

Deal with Bay keeps soccer at home

Club team banned from national championship tournament



Less than a year ago, the women's soccer club finished sixth in the nation in competition sponsored by the Association of Intercollegiate Athletics for Women (AIAW).

This year, the club tries to not even think about going to nationals again. It's not because the women aren't as good, or because of a lack of funds.

It's because an agreement made last year with athletic director Rick Bay which allowed the team to go to nationals last year on the condition that they didn't ask again this year.

It was another case of a short term benefit turning into a long term headache for a program which faced its share of hardships off the field while finding success on the pitch the past few years.

Two years ago, women's soccer became a varsity sport within the athletic department at Oregon. But it was cut from the athletic department last season, along with three other sports, because of lack of funds.

As a club, it was a part of the Northwest Collegiate Soccer Conference (NCSC) and the AIAW. But, the NCSC ruled that no club sport would be allowed to compete in the conference because wins over club teams did not count for as many points in the standings as wins over varsity teams.

The women were left with only one alternative — the AIAW. The AIAW, however, will not allow a club to participate at nationals unless they are certified by the intercollegiate athletic department, and the women were good enough to have to worry about it.

The club raised its own funds for the trip and approached Bay with their plea to allow them to go. Bay consented, because the club was just dropped as a varsity sport. But he made an agreement with soccer coach, Manfred Tschan and captain, Therese Bottomly, that the club would not ask again this year.

But the whole team was not made aware of this agreement. The coach and captain are gone and have left the new coach, the club sports coordinator, and Bay with a lot of loose ends.

"It (banning nationals) came as such a shock to us, especially after we went to nationals last year," says goalkeeper, Lori Kats (pictured above), who found about the agreement only a month ago. "It was a real let down."

This year, the club is in a new predicament. The AIAW has virtually folded because of budget cuts and the move of women's programs into the NCAA, according to Chris Voelz, assistant athletic director. Now, only a handful of teams compete in the AIAW.

The women's soccer club has followed suit and joined the NCAA. The athletic department is again held responsible if the club goes to nationals. The women must again receive certification from the athletic department and also abide by the NCAA rules.

The reason for Bay's decision to not support the soccer club is more complex than it may appear at first glance.

"I'm reluctant to take responsibility of a sport I don't control," says Bay. "All of my athletes and coaches deal with rules every day. The coaches take tests from the Pac-10. We have meetings where we cover these things. There are all these checks and balances."

"The problem is, the women's soccer coach doesn't answer to me and they may not know the rules. Even when you know the rules you can violate them."

This year's soccer coach, Tom Ebelew, realizes the predicament of the athletic department. "The way it stands, the whole athletic department could be put on probation," he says. But "the potential benefits outweigh the risks. It seems to me that what is happening is the risk is so slight when weighed with the chance of having a national championship."

Aside from the real issue, there was the problem of lack of communication

between the coaches, captain and players. Club sports coordinator Sandy Vaughn was involved with the agreement.

"Last year, I approached Rick Bay with the inquiry and agreed I would not approach him again for soccer or any other club sport for nationals. I have held to my promise. I made it very clear to some players and they were to make the others aware."

This year's team captain, Patty DeVito, says she was told about the agreement on the bus on the way to nationals, but says everyone was supposed to be informed before the agreement was made.

"The coach and captain probably felt we would agree anyway because we fought so hard to go last year," says DeVito. The club held car washes and other fund raising activities to raise the money to go.

conference.

"We've decreased somewhat in size," says DeVito. "But skill-wise, we are just as good and I know we could be competitive with the East Coast."

The principle involved, however, is what is important in this case, according to Ebelew.

"We would like to compete the best we can without putting pressure on the athletic department," says Ebelew. "The problem is that athletics and club sports are run by two different departments. The athletic department doesn't want to mix with us. We are in a strange relation."

Bay says he sees the potential of the womens' club.

"I know they are good enough and want to play in a national competition," says Bay. "But I can't jeopardize the whole program for that. I have enough trouble keeping the 16 sports I have in

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Other players, like Kats, didn't find out until this year.

There have also been rumblings in the community. Many of the soccer players and their parents have sent letters and made phone calls, all to no avail, according to Vaughn.

"I have requested the team not to bother Rick Bay, but they want to find out on their own," says Vaughn. "If I tell them something, I'm only giving advice — I cannot dictate. Students are very idealistic and these students are pursuing something they believe in."

Whether the club could do as well as last year is debatable to some. It has lost a few players after the ruling and the NCAA is a more competitive

line."

The fall of the AIAW and Bay's decision not to support club sports does not affect the other clubs.

Men's soccer, for instance, competes in the Oregon Intercollegiate Soccer Association.

The ski teams can compete in either the NCAA or the NCSA (Northwest Collegiate Ski Association).

Neither team has confronted the athletic department because they prefer to compete in the NCSA over the NCAA, according to former coach Dick Lindsay.

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Photo by David Kao**