

Sidelines Staff

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Cuts in athletics mean cuts in the big image

The Oregon athletic department is on the edge. Announcements have been made mirroring the effects of the recently-defeated ASUO ballot measure that asked for increased student funding. In brief, the department is facing a \$400,000 shortfall.

Wielding the budget-cutting axe was athletic director Bill Byrne. You can bet his job had increased in difficulty in recent weeks. It seemed that cutting some "minor" sports was the first, and most likely, option.

"Minor" in this case means ones that don't generate substantive revenue for the department. These are programs characterized by relatively small budgets that, for example, force careful management of scholarship monies.

In essence, full-ride scholarships are rare and coaches must painstakingly divide their resources among the greatest number of athletes possible.

From the Sidelines

by Joe Arndt & Dennis Fernandes

These are, in fact, programs run on a shoestring. Possible eliminations of any of these programs — tennis, softball, gymnastics, swimming or wrestling, perhaps — are frustrating. These are programs that are presently building or already are traditionally successful. These sports have produced a handful of NCAA championship-caliber athletes in the past school year.

But that's not the sole reason to mourn their possible demise. By dropping these sports, the University loses a bit of the tradition of Oregon athletics, and this tradition affects the entire institution. I'm talking about the big picture.

There is no doubt that the basis of the University's reputation is its academics. We'd be fooling ourselves to think otherwise. But the association of this school as Ducks, as in Oregon Ducks, is predominantly one promoted through our athletics.

Believe it, people identify schools with what they see and hear about them. I'm talking athletics and academics. And a school's athletic programs are dominant, undeniable tools for constructing a university's public image.

Athletics, however provide a window for those who otherwise would not have contact with the University.

When the expansiveness of a school's image-enhancer, like athletics, is lessened, there will be a negative effect. It won't be sudden but rather eventual. It may not be immediately recognized, but it will influence others in various, intangible ways. It may not even be measurable, but it will be there.

These losses wouldn't matter as much if our athletic department was misusing funds or embroiled in a scandal of some sort. I'm amazed at what these athletic programs, supported mainly through private donations and ticket revenues, achieve for this school.

It's so much more than victories and championship trophies.

Acknowledging the athletic department's ballot measure defeat, the majority of those who voted have their own priorities for where money should be spent. But I argue that a well-funded athletic department — and not a lavishly funded one as some think it may be — that attracts the widest and most diverse attention pays dividends beyond casual evaluation.

Think about it.

The Trailblazer experiment is over, and it was unsuccessful.

Sentiments aside, I sincerely feel that Dr. Jack Ramsay, Portland's 62-year-old head coach, should resign and let someone else give the Blazers a shot in the arm for a while.

This was to be the season when the team would "gel" after a trying experience last year, which netted a disappointing 42-40 record. The team's gelling process was composed of a 12-game losing streak, two talented but unhappy off-guards, the Darnell Valentine trade and the loss of center Sam Bowie.

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