

# Consistent overspending causes Athletic Department controversy

Dylan Scott  
For The Post

As controversy about athletic spending has swirled around campus, one question has been repeatedly raised: Is the financial toll of a Division I-A athletic program worth its benefit to Ohio University?

On one side, the faculty has voiced its concerns that President Roderick McDavis and his administration favor athletics over academics. Discontent

has grown as colleges have faced budget cuts while athletics has consistently overspent its budget. Many have said OU should hold a serious conversation about dropping to Division I-AA or lower.

On the other side, the administration and supporters of the Athletic Department have stressed the importance of athletics to the college experience. They have also asserted that Division I-A status offers unparalleled advantages in raising OU's national profile while attracting students and donors.

McDavis has said he is committed to remaining a Division I-A program. And many top donors have said they will reconsider giving to the university if OU leaves Division I-A.

"I would argue that the athletic program has been chronically underfunded relative to its importance to the university. I believe that participation in and attendance at intercollegiate athletic events is as much a part of the university experience as the classroom experience," said Perry Sook, who has donated \$56,500 to athletics and about

\$81,547 to academics.

On paper, however, athletics has dug a \$7.5 million budget hole since 2005, one-third of OU's structural deficit. The Bobcats expect to make less than \$4 million in revenue this year while spending almost \$19 million. The rest of their funds will come from general fee and general fund support.

Joe McLaughlin, president of Faculty Senate, said he is primarily concerned with the burden on the university's checkbook.

See **ATHLETICS**, Page 3

WWW.THEPOST.OHIOU.EDU

THURSDAY, APRIL 29, 2010 **3**

## ATHLETICS

Continued from Page 1

"It's very frustrating to hear the rhetoric of strategic priorities," he said, referring to OU's mission of promoting intellectual and personal development in students, "and then to see the reality of budgetary decisions."

Ohio's tax on students for athletics ranks fourth in the country for Division I-A programs and third in the Mid-American Conference. The MAC, as a whole, averages the most student fee support out of 11 Division I-A conferences.

Each student pays about \$1,500 each year in general fees, which fund the majority of the athletic department's budget. About \$650 of each student's fee is funneled to athletics, more than 40 percent of the total pool.

The General Fee Advisory Committee, which consists of six members of student government and three at-large appointees, makes recommendations every year to McDavis about how the money should be spent.

In its report for the 2011 budget, the committee placed athletics fourth on its list of priorities, behind the Division of Student Affairs, the Office of the Provost and the Office of Diversity,

Access and Equity. The committee also said OU should remain a Division I-A program.

"We listen to students," McDavis said.

However, athletics' piece of the general fee pie dwarfed the allotments to other programs this year, including the three priorities listed above the department.

Sook and other top donors to the Bobcats said OU must remain Division I-A. Each of them said they would seriously reconsider giving to athletics if the department dropped to I-AA or lower.

Joe Sutton, a 1969 graduate and former Bobcat tight end, said, "All the research that's done in the departments ... is essential to the university, but they don't publicize the university outside of Athens and that area."

"I live in Houston, Texas. I don't hear a single thing about it," he said.

Alan Riedel, class of 1952, and Sook, class of 1980, agreed with Sutton about athletics' ability to advertise OU. Each alumnus also challenged the idea that a Division I-A program could be a strain on the university when its intangible benefits for OU are considered.

Riedel, who retired as the vice chairman of Cooper Industries after 34 years

with the company, has given about \$370,000 to athletics and almost \$1 million to academics.

Sutton, a retired Army colonel, was an executive at Enron and was named in the employees' class action lawsuit after the company collapsed. His donations, which began while he was employed at Enron, amount to almost \$200,000 to athletics and about \$20,000 to academics.

"I have no comment about Enron except to say it was a good company and a lot of very good and talented people worked there," said Sutton, who served as a vice chairman. He sold \$42 million in shares upon his resignation, one year before Enron fell apart.

The donors also highlighted the tradition of Division I-A sports at OU and athletics' role in keeping alumni connected to the university.

"Everybody loves to throw on the green and white sweatshirt," Sutton said. "It's a pride thing."

This year, student attendance at the six home football games averaged about 4,200 in Peden Stadium, which has a capacity of 24,000, although one game was played after students went home for winter break. At 17 men's basketball games in The Convo, with its capacity of 13,000, about 750 usu-

ally came. Five of those games also occurred during winter break.

Total attendance averaged 15,621 for football and 3,649 for men's basketball.

McDavis also said that moments of athletic excellence, such as the Bobcats' trips to the Little Caesars Pizza Bowl and the men's basketball national championship tournament this year, are an essential aspect of campus life.

Those postseason appearances serve as major advertising opportunities for OU.

When the Bobcats fell to Marshall in the Little Caesars Pizza Bowl in December, almost four million viewers watched on ESPN. OU football appeared on ESPN's family of networks five other times last year.

About 10 million viewers saw OU upset Georgetown in the first round of the NCAA basketball tournament in March, and several Bobcats graced the covers of the next day's *USA Today* under the headline "Upsets rattle the brackets."

However, the football team's two trips to bowl games since 2007 have cost the athletic department \$500,000 in unplanned expenses and it is still unknown how much the basketball team's trip to the NCAA tournament will cost OU.

*The Chronicle of Higher Education* has reported that about 95 percent of Division I-A athletic departments have an annual deficit and rely on student fee support. The only exceptions are top-tier Bowl Championship Series schools, such as Ohio State, that bring in enough revenue to finance themselves.

College sports have come under scrutiny in recent years because of a perceived "arms race" in spending.

The main reason for the trend is competition for head football and basketball coaches and athletic directors, which has rapidly driven up salaries. Football head coach Frank Solich made \$90,000 more than his predecessor, Brian Knorr. Athletics Director Jim Schaus earned about \$50,000 more than the man he replaced, Kirby Hocutt. Men's basketball coach John Groce received \$10,000 more than his forerunner and recently signed a contract extension increasing his yearly guaranteed compensation by \$50,000.

Athletics spending has risen by \$6 million since 2005, reflecting this trend. At the same time, athletics has received about \$650,000 annually in donations during the last five years.