

## Are athletics at Guilford College the weakest link?

Karim Ali

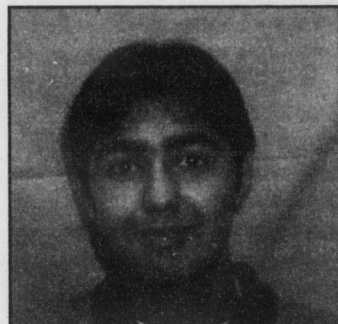
Staff Writer

Listening to NPR as I was driving back from work, I heard news about Iraq, the U.S.-Congress and Guilford College athletics. Jordan Snipe's 86-foot buzzer beater has popularized Guilford College athletics throughout the world.

However, sports are denied the limelight at Guilford. Athletes often complain about small crowds at games. Playing tennis as a first-year, I also felt a lack of support from my friends.

In my experience, there were many times when the home bleachers had more fans from the opposing team than from Guilford.

Even now, according to Sports Information Director Dave Walters, mid-week games soccer games only have 30 to 50 fans and road football games have larger crowds than do Guilford home



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games. With student enrollment at an all time-high, sports attendance seems to be at an all-time low.

Many people, including Golf Coach Jack Jensen, place blame on poor performances for poor attendance.

"People like winners," said Jensen. "People don't want to be associated with failure."

Performance serves well as an indicator of attendance for women's basketball. In 1998-99 when the team was 12-13, attendance was 130 on average.

In 1999-00 when the team was 19-17, attendance was 145. And in 2000-01 when the team won its first division title and was

undefeated in the conference, attendance jumped to 247.

However, such comparisons explain less about lower attendances in the case of football. The team's record in both 2000 and 2004 was 1-9.

Despite a two-fold increase in the student body, college population being 2511 in 2004 and 1255 in 2000, games played this season attracted fewer fans than games played four years ago.

Assistant Women's Basketball and Head Cross-Country Coach Scott Smith, provides other reasons as to why Guilford teams attract fewer crowds.

He believes that schools that have an active fraternity scene draw more support than schools such as Guilford, where no fraternities exist. I agree. Inter-fraternity competition, where fraternities compete to see who can bring the largest and noisiest fans to the stands, does boost attendance.

Smith also points out that being in the heart of ACC championships and with several division I schools nearby, many Guilford fans are detracted by higher-profile games going on at other schools.

Additionally, being a largely academic institution, sports at Guilford often find antagonistic sentiments. However, athletes competing at the Division III level at Guilford College are no different than any other student.

They receive no sports scholarships. They are not playing sports to go to school. They are going to school and enjoy-



INSLEE HACKETT/GUILFORDIAN

**Possibly as a result of consecutive 1-9 seasons, attendance has been low at Quaker football games, even at the traditionally well-attended homecoming game.**

ing sports as extracurricular activities. Where it may be true at other places, Guilford jocks ain't dumb.

According to Walters, 93 student-athletes have GPAs over 3.0, and five of the 16 teams have team GPAs over 3.0. Twelve have GPAs over 2.68.

Furthermore, 26 percent of the traditional student body plays a varsity sport.

Given that, Guilford students need to support their classmates who happen to play sports.

Sports attendance at Guilford is needed to pump athletes. Although good crowds seldom mean the difference between a win and a loss, vociferous fans contribute to team spirit. They enhance school spirit, and provide true home court advantage.

I, like Walters, believe that sports attendance is no different than attending any other college-sponsored event, be it a choir performance, a drama presentation, or a Bryan Series lecture.

Games provide ways of involving with the community and knowing what is going on at Guilford. They are a time to exchange conversation, ideas and fellowship.

If you enjoy being a part of the college, than attending games is a good way to come and meet with people that feel the same.

If you are a sports fan, you should attend games because school spirit is important to you, you like a good contest, and because you feel a sense of allegiance to both Guilford and Sports.

If you are not the biggest sports fan, you should attend games for the event, the opportunity to fellowship with friends, and enjoying the experience of being a fan. If the event is outdoors, such as a baseball game, you should attend to enjoy a nice day outside and socialize.

You don't have to play a sport to cheer in Guilford stands. You don't have to play basketball to enjoy a good game. Plus by attending you may get to witness momentous occasions like the recent overtime buzzer-defying victory.

Why would you want to miss that?%



MAGGIE BAMBERG/THE GUILFORDIAN

**Nearly empty bleachers at Armfield Athletic center during a football game.**