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Varsity Reds teams feel the blues as six sports programs get the axe

Women's hockey one of UNB squads demoted to position of competitive club

TONY VON RICHTER
The Brunswickan (UNB)

FREDERICTON—The University of New Brunswick's sporting landscape will look quite different next season, as the Varsity Reds announced last week that six teams—men's and women's cross-country, men's and women's wrestling, men's swimming, and women's hockey—have been stripped of varsity status. Beginning next season, they will be classified as "competitive sports clubs."

The announcement came as a shock to most individuals involved with these programs, though UNB athletic director Kevin Dickie said the process leading up to this decision has been going on for the past 14 months.

In a statement for the press, Dickie argued that "many universities are investing more time, money, and human resources in fewer varsity teams. If UNB is to remain a strong competitor and if our varsity teams are to continue to excel, we must adapt to the changing environment and adjust our current varsity athletics program."

The handling of the announcement has been widely criticized, as the teams losing their varsity status weren't told until after the press release had already been distributed to the media.

"Officially, nothing was ever told to us," said Terri Ryerson, goaltender for the women's hockey team. "Kevin Dickie neglected to say anything [prior to the announcement]."

Some, including swimming coach Paula Crutcher, were never personally informed. Instead, says Crutcher, she found out on the radio on Thursday morning.

"I do not feel that we have had much support from the athletic department at all."

CHERYL HAMILTON
 FORMER REDS HOCKEY CAPTAIN

According to Terry Haggerty, Dean of Kinesiology, the decision to cut teams was based upon a ranking of the Reds teams on 14 different criteria including things like funding, fan support, and performance. He added that the Varsity Reds expect to save about \$150 000 per year with this decision.

The decision was made in part because of what Kevin Dickie referred to as "minimal" effect on the teams, since, with the exception of women's hockey, the student athletes would still be able to compete in the AUS and CIS.

"Every time we go through it, we're going through, 'How does this affect the student athletes or the coaches? What can we do that doesn't affect them as bad?' We've been able to find a way for cross-country runners that are excellent to be able to compete; we've found

a way for the men's swimming team to still be able to continue at the AUS and CIS level, even though that club means that they have to engage their alumni to do scholarships themselves.

"We've thought about everything to minimize the impact."

Despite Dickie's contention that the effect will be minimal, many student athletes and coaches are unsure about what the future will hold.

This decision effectively ends women's hockey at UNB, as the team's budget was over \$100 000 this past season. The drastic cutback in funding, combined with the fact that without varsity status the team can't compete in the AUS, leaves the women's hockey team with no money, no competition, and no place to play.

"I do not feel that we have had much support from the athletic department at all. No attendance at our games, not even a 'good job' or 'nice try' when seeing someone from the department," said Cheryl Hamilton, a former captain of the team.

The timing of the decision also leaves players unable to apply to transfer to a different school.

"We feel that because Kevin [Dickie] left this so late, he wasted a lot individuals' time. Had we known even months previous that there were going to be cuts, we probably could have realized that there was a good chance that we would be cut," Ryerson said. "I feel that had he told us, we would have been able to prepare for it."

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