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As February rapidly approaches March and winter draws to a close, the athletic department is threatening to close up shop on four sports.

The budget axe, which was staved off last spring, is poised again. Four sports — men's and women's gymnastics plus men's and women's swimming—were recommended for elimination by Athletic Director John Caine last Thursday.

Basically, sports are being cut

to save money — a \$375,000 deficit to be exact. "Drastic measures had to be taken," says Caine.

But up to this point nothing is final.

First, the cut proposal must face scrutiny from the Intercollegiate Athletic Committee, which will review all proposals before making any recommendation.

Second, the committees recommendation must be approved by Acting University Pres. Paul Olum.

Faced with strong opposition from student athletes and the coaching staff, which voted unanimously to maintain all sports, the proposal may not make it through the committee intact.

At least that is what can be hoped.

While it is easy to sympathize with Caine's desire to balance the budget, it is not essential that the cuts come from sports designed to serve students.

It must be remembered that the University is here to serve all students, even if they also are athletes.

Unfortunately, that ideal often gets lost in the bureaucratic shuffle.

"We don't accomplish anything by eliminating the students we are trying to serve," says Bill Ballester, gymnastic coach and coaches committee representative.

The coaches have recommended budget and scholar-

ship reductions rather than eliminate programs. And, since every coach has agreed to the proposal, it would work.

Caine has already indicated the \$197,000 that must still be chopped might come from programs other than the four that face the noose. "We may very well have to get into the sacred sports before we're done," Caine says.

The elimination of the four sports would save about \$200,000 dollars from the budget, provided the University refused to honor scholarship commitments next year.

But the University's policy in the past has been to honor scholarship commitments for one year if the sport is dropped and the athlete chooses to continue their education at the University.

"Our whole University is in trouble," says Ballester. "There is a real need to tighten up. But we need to keep sight of why we are here — to serve students."

Obviously, no one has all the answers. The coaches' proposal offers an alternative to cutting any sports. The athletic department proposal is more realistic in Caine's estimation, though. And the final proposal has yet to be drafted.

When that final proposal does reach Olum's office, it should reflect the view of both groups. But more importantly, it should reflect the view of the people it will effect the most — students.

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