

UBC swimmers vow to stop rookie initiations

BY DOUGLAS QUAN

VANCOUVER (CUP)—The University of British Columbia's men's swim team has vowed to put a stop to rookie initiation activities after a team member complained the practical joking had gone too far.

The decision by the T-Birds, who won their second consecutive CIAU national championships last month, ends a tradition that has gone on for years despite the fact UBC Athletics condemns initiation activities.

The move comes about a month after head swim coach Tom Johnson called a team meeting to discuss a complaint lodged by a rookie teammate.

The teammate, who asked to remain anonymous, told *the Ubyssy*, UBC's student newspaper, that last January, veteran swimmers gathered the rookies to tell them they had ejaculated into a spaghetti dinner eaten by the freshmen during their 'rookie day' last fall.

"[The vets said], 'Do any of you remember the pot where the

spaghetti dinner was made was in the bathroom?'" the teammate said.

"When I found out, I was like, 'Oh my god, that's pretty disgusting.' That really flipped me

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out. It had an effect on my social environment. I went quiet. I was kind of mad. And I couldn't say anything."

But veteran swimmers insisted last week the incident never actually happened and that they were only joking.

They added that as soon as they heard from the coach that there had been a complaint, they went straight to the rookies to tell them it was just a joke and apologize.

"It was a practical joke we didn't think through," said team captain Greg Hamm.

The team then decided to abolish all its initiation rituals, including its unofficial rookie day.

While no members of the team contacted last week would say exactly what goes on during rookie day, they acknowledged "it was a day of drinking and running

around," and a day "to let the rookies know that they're rookies — a weird shaming."

But they also insisted that the events, aimed at bringing the team

together, were always controlled.

Still, for coach Johnson, one complaint was one too many.

"I think the opportunity presented itself for me to be able to say, 'Guys, as much as you think

you are getting this, you still don't really get this. This is not right."

Johnson added that since the incident he's been trying to find an expert who can come in and give the team sensitivity training.

Team members agreed they had gone too far and it was time to put an end to rookie day.

"Going into it, I was kind of bitter about giving up something that was a good tradition," said team member Jeremy Jaud. "But the more I reasoned with it, [the more I realized] humiliation was not one of the tools we needed [to build a strong team]."

But they added they're satisfied with the way the team dealt with the matter, and don't plan on penalizing it.

"It was handled properly, correctly," said Kim Gordon, UBC's co-ordinator of inter-university athletics.

Athletics director Bob Philip said he doesn't want to see behaviour similar to the practical joke played by the swim team. But he said it's difficult to deal with rookie initiation-type activities because of differing interpretations of the word hazing.

"We don't have a policy to ban them. The coaches don't want that, they don't want it going underground, they want it above ground as much as possible so they can control it," added Philip.

University of Calgary sociology professor Kevin Young, who has spent the last four years investigating socialization and identity in sport, says while teams will often deny any involvement in hazing, in reality, it still goes on.

"It continues to shock me that people involved in athletics comfortably rationalize this away as though it's acceptable and legitimate in the name of fun," he said. "It's clearly not."

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University athletics officials said the swim team's practical joke violated the school's Athlete's Code of Conduct, which prohibits behaviour that could be considered harassment, including comments that are degrading, hurtful or otherwise offensive, or which create an uncomfortable environment.

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