

# Fall 2014 Third Prize Essay

## DUQUESNE CUTS SPORTS PROGRAMS

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Growing up, youngsters always have dreams of playing sports through high school, in college and at the professional level. This dream of playing a collegiate sport may have been taken away from some students at Duquesne University when the men's wrestling, swimming, golf and baseball programs were eliminated in 2010 in order to focus on a core group of sports and maximize funding. This was a decision made by the University, and the Title IX sporting amendment influenced the decision. Title IX involves creating equal scholarship opportunities for women, and Duquesne has gone above and beyond that ("Requirements Under...1972"). At the University, there are now only six men's sports programs and 10 women's sports programs. I am not contending that having more women's sports than men's is a problem. However, I contend that the university should explore the possibility of reinstating the four eliminated sports, resulting in 10 men's programs and 10 women's programs. If spending can be equalized, this arrangement would be legal under the Title IX Amendment. As long as no additional men's programs are added to the athletic department, Duquesne will not face legal action in dealing with the Title IX Amendment in the future. There have been many changes at Duquesne University since 2010. If the University couldn't support 20 sports programs in 2010, that doesn't mean they can't support them now. There are a number of creative ways the University can raise money to reinstate these programs. The decision to cut four sports programs to generate more money for the remaining sports was very controversial. By reinstating the eliminated sports, Duquesne would offer additional scholarship opportunities for men, and would give students who played these sports through high school the opportunity to continue playing the sports they love at the collegiate level. There are various ways to raise money to support these four sports including fundraisers, sponsorships, sports camps, a slight increase in ticket prices, and a reduction in the amount of money spent on the remaining sports programs.

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Duquesne chose to cut men's wrestling, swimming, golf, and baseball in 2010. There were various factors that went into this decision, but the main factor involved optimizing financial resources. According to the Athletic Director, Greg Amodio, this was done to start "Focusing on and strengthening a core group of sports and maximize our ability to compete at the highest level, enhance the student athlete experience, and better utilize existing funding" ("Changes in Varsity Sports...Excellence"). Nearly 70 student athletes were affected by this move, as well as four full-time coaches and one part-time coach ("Changes in Varsity Sports...Excellence"). Amodio went on to say, "This action is in no way meant to diminish the dedication, effort or ability of these fine student athletes, coaches and alumni. They have

contributed greatly to Duquesne athletics and to the vitality and history of the University” (“Changes in Varsity Sports...Excellence”).

The move to cut these sports will reallocate one million dollars annually throughout the athletic program (“Changes in Varsity Sports...Excellence”). The Title IX sporting amendment is not what caused this move, contrary to what many people believe, but it did factor into the decision. The Title IX sports amendment is an amendment that strives to create equal scholarship and financial support for women, based on the enrollment of women at the school (“Requirements Under...1972”). According to Associate Athletic Director, Philip Raciot, the current gender enrollment at Duquesne is made up of 60% female and 40% male (Email Interview). At this time, because of the Title IX Amendment, a women’s sport could not be cut to create more money for other sporting programs. Mr. Raciot went on to say that would violate the amendment, unless it was counterbalanced with a proportionate number of opportunities and scholarships for women (Email Interview).

