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Budget axe aims at sports

Four may fall as money woes plague athletics

Ever since "intercollegiate" found its way into the jargon of athletic directors, athletic departments have been faced with financial difficulties.

Competition between schools costs money — for coaches, scholarships, equipment, administrators — at an ever-increasing rate.

A budget would be trimmed or a scholarship dropped, but as long as the revenues from football, basketball and television appearances continued to rise at least as fast as inflation, no one considered elimination of any sport.

Until now.

Faced with a \$375,000 budget deficit, the athletic department must make drastic changes. In order to alleviate the red in the balance books, Oregon might drop as many as four sports — two men's, two women's.

"The athletic department is \$375,000 in debt," says Athletic Director John Caine. "Obviously it is a real problem. It would be real nice if we could continue on as we are, but obviously we can't continue — we can't carry these burdens any longer."

"As I understand it, the problem is financial," says Acting University Pres. Paul Olum. "Exclusively financial and nothing else. Like everyone, I hate to see us cut any sport, major or minor."

"But the athletic department simply can't balance the budget the way it's going."

The burden isn't just on the athletic department, says Deputy Athletic Director Julie Carson. It's on the entire University. "The money just isn't there."

It isn't there for library books as well as training shoes and coaches' salaries.

But athletics, unlike the rest of the University, can't go to the Legislature for funds, Carson says. "We have to raise all the money we use."

And in the past, the Department of Intercollegiate Athletics has done just that. Football revenues last season, including television appearances and Oregon's share of the Rose Bowl, added \$2.8 million to the athletic budget. Basketball contributed about \$1 million more.

The rest of the \$5-million athletic budget has to come from donations and student fees. And that isn't increasing fast enough, Caine says.

So, the athletic department is back to square one. With 20 teams to support — 10 for men and 10 for women — an administrative staff to operate and equipment and facilities to maintain, the athletic department needs that money and then some.

"Since NCAA rules for Division I (universities) specify eight sports and the University has 10, there is a possibility of cutting two sports," Olum says. "I assume a corresponding thing would be done to the women."

"There's no doubt that you worry about something like this happening," says wrestling coach Ron Finley. "We don't want to see any program cut."



Fortunately for the students and coaches concerned, the search for an alternative to elimination is underway.

"All the coaches have agreed unanimously that we should continue with the present number of sports, that no sport should be cut," says men's swimming coach Rich Schleicher, a member of the coaches advisory committee.

The coaches, from football to basketball to golf, agree that no sport should be tossed out of the athletic department. But they are all aware just how limited the athletic department budget is.

Yet their suggestions will be unwelcome unless they save money, Olum says. "I've heard a rumor that some people thought we could get away without cutting any sports. If it were

For example, says Van Rossen, since the University of Houston cut swimming, it has been unable to gain the top caliber athletic program it wants.

"Instead of cutting sports to rectify the problem we should cut the budget to save sports," Schleicher says.

On the one hand Oregon has its Pac-10 and NCAA Division I membership, Olum says. "And a responsibility to do well in the sports we have."

On the other, a balanced budget and the athletic departments' debt. "None of us are happy about it," Olum says.

No one is at liberty to say what sports are being considered for the "axe."

"That decision is a little premature," Olum says. "A decision will be made within the next few weeks."

But obviously football and men's basketball are the "untouchables,"

letic department — cut no sports, cut the budget instead, says Schleicher.

And the faculty's intercollegiate advisory committee is awaiting word from the athletic department on its recommendations, says committee member Paul Swadener, an associate professor of finance.

At this point no one has seen or made any final decision, Caine says.

But a decision needs to be made before women's letter of intent day (March 2), says Carson. "We need to know by then if we do have to cut a sport or two, so we can tell our athletes, coaches and other schools."

Carson is hoping for at least two weeks to notify all parties concerned, but as March rapidly approaches, that may be impossible.

"Everyone is understandably disappointed about the turn of affairs," Carson says. "Oregon has one of the top programs in the country."

"It is almost with disbelief that we approach this point."

The disbelief has struck especially hard in sports in which Oregon is traditionally strong.

Oregon's sixth-ranked wrestling team first came under budget-cutting scrutiny last year, along with the fourth-ranked men's gymnastic program and the top-caliber women's gymnastic program. This year, scrutiny has extended to baseball and softball.

"The one thing that we've really got going for us is that we're a real Oregon sport," Finley says. "Every high school in the state has a wrestling program."

The hardest thing for Oregon to overcome will be the rumors, Finley says. "Once rumors start they really fly. Even if no sports are cut, someone will always believe sports are under the axe."

Right now, nobody knows which sports, if any, will go. And if anyone does know, he or she isn't talking.

Eventually the three advisory committees will make their recommendations, Caine will make his recommendation and Acting University Pres. Paul Olum will make a decision.

Until then, "We're scrambling hard to save sports," says Carson.

"We should know what will happen by the end of the week. At least I hope we'll know."

'Once rumors start they really fly. Even if no sports are cut, someone will always believe sports are under the axe.'

anything but money, though."

Finley, like other coaches, is especially worried about the effect a sport cut will have on the athletic department and the University overall.

"Oregon is a tremendous sports school," Finley says. "If we cut sports we'll lose athletes. If we lose athletes we'll lose students — and the University will probably lose more (money) than the sport costs."

The loss in tuition revenue is only one argument the coaches are using to advance the cause of saving athletics.

The cost of the cuts to the athletic department and to the University in terms of donations should also be considered, Finley says.

"Those schools that have cut sports immediately hurt the pride of their alums," says Donald Van Rossen, former Duck men's swimming coach and a member of the NCAA's swimming and diving committee for the past 14 years.

"Oregon State alums are backing our (swimming) program because OSU dropped theirs," Van Rossen says. "People don't forget those things. And they don't forgive."

says Carson. Other than that, no one is guessing.

"There are a lot of factors that have to be taken into consideration," Carson says. "Golf obviously is a small, inexpensive program — the same with tennis. Very little money is spent there. Swimming also receives minimal funds."

So golf and tennis and swimming are not "under the axe."

For the men's program, the only costs of the three programs are the coaches. The sports raise the rest of their funds.

And the women are considering a fund-raising model since the men's fund-raising program is so successful, Carson says.

Three sports gone from the list for women, five for men.

Track and cross country, while low-revenue sports, are high in prestige, she says. And "soccer is an investment in the future. It's a sport that has captured the American youth."

Everything else, from secretary to adhesive tape costs, is under scrutiny.

The coaches advisory committee has made its recommendations to the ath-

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