

The Chairman's Corner - May 2013

By Jon Blank

UNC-Wilmington's varsity swimming and diving program may be on the chopping block, if UNC-W Chancellor Gary Miller and UNC-W Board of Trustees heed a recent Intercollegiate Athletics Review Committee recommendation. What a detriment to the sport of swimming, particularly after recent decisions at Clemson and Maryland led to the loss of varsity swimming and diving for those institutions!



Sports is big business. This will come as no surprise to anyone who has succumbed to March Madness, or to anyone who follows NCAA football. The business of sport has been a matter of public inquiry since the time of Theodore Roosevelt. Indeed, Roosevelt's impetus ultimately led to the formation of the NCAA, ostensibly to regulate sports as a part of campus life. Yet, now the NCAA and its member conferences are powerful monopolies, courted by titans of industry and mass media, with economic impact measured in billions of dollars.

In today's world of bottom-line athletics, there is a clear distinction between "revenue" sports, (essentially men's football and men's basketball), and their lesser "non-revenue" siblings. The bread-and-circus mentality of collegiate leadership seems to have abandoned the goal of scholar-athlete recognition for a more mercantile (perhaps mercenary) one. Simply put, rather than viewing varsity athletics as character-building, laudable enhancements to collegiate life, athletic directors, presidents, and trustees look to sports merely as revenue enhancers.

UNC-Wilmington men's swimmers have had the most successful program on campus for at least a dozen years, as 12 consecutive CAA championships and a fistful of Olympic Trials qualifiers prove. The women's program is nearly as successful, with several CAA championships and Trials qualifiers. The Seahawks' academic success is as compelling - ten swimmers have won the University's highest scholar-athlete award since 1991; over thirty earned degrees with honors, and over 200 have achieved to the Dean's List in the past decade. Scholar-athletes indeed on the UNC-Wilmington swimming and diving squad! And THIS is a program recommended for extinction?

Swimming is an expensive sport. It's not the tech suits and goggles that constitute the expense, though. Building competitive pools is a huge capital investment, and pool maintenance is also costly. That is likely the reason that, in recent years, swimming is one of the two sports most frequently dropped from NCAA women's athletic rosters. Yes, you read that right: despite the significant contribution to gender disparity, now at a 57 : 43 male : female imbalance, women's swimming is one of the two most frequently disenrolled from intercollegiate athletics. The NCAA admits that Title IX noncompliance is largely due to the size of football rosters. (ncaa.org, September 2012). Anyone who can swim knows that, unlike football, swimming is a lifelong sport. If our institutions of higher learning recognized the overall benefits, there would be no issue. But dollars drive decisions, and "revenue sports" are so yclept for a reason. Swimmers, divers, tracksters, and golfers are learning the hard way the real goal of intercollegiate athletics: dollars.

Unconscionable. I urge NC Masters athletes to join a petition to save UNC-W swimming: join over 13000 like-minded supporters at <https://www.change.org/petitions/uncw-chancellor-gary-miller-save-uncw->

swimming-and-diving.

Help save intercollegiate swimming. The next generation of Masters Swimmers will thank you.