

Tories go out of bounds

by Karl Wilberg

According to Ed Zemrau, U of A director of athletics, people involved in sport programs cheered when the Tories gained power in Ottawa. However, that elation, like election promises, has changed. In fact it is now obvious that advances made under Campagnola's Sport Canada have not only been halted but also reversed.

There are two areas of concern and, as usual, short and long term implications. First of all the federal government \$500,000 travel assistance grant to the CIAU had been cut to 190,000 by Steve Paproski's fitness ministry. This reduction late in the summer ruined playing schedules and set back years of negotiation with the previous government.

For example, the travel grant was important because competition between western universities involves large distances and high travel costs.

In addition, Zemrau states that the subsidy "allowed us to consider interlocking play." Also, it "allowed Memorial University (Newfoundland) to compete." In general it seems the subsidy encouraged east-west competition to replace less expensive Canada-U.S. travel and play.

Needless to say, Zemrau was shocked to hear the Tories had reduced the expected \$500,000 grant to \$190,000. Zemrau mentions that "the Western conference and Maritimes went back to the minister" and had the grant raised by \$100,000.

In any case intercollegiate schedules had been upset and interlocking play made impossible. Only the U of A hockey program maintained part of an interlocking schedule. Again, the fitness ministry was approached to increase the grant but no increase has occurred. Zemrau states Paproski "is not aware of the situation" and has "no idea what it costs to run a program."

Another concern for the

intercollegiate program, and amateur sport in general, is the recent transfer of Loto Canada revenue. Now, the provinces control a large part of the funds and, as yet, have not announced how amateur sport is to be promoted. However, according to Zemrau it is clear that business operations, like the Edmonton Exhibition Association, will be receiving Loto monies. For example, the Coliseum is receiving three million dollars. Zemrau asks "What do they have to do with amateur sport" and comments that these moves are "in direct contradiction to promises."

A long term result of this transfer is the inability of every province to spend equally on amateur sport. Consequently, Zemrau sees "a great difference in province to province" competition and the "have-nots going further down the line."

In Alberta, besides the reduction in scheduled events, there may be what Zemrau terms "a significant cut in oppor-

tunities presented to our athletes." Furthermore a growing inability to provide athletes with competition may "chase them to the U.S."

Recent statements by Paproski indicate he wishes universities to offer sport scholarships. However, U of A programs have been able to attract top athletes without money lures. For example, national team track athletes Frank van Doorn, Dan Biocchi and Ian Newhouse run for the Bears because the program is first rate. Similarly, Zemrau's first concern is to provide "the best coaching, training and competition" for the U of A.

Another effect national plans for sport funding have is the reduction of funding for certain U of A programs. It has been argued that football and other expensive teams are funded at the expense of other collegiate programs. In addition, groups like co-rec and competitive clubs have suffered decreases in funding.

Zemrau responds that priorities here will not change and intramural programs will not have decreased funding. Also, the opportunities to students in other leagues are reviewed when a program is funded.

Still, it seems that at the U of A, and other levels, an assessment of amateur sport is required. That much is now obvious. What is not clear is how collegiate teams and programs should be funded in the future. One imagines that a program's benefits to participants and the population must be seen in view of its expense.

Although the near future is troubled, Zemrau states that the universities are "not going to give up." One hopes that they do not. Many Olympic competitors and most coaches have been involved in collegiate programs. If this resource is harmed the effects will not only be national but will compromise our international standing.

Alberta good place for: Gym Pandas

In most provinces, women gymnasts old enough for university have no competitive future. Also, if they weigh more than 90 lbs. few programs will encourage their participation. In fact U of A Pandas Gymnastics coach, Sandy O'Brien states "they are humiliated out of the sport." In this light, the U of A's past success appears, at first, mysterious.

However, at the U of A no one is discouraged from participating. Moreover, the more comfortable atmosphere at the U of A has helped produce two national champion teams. O'Brien maintains she has "no advantage over other coaches in a technical way" but she is "enthusiastic." Consequently, one thinks that O'Brien's willingness to coach hard working gymnasts, regardless of their age, has created a desire to do well that other programs fail to develop.

The reasons for O'Brien's success, and the other program's failure, are complex. The basis for successful gymnasts is taught at a young age. According to O'Brien, young girls are taught as many skills as possible and trained for strength before puberty. After puberty gymnasts are not able to maintain the same strength to weight ratio because hormones encourage more body fat and water retention.

In addition, if a girl grows tall, she is considered too large for future success. The reasons for preferring small women are

partly aesthetic, but, as O'Brien states, there is also a "biomechanical decision." In other words there is a "clear physique" that potential top gymnasts have. Simply, the relative strength of a "small well trained person" is greater than a large person's.

It seems then that U of A gymnasts are at a serious disadvantage: they are too old and many are larger than the ideal. However, the Panda program proves that there is a place for everyone in a program that can compete with teams from Ontario. Ontario has what O'Brien terms an "incredible base" of clubs, coaches and facilities.

However, by the time they are eligible for university, many eastern gymnasts have finished with the sport. O'Brien says "kids from Ontario do not want to compete" and that "they have been turned off." Consequently, Ontario universities have fewer mature competitors. Also, some of the better ones are tired of competition. It seems that a program aimed solely at development of national team members and not development of competitors themselves results in an early dissatisfaction with the sport.

On the other hand, in Alberta, these problems are not large. O'Brien mentions that ex-Panda's Janice Dever and Peggy Bureaud had competed for years and that as a whole gymnasts here "are not finished with the sport" early. O'Brien says if people "show up regularly and work hard, I won't get rid of them."



photo Brad Keith

Thea Mackay of the National championship Pandas participates for winter competition.

Simply put, there is still a reward for remaining in competitive gymnastics.

O'Brien's and her team's love for the sport have paid off in other more visible ways. The Pandas recently have been contenders for the national title. Patricia McMillan, Thea Mackay, Janice Dever, Sandra Farley and Peggy Bureaud in the past have taken the team to the

top. However, O'Brien emphasizes that past success is based on the Panda's depth and ability to avoid injury. She states "we have good kids" lower in the standings "that win meets."

This year O'Brien is not optimistic about winning a national title. Bureaud, Farley, Dever and Cathy Mattock are gone. However, McMillan, Mackay, Carol Brinkhurst,

Audrey Gee, and Lillian Khattab will keep the team competitive.

Still, O'Brien is concerned about the declining level of competition here in relation to the East. In spite of this, she states "We have our job cut out" and "ability is a matter of time." In any case though, there are a number of new Pandas that should maintain the team's depth and perhaps be part of another national championship effort.

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