The four men’s sports, namely golf, baseball, wrestling, and swimming should be reinstated at Duquesne University. Unfortunately, the athletic department decided to focus on certain programs, causing some athletes at Duquesne to give up the sport they love. Duquesne offers some of these sports at the club level, but it is simply not the same level of competition. I played golf throughout high school, and really would have loved to play golf here at the Division 1 level. I play on the club team, but the level of play is not the same level of competitiveness, and as a result, is not taken as seriously. Duquesne is a great school with strong academics and a beautiful campus. I passed up Division 1 offers from Robert Morris and Ohio University, to come to Duquesne. Unfortunately, the sport I am interested in playing was eliminated by the University. According to Athletic Director Greg Amodio, this was done in order to focus on a core group of sports and ensure that they could compete at the highest level possible (“Changes in Varsity Sports...Excellence”). However, this plan has really not worked. The football team, unlike the basketball team, still does not compete at the highest Division 1 level in college football. The records of the team are starting to improve, but their play is still not at the “highest level”. The best year for the football Dukes since the sports were cut was 2011 when they went 9-2 and made the post season play-offs (“Duquesne Football Archive”). The following three years were a different story. The team did not qualify for post season play in any of those three years. Another of the sports programs that was a core focus after the cuts was the men’s basketball team. The team has not made the NCAA tournament since 1977, and they have not shown significant improvement since 2010 (“Men’s Basketball”). Since there has not been significant improvement, and since the team is still not getting better recruits who can lead the team to the NCAA tournament, I contend it’s time to reconsider the possibility of reinstating of men’s wrestling, swimming, golf, and baseball.

If there isn’t enough money to support 20 sports teams here at the University, perhaps it is time to start raising money in different, more creative ways. Cutting four sports programs, taking the jobs of coaches and depriving students the opportunity to play the sport they love was a drastic step. One way to generate money to support the reinstatement of these four programs is to create a series of fundraisers. Interested parties, especially alumni and previous athletes, working with the University, could set up various fundraisers to generate revenue to save these sports. There are people, especially alumni, that were upset by these cuts and want these sports reinstated at the University. This could be a positive and profitable venture for Duquesne Athletics. Another idea for a fundraiser would be for the athletic department to hold camps, such as a baseball camp, for young athletes in the summer. This would be a great way to make money, and also interact with young athletes and teach them to play various sports. Getting these youngsters on campus might also make them want to attend Duquesne when it’s time for them to decide on a college. Approaching the regional corporate community for sponsorships and using

part of the proceeds from these sponsorships on advertisements for the camp would be a great way to publicize the camp and, at the same time, raise large amounts of money through the sponsorships. If the athletic department charged each participant around 300 dollars for a full week of camp, and the camp attracted between 200 and 300 participants, that would generate a profit of approximately \$70,000 after the money spent on paying the instructors, facility use, and food are factored in. According to Philip Raciot, Associate Athletic Director, the golf team, for example, costs around \$120,000 a year to maintain (Email Interview). With a successful one week camp, the athletic department would already be halfway there in covering the sport for a year. According to Mr. Raciot, four million dollars would need to be raised before the University would consider reinstating these programs. Corporate sponsorships, alumni donations, fundraising efforts, and camps have the potential to generate that money over time.

I would also support a slight increase in ticket prices for events held here at Duquesne as a way for the Athletic Department to raise additional funds. The AJ Palumbo center holds 4,406 people ("A.J. Palumbo Center") and if 3,000 people attend a basketball game a ticket price increase of \$3.00-\$4.00 can yield an additional \$9,000-\$12,000 per game. With all of the men's and women's home games, this would generate substantial revenue. The same is true with the football games and all other revenue generating sporting events. Just a \$3.00 - \$4.00 increase in these prices would generate substantial additional funds for the Athletic Department. With these funds, over time, the University will be able to support the four programs. The athletic department is also allocating large amounts of money to the football and basketball programs. If they scale this back a bit, and utilize a portion of the funds they are currently putting into these programs for the reinstatement of the four programs that were cut, that could also be a way of generating the necessary money to reintroduce men's wrestling, swimming, golf, and baseball.

