

Future of Spring Sports: Another Viewpoint

By Barney Pannell

Spring sports at Mars Hill College have been much maligned in the past. However, according to the college's athletic department, improvements have been made even though problems still exist.

The charges that have been leveled at the athletic department include lack of financial support, practice time and field availability, publicity by the yearbook and athletic banquets, and no full time coaches.

In spite of this stiff criticism, athletic director Claude Gibson is optimistic about the future of spring sports at Mars Hill. The lack of scholarships is a pivotal point in the comments made concerning the tennis, baseball, and track teams. Gibson stated that he repeatedly recommends additional funds be appropriated for spring sports in each year's budget request but has been turned down. The one year that additional funds were available was the year that Title IX of the Higher Education Act became law and women's sports were given the extra funds.

In comparing Mars Hill's spring sports program to other schools comparable in size and budget to Mars Hill — including Southern Atlantic Conference (SAC) schools and some other basketball rivals — both Gibson and college president Dr. Fred B. Bentley admit that Mars Hill trails 60% of the schools mentioned. Of the ten schools considered, eight give scholarship support to baseball, three award scholarships in track, and six award scholarships in tennis.

At Mars Hill, two-thirds of the total athletic budget is spent on football and basketball, with the remaining third is divided among tennis, track, and baseball. The football team receives 22 scholarships, the basketball team awards seven (women's sports award seven also), and men's spring sports has none.

An additional reason for the lack of support for spring sports is, according to Gibson, the weather. Judging from

the amount of events cancelled by bad weather, only four to five weeks exist with acceptable conditions for competition. One solution that was mentioned to this problem is to schedule the first half of the season at schools where the weather is less severe and playing the remaining portion of the season at home in better weather. This has been done to some extent with the baseball team's trek to several deep south states during spring break.

Another crucial problem is the lack of full time coaches. Each coach for a spring sport is also a football coach, and spring is the time of year that they have to recruit new players and supervise spring practice. The teams involved in spring sports usually end up practicing on their own, and as one player state, "we aren't as hard on ourselves as a coach would be."

An alternative to this problem is to invite interested and experienced people to volunteer their time and help. Bill Atwill, who owns Mountain Sports in Mars Hill, is an example of this. He has been working with the track team and his help is greatly appreciated.

Other improvements for the spring sports team include new practice fields on the area beside Fox Residence Hall which will relieve the use of the baseball field by the football team during spring practice. The new field will also be used by the women's softball team for practice. In addition the main gymnasium floor of Chambers Gym will be rescheduled to allow the spring sports teams to have a place to practice during bad weather. The tennis team has been practicing occasionally at the Asheville Racquet Club, but this has proven to be expensive.

The Laurel's support of spring sports will be improving. Because of the annuals' early deadlines, spring sports have received poor coverage and have even been left out of the annual in past years. This will change with the 1979 Laurel which will feature the 1978 spring sport teams in the yearbook, the support by the Laurel for spring sports will improve.

Mars Hill letter jackets were given to the senior basketball and football players last year while the seniors participating in spring sports were not given jackets. The money that paid for those jackets came from a donation, and yet it was an insufficient amount to buy jackets for all the seniors in every sport. But this year and in the future, according to Gibson, the seniors in each sport will receive letter jackets.

To provide an opportunity for athletes in all sports (men's and women's) to be publicly recognized, an annual athletic banquet has been proposed. In the past, private dinners or backyard cookouts have been held for the spring sports teams, where — at times

— team awards have been presented. At an annual banquet, all of the college's athletes can be given equal public recognition, which will improve the public support of all Mars Hill College sports.

In conclusion, even though there are problems in the present spring sports situation, many improvements have come about because of the changing attitudes of the athletic department and the administration. Spring sports are not getting a "bum deal," they are just not being emphasized. Needed changes will occur when the emphasis shifts to equality in all sports. That will happen when more people get involved.



The track meet of April 27th against Milligan shows Bob Eddins in recent competition. Photo by John Marshall.



Pictured is the MHC Stage Band, which performed in the cafeteria successfully. Photo by Archie Jones.