

The Other Wildcats

Student-Athletes on UNH's 30 Sport Club Teams Play with Heart, and Win

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Representatives of the University's thriving and diverse club sports scene gather at the wildcat sculpture.

National champions. Regional gold medal-winners. Second-best player in the U.S.

Wildcat competitors are no strangers to success, but these accolades don't always go to the varsity athletes one might assume. Rather, student-athletes on some of UNH's 30 intercollegiate sport club teams attained these honors, among others.

Teams in the sport club program compete with all the focus, personal sacrifice, and camaraderie as their varsity counterparts, running the stairs of the Whittemore Center at 6 a.m., taking to the ice when their classmates are shutting their books for the evening, plying the pre-dawn Oyster River in sleek rowing shells.

“A lot of people think of club sports as glorified intramurals,” says Brett Berger '07, assistant coach of the club hockey team that won the American Collegiate Hockey Association national championship in March. “It’s a lot more than that. It’s a huge commitment for all the kids and the coaches as well.”



Many sport club athletes devote 20 hours each week to team practices and individual fitness; weekends are packed with games and tournaments, often involving lengthy road trips. Even Ultimate Frisbee rises above its laid-back reputation. “It’s not a casual lawn sport. We take it very seriously,” says men’s co-captain Johnson Whippie '15.

More than 1,200 students participate in sport clubs each year, says Brian Scott, Campus Recreation assistant director in charge of sport clubs, who oversees the \$450,000 program with a two-person staff. Offerings range from the familiar (hockey, lacrosse, baseball, rowing) to the exotic (competitive rock climbing, synchronized skating, woodsmen team). A few teams, such as skiing and snowboarding, are primarily recreational, while others are highly competitive.

For the hockey team, which taps a deep pool of hockey-crazed students for its roster, “the expectation every year is to go to nationals and to win nationals,” says Berger, who played on the team during his undergraduate days.



EARLY MORNING MIST ACCOMPANIES THE ROWING TEAM DURING A TRAINING SESSION ON THE OYSTER RIVER.

“At the collegiate level, rowing isn’t one of those sports you can do recreationally,” says Rachel Rawlinson ’99, head coach of the men’s and women’s rowing team, which practices on and off the water year-round and is, say the rowers, every bit as intense as a varsity team.

“Because we’re a club program competing against Division III programs, we know we have to bring a lot of fight to the table,” says Kelsey Swalwell ’14, coxswain for the men’s varsity eight. The club’s women’s four won a gold medal last weekend at the New England Regional Rowing Championships, beating out better-funded varsity teams.

Each sport club team is required to raise half its budget, with the other half coming from Campus Recreation. Most participants pay dues, and teams raise money with personal appeals, fundraising events such as the work weekends, and more creative projects: the Ultimate team cleans up the stands after football games; rowers assist with swim meets at Swazey pool. Some coaches receive stipends; many are “volunteers who are addicted to the sport and really want to give back,” says Scott.

Scott is justifiably proud of the winning records of the sport club teams. Baseball, softball, men’s lacrosse and fencing are among the clubs with standout seasons. Two students on the UNH Woodsmen team – graduate student Trevor Beaudry and Kendall Edmondson ’14 – chopped their way to top honors at that sport’s spring meet, and golf team captain CJ Konkowski ’15 took second place in the National Collegiate Club Golf Association’s fall national championship in November.

Yet Scott is quick to add that winning, as the cliché goes, isn’t everything. “The way we measure success isn’t necessarily competitive,” he says. “It’s getting students participating and having a good experience.” Calling the UNH program very student-driven, Scott focuses heavily on developing leadership skills among the students who assume captain roles.

“We make the attendance policies, we make the decisions about who’s on the team, we schedule meeting times,” says Ultimate’s Whippie. “If we’re doing a sprint because we aren’t playing well, that’s my decision or my co-captain’s decision.”

Rower Taygra Longstaff '15 adds that her sport club experience has taught her about much more than rowing. "Being on the team has given me skills for life: dealing with adversity, challenges, pushing myself."



CLUB SPORTS TYPICALLY SERVES AROUND 1,200 STUDENT-ATHLETES.

And more than winning or competing, sport clubs are about lasting friendships, says Scott and the student-athletes. Bonding on long minivan rides to tournaments, early-morning and late-night practices, and team chants and songs make their sport club experiences the pinnacles of their UNH careers.

"Alumni don't remember who was in their English class, but they remember who they rowed with, who they played hockey with," Scott says.

Swalwell, the coxswain, echoes Scott. "UNH rowing has given me everything important in my life."

[Learn more](#) about the 30 UNH sport club teams.

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