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Club sports & news

Teams sweat off the field

By: Max Sills

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A Frisbee is plucked from the air. An oar cuts sharply into still water. These are not the activities of idle students, trying to steal a little leisure before the next panic attack. These are club sports: student-run organizations, which rely on the commitment of their members to stay alive. Club sports are growing rapidly on college campuses across the nation. They serve those students left in the wide gap between the more piecemeal intramural sports, and the demanding realities of varsity.

Club sports here act like small states. Each organization drafts its own constitution and elects its own officers. These officers become delegates to the monthly meetings of the Sport Club Council, which rotates leadership each month. In addition to being chartered by the council, some clubs are also involved with their respective national groups, like the Ultimate Player's Association for Frisbee, or the Collegiate Hockey Association for hockey. The council offers extensive leadership training and community outreach; it's hard to go a month without a presentation on ethics or an inter-club effort like the "martial arts film night," co-sponsored by Taekwondo and the Film Society.

Like any state, the rise and fall of a sport depends on the efforts of its citizens. For the 20-plus years they've been on campus, club sports have come to life and been mercilessly snuffed out by student interest. Clubs are responsible for recruiting their own members, and doing their own fundraising. They are allotted supplemental funds based on what associate athletic and club sports director Pat Kennedy calls "goal-oriented budgeting." As in, how many recruits does a club think it can get this year? Will it need cash to travel?

Kennedy said club sports "provide an opportunity to have a more structured competitive experience" than intramurals, but clubs are not necessarily incentivized to win. They are incentivized to care. With yearly membership fees upwards of two hundred dollars for some sports (though some clubs are as cheap as ten), members have to care. Some clubs pay for equipment, practice time, and instructors. They get a base income from USG and the Athletic Department, but it's up to each club to earn its keep.

Jessica Schneider, the president of the crew club, understands this struggle too well. She commends the efforts of the athletic department, but believes funds dispensed for varsity t-shirts and pizza at meetings could be better spent. She recently spent 12 hours selling beer at a Browns game to help fund her sport.

"While they're eating pizza, I'm serving beer to a drunk man whose making comments about my chest," Schneider said.

But thanks to Schneider and her teammates' herculean fundraising (over \$11,000 last year), the club has just enough income to stay afloat.

There are benefits to being in a club. Being a member gives you "practical experience in organizational management," said Kennedy.

At the very least, you own a piece of your activity. It's one thing to resuscitate a plastic dummy for gym credit, and another thing entirely to argue for the existence of a sport, to fight for its funding, to rally new members, and to define the parameters of your success. If a frisbee is plucked from the air, it is plucked because a passionate, motivated student is paying precious time and money to be there and pluck it.

FYI

Crew: "The Head of the Cuyahoga Rowing Regatta." 11 a.m., Saturday. Boats start at W. 3rd street.

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