

Swim cut not fault of Title IX

Title IX found its way to Lincoln last weekend at the expense of the Nebraska men's swimming program.

The phrase "bound to happen" snuggles its way conveniently into this scenario. As budget constraints found their avenues of threatening NU's Athletic Department with cost overruns, or, even worse in Bill Byrne's eyes, the possibility of losing self-sustaining status, NU moved swiftly.

You know the outcome. It wasn't a pretty one with swimmers, parents and yes, even the state media casting less than a glowing eye toward Byrne's financial planning.

But another, disturbing by-product came out of Monday's press conference. It was the sense that Title IX, the law that guarantees opportunities for women athletes, was going to hamper NU's Athletic Department in cutting costs. In fact, as other coaches in men's gymnastics and tennis programs seemed to indicate in news stories, it would destroy their sports as well.

If an NU coach worries about his small sport, he ought to look elsewhere than Title IX for the blame.

Samuel McKewon

For all the times Byrne and others have touted women's athletics, he used Title IX as a hamstring Monday. It was cheap. He basically pitched that the women's swimming program would have been cut if it wouldn't have brought on a civil-rights lawsuit.

Let's consider those last three words. In the process of guaranteeing opportunities to women who attend institutions that receive federal funding, Title IX, which covers a whole lot more than sports, morphed into a civil-rights issue. It was signed into law by no less than the Nixon administration - not men of the Great Society or Kennedy idealism, but of a conservative stock. Its time had come years ago.

Title IX is imperfect. But it has led millions of women and girls to athletics. Before it, women's athletics were akin to sorority pastimes in college.

Starting with a lawsuit against Brown University in the early 1990s, Title IX gained some spurs. It put athletic department's feet to the fire, so to speak, in supplying women and men with equal opportunities and finances.

And since many schools have football programs that eat up funding and scholarships, the law requires college administrations to balance out the equity by offering more women's sports and scholarships.

It's not a trend. It's the law - a mostly good one. Had Nebraska dropped women's swimming, yes, it would have been sued. And, yes, it should have been.

How does a law achieve anything without enforcement? Is it Title IX's fault NU insists on running a football program? Is it the law's fault it doesn't take into account how much football "earns" for NU because, guess what, college athletics aren't supposed to be business?

If an NU coach worries about his small sports program losing funding, he ought to look elsewhere than Title IX for the blame.

He ought to point to football, a sport that claims it needs 85 scholarships when the NFL plays more games with 45 active players.

He ought to point to useless Devaney Center renovations, which haven't increased attendance or winning. He ought to point to Barry Collier's big, fat contract, which pays a boring man to play slow basketball.

He ought to point to an athletic support staff so large it has three or four marketing kids in the

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Gymnastics team worried about cuts

BY KRISTEN WATERS

Three days after Nebraska Athletic Director Bill Byrne announced that the men's swimming and diving teams would be cut, many are wondering what sport, if any, will be next to go as the Athletic Department tightens its collective belt.

Nebraska men's gymnastics Coach Francis Allen thinks he knows the answer to that.

"Unless something drastic happens in the next six years, men's college gymnastics is doomed," he said.

If men's gymnastics at Nebraska eventually disappears, it may be more because of the nationwide demise of the sport than a cost-saving measure by Byrne.

As school after school drops men's gymnastics to save money, it becomes more and more likely NU will follow suit.

"There are 22 men's gymnastics programs out there, and every year a few more go," Allen said. "This year it was James Madison and Michigan State that cut their programs for next year."

"If a few more schools go, it could become a landslide."

At a Monday afternoon press conference, Byrne said more schools were dropping sports to save money, particularly men's gymnastics.

"Expenses are out-racing resources, and people are looking for ways to cut," Byrne said. "The men's gymnastics championships has virtually become an all-comers

meet because there are so few teams."

Byrne denied any sport besides swimming and diving would be eliminated in the immediate future, but said it was hard to tell what would happen down the road.

"It's hard to speculate because I didn't know we'd have the increase in the budget bill that we had," Byrne said. "For us to continue to balance our budget is a must."

The men's gymnastics team lost approximately \$435,000 during the athletic department's last fiscal period, which ended June 30, 2001. The team cost the athletic department more money than all but three men's sports - baseball, track and cross country and wrestling were the top-three drains.

But those sports aren't in as much danger nationally as gymnastics is. It's this

specter of a national snuffing out of men's gym that has Allen worried.

"As long as there is representation from schools and competition between schools, there is a reason to keep it going," Francis said. "But if there is no competition, then there is nothing."

However, to the gymnasts, keeping the program running as others fold is still worth the cost. Because there are no professional gymnastics teams, college is one of the few ways gymnasts can compete at a higher level.

"I'd be furious if they took away gym," sophomore Jeff Kelly said. "Most of the guys out there have trained five days a week or more since they were 6. It's just not right to take that away."



David McGee/DN

LEFT: Buck Beltzer Field, which has been the home of Nebraska baseball for 22 years, is in its final season. The Huskers will be moving to its new stadium, Haymarket Park, either at the end of this season or the beginning of the 2002 season.

BELOW: Buck Beltzer Field's press box will be replaced by a larger, updated press box at Haymarket Park.

