

## We should be producing contenders

There has been a lot of controversy the past few weeks, concerning the attitude of this university's administration toward varsity athletics. The big question seems to be whether or not the UNB administration looks at our athletics program in a serious light. When one closely examines the situations which exist here, one comes up with the conclusion that athletics have a very low priority at UNB.

Let's face it: UNB has never had a national contender in any of the "big three" sports (football, hockey, men's basketball), at least not since college athletics became a major sports enterprise in North America. While it has been pointed out that we have had winners in other sports (i.e., field hockey, soccer, and women's basketball), that is more a result of circumstances than goal-oriented planning. We do not mean to downgrade those teams, or their achievements; certainly, in their own right, those are very worthwhile accomplishments, and are to be applauded as such. Plaudits must go out to the coaches and supporting personnel involved with those teams for doing the excellent job they do with the limited resources they are given. But it must be pointed out that the competitive recruitment for talent in those sports is not nearly as fierce as it is for athletes in the "big three". It is that fact which puts UNB on equal footing with other schools when it comes to competing for potential athletes - it is not due to any attitude or policy of the administration. And that shows up in the sports in which there is vigorous recruitment of potential athletes.

When it comes to competing in the three major sports, this school is sadly devoid of anything resembling a national contender. In fact, we took a giant step backward when the football program was dropped two years ago. Lack of available money was the reason given for that decision. The administration had decided that other

sports, such as hockey, and men's basketball, should take priority over maintaining a football program. Well, that would be acceptable, providing that some positive progress had been made as a result of that decision. But what have the hockey and men's basketball teams done since then? It would seem that despite sacrificing the football team (the one team which drew any kind of fan support), and despite the administration's expressed desire to improve those programs mentioned above, they have gone backward instead of going forward.

Unfortunately, the arguments that "times are tough" and "those other schools have more money" are not really valid, although they are flogged to death whenever a discussion on this topic arises. UNB has an enrollment of roughly 5200 students. Acadia University, a perennial football power, and until recently, a school strong in basketball tradition, has a current population of 3000 students. St. Francis Xavier University has 2700 full-time students enrolled, yet they're always strong in football and basketball. And the University of Moncton, the two-time defending CIAU hockey champs, have 2600 students at their institution. So...how can these schools with smaller populations afford to build national contenders, while a larger school like UNB cannot?

Then of course, there's the stance taken that UNB has higher academic standards, and that those standards are more important than having nationally competitive sports teams. Okay; so why bother having major sports teams at all? We are not criticizing the powers that run UNB for placing academics before athletics; far from it. What they are being chastised for is the pretence that they desire winning teams at UNB. Perhaps they desire it, but their actions don't support that. They haven't yet caught on to the fact that in this day and age, their

type of 9th century approach to building winning teams is archaic, and cannot hope to produce national winners in the major sports already singled out. It has to be "all-or-none" - either make a decision to commit this school to athletic excellence at all levels, or get out of the game. If they don't wish to put the necessary money and effort into the major sports, get rid of them! At least then they wouldn't be trying to build a castle using only straw or wood, instead of the bricks necessary for a solid foundation. And they could increase the excellence of the programs we are already proficient in.

We are not advocating a "win-at-all-costs" philosophy. What we do desire is a realization by this school's administration that a "winning-is-the-only-thing" philosophy is necessary to compete on a national scale. This latter type of philosophy, made famous by the late Vince Lombardi, is subtly different from the former. The quote "Winning isn't everything - it's the only thing" does NOT mean that the ends (winning) justify the means (cheating, bending the rules, etc.). It DOES mean that athletes in competition must strive to win - that is their ultimate goal. And in striving to win, they are striving for excellence in their chosen endeavour. Winning is the measuring stick used to determine how close a team or player has come to achieving that excellence, in much the

same way that an "A" grade measures academic excellence. Only through this striving can an athlete hope to achieve excellence - and no athlete worth his weight in jock-straps ever went into a contest hoping to "be competitive and keep it close". Any athlete who does not go out to win is cheating himself, his team-mates, his coaches, and the fans.

Unfortunately, the administration at UNB does not share in this striving for excellence, at least not in athletics. Although they have

given lip service to developing winning teams at UNB, the fact remains that they have done little to actively bring this about. They prefer to hide behind the standard of "academic excellence", while hoping that our teams can be "competitive", with winning an added bonus, but not something to be actively pursued. It's funny that one never hears about the "poor academic standards" of the St. Mary's science faculty, or the Dalhousie faculty of medicine. And those schools certainly have good athletics programs.

We do not really blame the people directly in charge of the athletics programs here at UNB; they only operate within the framework they're given. And it has been proven that anyone with the guts to speak out against this system is not looked upon with much favour by the powers-that-be. As one local journalist recently put it, UNB does not want an athletics director who will stir things up, and -heaven forbid! -stand up for his school when the time comes to deal with the other schools in our conference. They would rather have a party-man who will tow the line, and present a good public image. And, they get what they pay for. Unfortunately, besides leaving UNB short of talent, this approach also assures our teams that they will get the shaft whenever any major scheduling decision arises. There are numerous examples of this: look at what happened to the Red Devils in last year's hockey play-offs; look at the brutal schedules this year's UNB teams have to contend with (the Raiders had a 25-day stretch in which they had only ONE AUAA game scheduled; and the Bloomers did not have a home game in AUAA action in the entire first term); the list goes on.

So those of you in control at this university, please take heed: stop pretending - either give us the means to develop contending teams in the major sports, or dump them, and put the money to better use elsewhere.