

## Curling, golf to be added as 'self-funded' varsity sports

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While the University of Alberta has added students and buildings at an unyielding pace over the last decade, the number of athletic teams that the school's fielded has remained relatively constant. Only women's rugby, tennis and women's hockey have been added in the past ten years.

Compared to that sluggish expansion, next season is going to seem like an explosion of growth for Alberta athletics as both men's and women's golf and curling join the Bears and Pandas family, bringing the total number of Alberta teams to 25.

However, as a result of a new policy adopted by the department of Athletics in November and approved by the Physical Education and Recreation's Faculty Council in February, neither of these new sports will receive direct funding from the University. That's because the new policy has divided athletics teams into three categories: core funded, minimally funded and self-funded, with both golf and curling falling into the last category.

"It's safe to say that any new teams that we bring on would be in that non-funded category," Alberta athletics director Dale Schulha said. "[Golf and curling] are there now, and there's nothing to say they couldn't become core-funded programs, but we would have to be in a financial position to move them to that situation."

While the addition of curling as a sport has been expected for two years since the CIS announced it would become a national championship sport beginning in 2007/08, the addition of golf was unexpected. According to Schulha, the existence of a combined college-university Canadian open championship and its willingness to become a self-funded program made the decision an easier one for the Athletics Department.

"We've had proposals from both of them, especially golf, for the last couple of years," he said. "For us to accept them, they've had to come forward and give us their program plan [and] their budget plan, and they'll have to generate their own dollars."

"But we will provide them minimal administrative support," Schulha

added. "Obviously we have to run our eligibility [checks], and if they were any scholarships and awards, we'd have to run that through our office."

In addition to golf and curling, the only sports not to be included in the core-funding category are the women's rugby and tennis programs—both of which are minimally funded. However, as Schulha is quick to note, none of the 17 teams the Athletics Department categorizes as core-funded can be called fully funded. University funding covers only what is needed to allow teams to meet their Canada West and CIS commitments. The teams themselves must cover through fundraising extras (or extended budget items), like non-conference travel, special equipment and extra meal money on the road.

"Right now, we're not in a financial position to move anyone else into core-funded; in an ideal world we'd have all of our teams in that position," Schulha said. "We'd also have core and extended budgets together and say that's what it costs us to run our program and allocate all that funding, but we're not there."

### ALBERTA'S THREE-TIER SYSTEM

Tier one sports include basketball, volleyball, football, ice hockey, field hockey, wrestling, cross-country, track and field, soccer and swimming. They must be CIS championship sports, nationally competitive and have strong alumni and community support. The University

covers all Canada West and CIS commitments for these teams.

cost. They must also be either be CIS or NAIA championship sports.

Tier two sports are rugby and tennis. These teams must come up with some of their funding on their own, but the University will cover some of the team's

Third tier sports are self-funded and include golf and curling. These sports must have a postsecondary championship and secure additional competition.

### Self-funding the way to go for new sports



NICK FROST

Sports Commentary

While it took many years, and much prodding from the teams involved, the University of Alberta Athletics Department has finally decided to bring men's and women's golf and curling into the fold to compete under the Bears and Pandas monikers. With the announcement also came the decision that the two new programs would have to fund themselves. This means various fundraisers and drives in order to cover not only various team expenses—out-of-province travel, accommodations, etc—but also their commitments at both conference and national events. For other teams, these would generally be covered by financial assistance from their university. In an ideal situation, it would, obviously, be nice to be able to share at least some of the wealth amongst all of our varsity clubs; however, because some programs are indisputably stronger and provide more of a reputation to the University than others, it's only fair that the new guys get the short end of the stick when it comes

