up among the student body, and for that matter among certain segments of the faculty, a group of persons who are ardently vociferous in their condemnation of the athletic program here at Studley. This small but painfully obvious group have had a marked effect on the spirit and enthusiasm of the students in general, to the point where widespread apathy seems to have settled in.

There is no doubt that every program has its faults and can be justifiably criticized - ours at Dal is no exception; but what the detractors here have failed to consider is the concept behind the policy which has brought about our relatively poor record. Simply

stated, the plan was to give Maritime athletes a better break, and to determine over a period of years if we could be competitive in all aspects of a particular sport while using these athletes. In my estimation it was a good idea, a concept that took considerable courage to initiate and carry through. It didn't warrant the harsh and unthinking criticism it received. It seems more than a little ironic that in many instances the harshest fault-finders were native Maritimers.

Of the three sports in question, football fared the worst. Football's failure is of course due to a variety of factors. The two most notable are limited opportunities for the Maritimer to play the game, and for those few who did have that rare chance frequently there was inadequate coaching. In no way is this a reflection on the individual competitor. If you placed the same person in the Ontario minor and high school system you would end up with, in most cases, a superior football player - simply because of prolonged exposure, coaching, and competition.

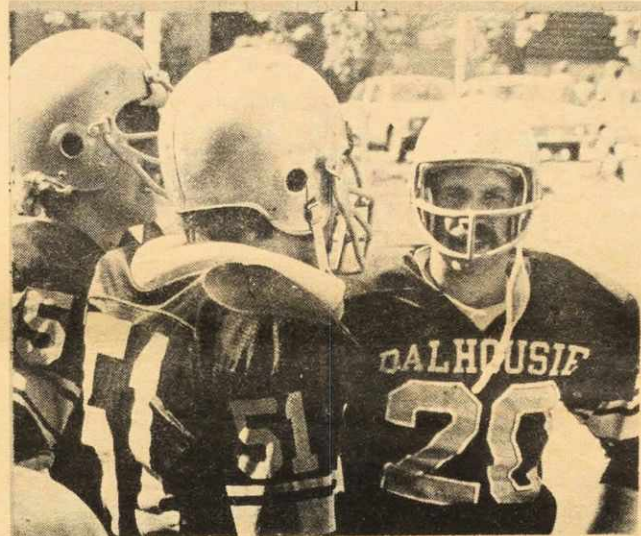
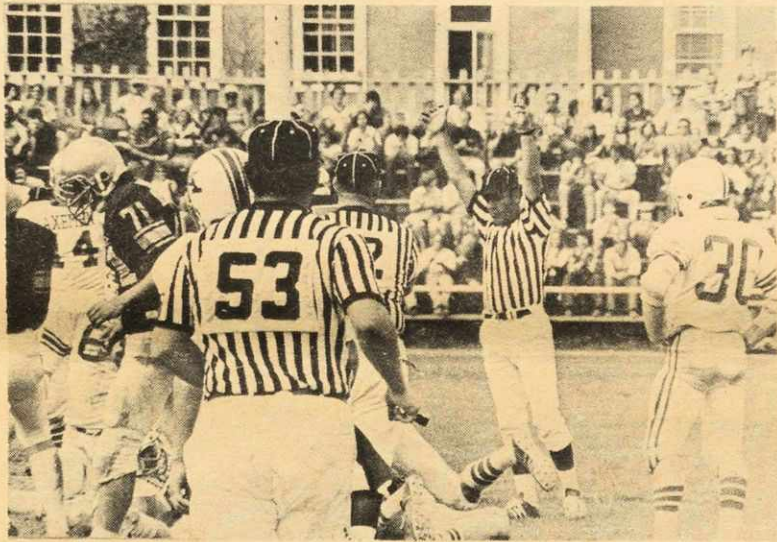
In any event, the concept was tried for three full years and found unworkable. Probably the only way it could have succeeded was if all the best athletes in the area had

come to Dal. We certainly got many of the best, but not all.

For better or for worse that play is history now. This year Dal coaches have been busy promoting their respective sports to promising athletes in Ontario and Quebec as well as the Maritimes. Will this make a difference in the win-loss column, which in our society seems to be the measure of success? One would certainly hope so, because if not a great many people are going through a lot of work for nothing.

The university has changed its policy; what remains to be seen, is if you - the student - can shrug off your apathy. Don't wait until you have a championship team before you start cheering; get out there and help the coaches and players to build one by showing you are behind them. After all, it's your school, it's your athletic program, you are helping to pay for it, so why not support it.

The athletes must be aware that you are one hundred percent behind them if they are to be successful. This Saturday you will have your first chance to show your support at the opening football game against Mount Allison, to be played at the Wanderer's Grounds. There is no charge, so let's get out there and make this season the start of an exciting new era in Tiger sport history.



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