

Inside the System

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amount of athletic talent.

Some call it a natural talent. Others say it is God-given.

But success in the world of collegiate athletics isn't judged solely on one's natural ability to throw a ball or to run especially fast.

Sandra Kinoshita, an academic counselor and coordinator of multicultural programs in the NU athletic department, has spent the last seven years working with athletes.

After working at three different schools, Kinoshita said Nebraska's success in all sports comes down to one thing — the amount of time and money the athletic department spends to develop the players' natural talent to the fullest.

"It's the system," Kinoshita said. "Success depends on what the system as a whole can offer as far as resources, availability and visibility."

The main ingredient

Those at the top of the athletic department hierarchy know athletic success depends on much more than God-given ability.

Another 1,400 employees work part time — from two to 30 hours a week — as tutors, student managers, student workers, ticket-takers and concessions personnel, Fouraker said.

Overall, 1,600 people work on behalf of 700 athletes at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln — a more than 2 to 1 ratio.

By contrast, UNL has more than 12,000 faculty, staff and employees working to support more than 22,000 students outside the athletic department, according to figures obtained from Institutional Research and Planning.

That's a ratio of about 0.5 staff member for each student.

The whole athletic department has a budget of \$36 million, so more than \$50,000 is spent per athlete in the form of recruitment, medical treatment, staff salaries and other support, Byrne said.

The investment of staff and money has led to a program that promotes a philosophy of total support for each athlete.

The program is at the top of its class in many areas, Byrne said.

"We are clearly one of the best, if not

facility was one of the biggest, said Boyd Epley, director of athletic performance. It boasted a size bigger than Oklahoma's and Indiana's put together.

Today, schools across the nation are closing the gap with Nebraska, constructing facilities that are larger than Nebraska's 30,000-foot complex.

"As more and more schools spend more money, we've continued to lose our advantage," Epley said. "But we've forced a lot of schools to spend a lot of money."

Papik said so-called "upsets" of large sports powers by less supported schools proved the shift in emphasis is having an effect.

But, for the most part, schools that have the resources continue to dominate.

"If you look at who were the football superpowers 25 years ago, they are the same ones that exist today," Papik said. "It's been a success only to a degree."

The idea that student athletes need personal support was accompanied by the idea that football players aren't the only ones who should have it.

Beginning in the early 1990s, administrators in the athletic department began to recognize that all 24 sports at Nebraska deserved equal treatment.

More emphasis was put on the idea when Byrne began his tenure, Papik said.

"We decided we wanted to give every sport a chance to be successful competing at a national level and recruiting at a national level," Papik said.

The change in attitude meant the whole support system had to adjust to fit the needs of a variety of individual athletes.

Weight rooms started filling with swimmers and bowlers rather than just football players.

Two full-time nutritionists — one male and one female — were hired to monitor athletes' diets.

are "caught between a rock and a hard place" when trying to meet the demands of competing nationally.

It's important to be able to tell the coaches of Nebraska's 24 sports they will be the best-paid and have the best facilities, Papik said.

"You have to make the decisions that revolve around money," he said.

During his seven-year tenure, Byrne has been keenly aware of the importance of money in the success of the system.

"We decided we wanted to give every sport a chance to be successful competing at a national level and recruiting at a national level."

Al Papik

senior associate athletic director emeritus

Succeeding Bob Devaney as athletic director, Byrne said his style of running the organization is different from Devaney's.

"I have more of a business focus," Byrne said.

Byrne's business mind is evident when he talks about what the future of the Nebraska athletic department will be.

"We're trying to continue to invest in ourselves," he said. "As long as we do that, we'll continue to have a great program."

Epley agrees. Even though Nebraska

"Our philosophy is that great teams have great support. It has to be first-rate, or it won't be a first-rate program."

Bill Byrne

NU athletic director

As a result, a web of support services surrounds each athlete who plays for Nebraska.

The intricately constructed support team helps determine how much athletes eat, how much they lift, what classes they take, what career path they choose and what media personnel they speak to.

"Our philosophy is that great teams have great support," NU athletic director Bill Byrne said. "It has to be first-rate, or it won't be a first-rate program."

Roughly 200 employees work full-time in the department at jobs that, directly or indirectly, exist to support the athlete at Nebraska, said Gary Fouraker, associate

the best," Byrne said. "We are a leader in a number of areas and will continue to be."

Changing times

Byrne's recipe for success is one that has been around for only a decade.

Before the 1990s, support for athletes meant providing them with a scholarship that paid for their tuition, room, board, books and fees, said Al Papik, senior associate athletic director emeritus.

Student athletes were also provided with a small amount of "laundry money" they could use for incidental purposes.

Today, the definition of "athletic support" has been reshaped nationwide. Schools across the United States have constructed multi-million dollar complexes so athletes can eat, train, study and talk to career counselors all in one place.

The amount of support athletes get hasn't changed. But the form it comes in has, Papik said.

"Athletic departments are more concerned about students being able to compete athletically while competing academically and getting a degree," Papik said.

The NCAA was responsible for the shift.

By making schools spend more money on embedding life and academic skills in student athletes, the NCAA believed it could even the playing field between schools that had a lot of resources and others that didn't, Papik said.

Schools would have to cut back on the amount of scholarships and coaches to fund the increased support system.

But today, instead of working toward a level playing field, schools are viciously trying to create the best support system by outbuilding and out-buying each other.

When Nebraska first built the West Stadium Strength Complex in 1981, the

But most importantly, all student athletes felt empowered, whether they were a football player or a golfer.

"We make sure every team has total support," Byrne said. "We try to make sure that all teams are important."

Making it possible

Treating all teams equally and providing an extensive support system have introduced another necessity for Nebraska athletics in the 1990s — money.

Appropriately enough, one of the biggest changes the athletic department has seen during the last 10 years is the increased emphasis on the bottom line.

It's something that is met with mixed emotions by members — both past and present — of the athletic department.

"Some of us that are classified as 'old-timers' are disappointed that the decisions we need to make administratively revolve around money and what the spectators, fans and public demand," Papik said.

Epley feels differently. Living in a state with less resources than highly populated states, he sees the importance of finding the money to keep Nebraska's program at its current level.

"Nebraska's competed well," Epley said. "More fans, while they may not have the finances, have loyalty."

But for Nebraska to stay at the top, Epley said the department needs to find ways to finance a new building to house many aspects of the system.

"It's hard to predict the future, but I have a feeling a new building is critical to our ability to enhance our position nationally," Epley said.

While Papik is nostalgic for the days when the athletic department didn't focus so much on the money-making aspect of the department, he admits administrators

has one of the strongest fan bases around and recruits some of the most talented athletes, the future of the program will still depend on Nebraska outdoing other states in the buildings that facilitate the entire system.

"We don't have mountains, industry, wealthy donors or the population," Epley said.

"As a result, there are not a lot of resources to give us an advantage over other states.

"We need to rely on our facilities."

IN NEBRASKA A LOOK AT THE CORNHUSKER EMPIRE

DAY ONE	The System
DAY TWO	The All-Americans
DAY THREE	Athletes and their tutors
DAY FOUR	Learning Disabilities
DAY FIVE	The Sports Major
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DAY SEVEN	Isolation and Its Counterparts Athletes After Graduation The Social Scene for Athletes Athletes as Role Models A Day in the Life
DAY EIGHT	The Academic/ Athletic Tradeoff
DAY NINE	Gameday

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Boyd Epley

director of athletic performance

athletic director for business affairs.

Academic counselors, performance coaches, athletic trainers and administrators are all included in this number.