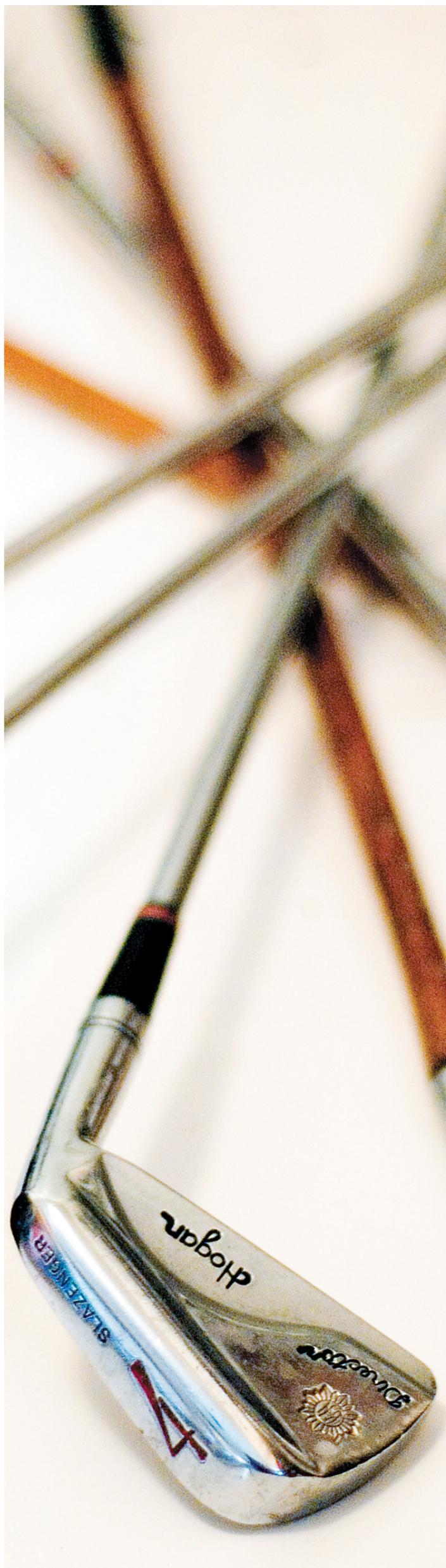
to receiving money from the Athletics Department.

For either team to receive any money from the University, funding would have to be removed from other programs. The concern here is that the high profile squads—more specifically, Alberta's numerous championship-winning basketball, hockey, soccer and volleyball teams—would see reduced funding and in turn reduced performance in order to accommodate the upstarts. Removing funding from the various teams that already have an established presence in both the Canada West conference, and in the national rankings—close to or at the top of the CIS on a seemingly annual basis—only serves as a step back for Alberta. The guarantee of having money would probably make the smaller, lesser-known programs more prepared for success, but it wouldn't necessarily make them more popular than they currently are, or show results for a few years, and so there's no real immediate benefit to providing these teams with money, especially not at the expense of the teams that combined for five national medals this year.

Looking long-term, it even seems doubtful that any of what the Athletics Department has dubbed "self-funded" teams would be able to make a substantial enough impact that would convince the higher-ups to provide

them with any sort of funding. For example, despite winning championship after championship in the last near-decade, the women's rugby team—added in 1999—is still not fully funded, lacking among other things, a full-time coach employed by the University. Even though the team has had an extremely high success rate, their exploits have garnered little attention and haven't really done anything drastic for the Alberta athletics program. And because they've already hit the highest echelon of success in their particular sport, yet still haven't received any funding for it, it's unlikely to think anything they could potentially do in the future would give the Athletics Department a significant enough reason to provide them with further funding.

Despite all this talk of money, though, having curling and golf on board can only make Alberta's athletic arsenal stronger. While some may look at these two particular sports and consider them somewhat-fringe sports in comparison to more popular varsity options—or, at least, look at them and wonder who's really going to care either way how either team performs—it's important to remember that by becoming varsity teams, the four teams will have much more support than they would have as club teams—even if it's not in a monetary sense.



FILEPHOTO: TARA STIEGLITZ

**NOW MORE THAN A CLUB** Starting in 2007/08, golf will be a varsity sport at the U of A instead of club. Of course, they'll still have to fund themselves.