

Generating school spirit at UNB

A look at the development of Varsity Mania

PART 1

by Aime Phillips

Until three years ago varsity sports at UNB were not a big topic on campus. Everyone complained about the student apathy concerning sports, but all anybody ever did was complain.

The summer of 1987 saw a change to the lack of spirit when Carl Burgess, recognizing a demand for sports on campus, created Varsity Mania. Burgess explains that "coming from a high school with a lot of school spirit, I expected this in university."

Burgess first went to each coach individually explaining how he wanted to boost the exposure of sports' teams on campus, and then he collected letters of support. He took these references to the Student Union and the University's administration where he received further letters of support. Burgess then proceeded to look for corporate sponsorship. He found some with Moosehead breweries, Coca-Cola, CIHI, Coastal Graphics, Greco, and Trius Taxi. Thus, Varsity Mania was born.

The first event was the opening soccer game at Chapman Field featuring the UNB's Red Shirts and the UPEI's Panthers. Burgess claims he was doubtful as to

whether anyone would show up. But on the afternoon of the game the field was scattered with coaches, athletes, sponsors and two very rowdy groups of men from Aitken House and Bridges House. The two residences were present to compete in the Residence Challenge, Varsity Mania's main event where the largest, craziest turnout from a residence is rewarded for its participation.

Burgess explained that he used the already existing competition between the men's houses to promote the varsity games and stir up

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interest for the teams on campus. To generate more interest, prizes were awarded to the houses. Each term the residence with the highest aggregate attendance for all Varsity Mania events received a VCR, and with the way liquor regulations were at that time, Moosehead products were awarded to the house with the best participation per event.

However, as with any organization just starting out, problems arose. Regulations with posters, trouble with obnoxious fans, and unruly behavior made Burgess decide to give fans something to do. He introduced Varsity Mania paraphernalia and the Red Tide,



University spirit: Although there was doubt about how many people would show up at Varsity Mania events, they immediately stimulated interest.

which is a zany band designed to boost excitement.

Problems also developed for Burgess personally. As Varsity Mania gained popularity it became more time consuming, and Burgess, also VP Activities of the Student Union at that time, was criticized and accused of not fulfilling his mandate.

As current Varsity coordinator Steve Williams put it, it seemed "every time Varsity Mania took another step forward everyone expected it to fall flat on its face instead of being successful."

Students wondered what would become of Varsity Mania after Burgess graduated in 1990. Williams was named coordinator; and, with the success of Varsity Mania this year, he was proven that "Carl laid the groundwork for something that has the potential to become even bigger."

Greg Lutes, current VP finance of the Student Union and a four-year resident of Aitken House, was stimulated by the effect Varsity Mania had: "Carl Burgess took great strides in making being a fan an activity on campus."

Students are not the only ones who see success in Varsity Mania. Jim Born, Athlete Director for UNB, says the coaches appreciate what is taking place and "overall, its been very good for us."

Thus the first year of Varsity Mania proved to be a growing success despite its problems and the doubt surrounding it.

Next week: Varsity Mania's successful second year in defiance to the liquor policy problems and Burgess' departure.



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