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One school that also had to cut sports in order to gain funds for their other programs was the University of California. The university cut five sports programs and these included the men's rugby, women's lacrosse, women's gymnastics, men's baseball, and men's swimming ("Cal preserves...teams"). Campus officials at Cal said that the men's rugby and the women's lacrosse and gymnastics team fundraised aggressively and raised between 12 and 13 million dollars. This would cover the costs of having these sports at the university for 7 to 10 years, and they have actually reinstated these sports at the University ("Cal preserves...teams"). This success story hints that it is possible for Duquesne to make this happen. If Duquesne fundraises cleverly, and raises money for these programs in a variety of ways, these sports can be back at the University. If the four sports at the University of California can raise between 12 and 13 million dollars, it seems reasonable that Duquesne can raise at least one million dollars. Even if just one million dollars is raised through fundraising efforts, that would be enough to reinstate these programs at the school for the time being. The programs must raise enough money to be supported for at least four years. With that being said, according to Associate Athletic Director, Philip Raciot, around four million dollars raised through fundraising and contributions is going to be necessary for the University to consider the reinstatement of such programs (Email Interview). If the programs do get reinstated, fundraising and endowments will have to continue to support these programs into perpetuity.

Some people may argue that it will not be possible for Duquesne to bring these sports back. They might contend that fundraisers cannot raise enough money, and that fans of Duquesne sports would be upset if the ticket prices are raised. I totally disagree with these arguments. Back in 2010 when all these

sports were a part of the University, the sports programs were performing nearly as well as they are now. The basketball team went 16-15 and didn't make the NCAA tournament, and the team has also failed to do so after these programs were cut. In the words of student, Jake Hareza, "I hate the fact that I can't play baseball here at Duquesne. The school is great, it would be perfect if I could still be playing baseball. The sporting programs were not elite back in 2010, nor are they now, so I believe the University should bring the sports back, and focus on building strong programs doing it the right way, not simply taking the opportunities away from many athletes" (Personal Interview). Some people may also argue that the golf team was not very good in 2010, so why reinstate it. That is completely unfair. If a program is not doing well, it doesn't mean that it deserves to be completely eliminated from the school's athletic program. The team could hire a new coach, increase their recruiting efforts, and turn the program around in just a couple of years. Another argument that some people may raise would be that club sports are offered for two of the sports that were cut. Indeed, golf and baseball are offered at the club level, but they're not close to being on the same level of the sports that are offered at the Division 1 level. Matt McKim, my teammate on the club golf team said, "Club golf is honestly so laid back. It is kind of a joke to be honest. Everyone goes out the night before the tournaments and shows up the next day really unprepared. High school golf was more competitive to be honest" (Personal Interview). I totally agree with Matt's contention. Playing golf at the club level is definitely fun, but it is not competitive at all and really does not provide the same level of experience as playing college golf. There is not a designated coach for the team, and our idea of practice is going to Schenley Park and playing six holes. Fundamentals of the game are not kept sharp, and it is really hard to take the tournaments seriously because you are not playing for anything. If these sports are reinstated, I am sure there will be many people who are pleased and in agreement. There will also be people who disagree with the move, and the arguments above are some that I believe people will raise.

In 2010, Duquesne decided to cut men's golf, baseball, wrestling, and swimming from the University's Athletic Program in order to generate more money for a core group of programs including football and basketball. Title IX also came into play as only men's programs could be cut. No women's programs were cut because equal scholarship opportunities and funding have to be present for women. I totally disagree with the move by Duquesne to cut these sports because it takes away many partial scholarships for men, which in turn, costs the University a number of students. My solution for this situation is to reinstate these sports at the University and find alternate and innovative ways to raise money. The University could hold athletic fundraisers, approach the regional corporate community for sponsorships, and get former athletes and alumni involved. The programs could utilize summer camps that would teach youngsters how to play these sports and expose them to the Duquesne campus. Also a slight increase in ticket prices may be another option. I believe this would be a viable solution, because if you are a true Duquesne sports fan, you will be willing to pay a couple extra dollars to watch the team you love play. Arguments such as that the school offers these sports at the club level will arise, but the club level is not comparable to the Division 1 level. The level of play and competitiveness is lacking, and the club sports are simply not intense enough to provide the competitive experience you are accustomed to while playing these sports. Bringing these sports back to Duquesne may be difficult, but through fundraisers and various money-making schemes, it is definitely possible to make this happen.

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