Buck stops after 2001 season

■ It may be Nebraska's worst facility, but the Cornhusker baseball team will still miss Buck Beltzer Field's charm.

BY JOHN GASKINS

In an open prairie field just west of the I-80 overpass that leads into downtown Lincoln lies the scaffolding of what will become the immaculate home of Nebraska baseball, Haymarket Park.

Lincoln residents, Husker fans and especially those within the budding program continue to rave about the new, \$32.6 million facility. The ambiance of a plush, mini-major-league ballpark with Memorial Stadium and the Lincoln skyline in the background is eagerly anticipated - a place for players and fans to be proud of. The palace of a new, powerful kingdom.

On the other side of that overpass, in the shadow of the awe-inspiring Memorial Stadium, lies the bastard child

of this powerful athletic department's facilities - NU baseball's current home, Buck Beltzer Field. A place that has all the ambiance and charm of a junkyard. The old dog will be put to rest after this season. When the Huskers and their fans say goodbye to the Buck this summer, they'll say goodbye to a place that had its own, er, charm and plenty of stories.

Granted, its mostly screwed-up charm and screwed-up stories. The Buck is better known for making several bloopers videos via a home run ball that smashed the window of a moving car than for any great game or quality.

But, for some reason, some Huskers will be a little sad to say goodbye.

"In a way, we will miss it," junior infielder Will Bolt said. "Any time you leave a field, it's a little bit sad. It's the only field we've known here, and we've had some good times and good success here."

Besides the familiarity, fan-friendliness and some memorable wins the last couple of years, it is hard to imagine what

there is to miss about the Buck - a place one local sports columnist said made the near College World Series-caliber Huskers look like "Pavarotti performing at the Royal Grove."

From the lovely view of the dirt mound, parking lot, energy plant and nearby trains behind the field, to potholes in the outfield caused by the football team, which practices there, to a ramshackle press box that is so rickety it shakes like an earthquake when the crowd goes wild, the Buck is more of a tortured battlefield than a baseball field.

Every ballpark has its trademarks. Fenway Park has the Green Monster. Wrigley Field has the ivy wall.

Buck Beltzer Field has "the bounce of the Buck." Besides the cold weather, it is what the Huskers consider their biggest home-field advantage.

"Our field is a unique case," eight-

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Basketball off season doesn't mean time off

BY BRIAN CHRISTOPHERSON

Nebraska basketball Coach Barry Collier lives a tidy existence, from his well-kept office to his clean-shaven face, which sits above his tucked-in dress shirt.

There is no surprise then that he runs a tidy, detailed "off-season" program. Players already have found out slacking off, even in late March, shows up like a dirt spot to Collier.

This March, it's lift, condition and an NCAA-allotted two hours of "highly intense" workouts under Collier's watch.

"(Collier) gives us choices," Cary Cochran, the Nebraska senior-to-be guard said. "You're not obligated to come in and work during the off-season, but you're also not obligated to be a part of this team next year, so you really are obligated."

Cochran likes it that way. He said it's different than it used to be under Coach Danny Nee of two seasons ago, a coach who really didn't make lifting weights and conditioning mandatory.

"My nature is to really work hard," Cochran said. "I believe in outworking people."

So does Collier. The Cochrans of the world are the type of players Collier embraces.

He needs players with work ethic because of NCAA regulations. Collier isn't granted much opportunity to see his players' off-season improvements until the magical first practice day. Collier dislikes this rule.

"In the off-season, it's as though the coaching staff goes into this dark room and comes out on Oct. 15 and sees how their team has improved," Collier said. "In the end, it falls on each player to make individual improvements."

However, Collier is still able to track lifting and conditioning with limited gym hours. Collier uses this time to the fullest.

Lifting is being especially targeted by Collier this off-season with the loss of Kimani Ffriend

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Improving tackling key in spring

BY DAVID DIEHL

It is said the Nebraska football team has a commitment to excellence, not to being average.

But average is how Nebraska Defensive Coordinator Craig Bohl rated his defense's tackling in last year's 10-2 campaign.

The sometimes-shoddy tackling has led NU coaches to make the fundamental a focus in the four weeks of this year's spring practice.

Overall, Bohl said he would give the tackling of last year's defense a 'C' grade.

"To play championship style defense, you can't be average," Bohl said. "We need to be excellent tacklers, and that's probably one of the biggest things we need to improve on and are addressing here in the spring."

The problem was more costly than allowing an extra yard here or a first down there, Bohl said.

"I think it was the difference between winning 12 games and 10 games," he said.

The tackling problems may have shown up on the scoreboard last season. Nebraska allowed 19.6 points per game, the highest average an NU defense had given up since 1958.

In its defense, the Blackshirts did replace eight starters from its 1999 squad. That included one of the best tacklers in Nebraska history, rover Mike Brown, who is second on all-time NU tackling charts.

This spring, NU returns nine defenders who started at least four games in 2000.

"Tackling was a problem for us," cornerback Keyou Craver



DN File Photo

Defensive Coordinator Craig Bohl says the Blackshirts need to recommit themselves to above-average tackling this spring and during the 2001 season.

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