



*With the cost of
intercollegiate
athletics
skyrocketing,
administrators are
taking a hard look
at minor sports.*

FOOTBALL, BASKETBALL, and Who Cares?

By Steve Shinn

Some refer to them as minor sports. Others say non-revenue sports. And sometimes they're identified as those sports besides football and basketball.

Athletic director Mel Sheehan doesn't like any of the terms. He thinks track, baseball, wrestling, tennis, golf, and swimming are integral parts of Mizzou's intercollegiate athletic program for men. But he can't think of a positive term for them, either. And he is aware that minor sports are becoming a major problem.

Most of the problem centers around money. College athletics are increasingly expensive. Many schools are showing deficits. Administrators throughout the land are looking at ways to cut costs. Some of these efforts are concentrating on football. Big Eight schools generally aren't interested in further cuts in the football program. After all, the Big Eight may be the premier football conference in the nation. Football makes money. Why kill the goose that lays the golden egg? In the Big Eight, university administrators are hoping to increase revenue—a postseason basketball tourney, an intercollegiate spring football game—and to reduce expenses in the sports “other than football and basketball.”

Mizzou's athletics still are in good shape financially. The department

generates and spends a \$3 million budget. And there is still something left for the contingency fund. "Right now," says Sheehan, "we can afford what we're doing."

What we are doing amounts to spending more than \$350,000 on minor sports. That includes coaching salaries, recruiting costs, scholarships, and team travel. It does not include some other expenses

NO ADMISSION IS CHARGED FOR MINOR SPORTS. But few fans attend the events at Mizzou.

charged to the department's business office budget. What we're not doing is winning consistently or attracting substantial student/alumni/fan interest.

Tennis, a Horatio Tiger success story, won its first championship in history this year. Cross country tied for first. Indoor track and baseball last won in '65, outdoor track in '51, golf in '49. Swimming and wrestling never have won a championship, and Mizzou does not field a gymnastics team.

The Alumni Association's Athletic Committee talked about the non-revenue sports situation at its meeting in April. Like the vast majority of Mizzou alumni, the committee's primary interest is football—and, next, basketball. Then, some members would need to have the rules of the other sports explained. But the committee generally agreed that minor sports should be supported to the extent that they could generate interest, or pride, or some of their own revenue. Otherwise, perhaps they should be phased out.

Johnny Wooden, UCLA's legendary basketball coach said upon his retirement last spring that intercollegiate sports were played "for others." He meant, apparently, for the fans, the alumni, students—and some faculty—who lived vicariously through their teams, who felt a pride in their teams, who found an emotional satisfaction in the contest. Yet, no non-revenue sport draws sizeable crowds at Mizzou, even though admission is not charged.

Since becoming athletic director in 1972, Sheehan—a former track star as well as a grid standout—has put increased emphasis on minor sports. He has

hired a full-time wrestling coach. A part-time assistant swimming coach is being sought—partly in response to the swimming team's petitioning that head coach Joe Goldfarb—also part-time—be removed.

He brought in Bill Price as a part-time tennis coach. Price, 60, is nationally known as a developer of tennis talent. He came to Columbia as the pro of a private tennis club. He left that job, but Sheehan believes he can induce Price to stay as the Tiger coach. There are plans to continue upgrading Mizzou tennis. A canvas bubble will be built over the new Hearn Building tennis courts, making them a year-round facility that can be rented to students, faculty, and townspeople. A similar plan at Tennessee has made its tennis program nearly self-supporting. There also are plans for a summer tennis clinic to be run by Price. Certainly, tennis—one of the hottest sports commodities in the nation—is on the move in Tigerland—if that's important.

Sheehan also points to his department's educational function. It's as valid, he says, for a Jack Gorsuch—Mizzou's nationally ranked net star—to work to be a professional tennis player as it is for graduate students to study in some esoteric field in engineering. Sheehan believes, too, that a state university has a responsibility to the high schools of the state. That's why he urges his coaches to sponsor clinics and workshops for high school coaches.

The NCAA requires that a university field teams in at least six sports to be a member of that organization. But they don't have to be the eight sports Missouri has. The NCAA recognizes lacrosse, hockey, rugby, soccer, and fencing—to mention a few. What about fielding a soccer team, for example? Mizzou already has Faurot Field, and in Missouri soccer has a greater participant, spectator and recruiting potential than some of the sports Mizzou already has. Now, baseball is over before the season really gets started. How can a Tiger golf team practice in February? Now, Missouri high schools simply don't produce enough quality swimmers and wrestlers to give Mizzou a recruiting base.

Sheehan concedes all this. He acknowledges that there may be valid reasons for making changes. But he feels he was hired to win an all-sports championship based on what we have. He does not intend, in the words of Winston Churchill, to preside over the dissolution of the empire. □