

SPORTS AT HARVARD: ATHLETICS FOR ALL

With eight Marshall Scholars and four Rhodes Scholars (see story, page 3), the Harvard Class of 1998 has continued the extraordinary academic achievements of recent Harvard classes. But the fall of 1997 was also marked by unprecedented athletic successes: the women's soccer team went to the third round of the NCAA tournament before losing 1-0 to the eventual national champion; women's volleyball was undefeated in the Ivy league, and had an overall record of 25-9; and football had its best season in Ivy League history, going 7-0 in the League and 9-1 overall.

As wonderful as these achievements are, they are not the main objective of our athletic program, which is run for the benefit of our students as one of many educational activities that occur outside the classroom. Athletes at Harvard are no more a separate category of students than are the singers, instrumentalists, actors, journalists, or poets who add so much to our community through their extraordinary talents.

Harvard sponsors 41 varsity sports --- 21 men's and 20 women's. These are the largest number of sports, and the largest number of women's sports, offered at any NCAA Division I institution in the country. In sponsoring such a broadly-based program, Harvard seeks to teach and to maintain traditional values of sportsmanship: teamwork, grace in defeat, and humility in victory (see Mission of the Athletic Department, below). Our coaches are teachers and are evaluated for the lessons they teach, not simply for the win-loss records they achieve.

The roots of American intercollegiate athletics are in our history: the first intercollegiate contest of any kind was the Harvard-Yale crew race in 1852, and Harvard played in the first intercollegiate ice hockey game a hundred years ago this winter. While Harvard's victory in the Rose Bowl in 1920 will not be repeated anytime soon, Harvard has won national championships in major sports in recent years, such as men's ice hockey in 1989, and women's lacrosse in 1990. Harvard's dominance in men's and women's squash has been virtually unchallenged. Eight Harvard athletes competed in the 1996 Olympic games. These successes are especially remarkable since Harvard does not award athletic scholarships, and many of our varsity athletes chose to come to Harvard with financial aid awards (if any) based only on their need, rather than to accept the athletic scholarships they were offered by other institutions.

Harvard's athletic program has long operated under the oversight of a student-faculty committee, the Faculty Standing Committee on Athletic Sports, whose very name suggests its antiquity. This committee ensures that the athletic program supports and respects the best interests of our students. It has also monitored the changes at Harvard and in the athletic world and provided guidance to the development of our programs. For example, the Athletic Department has reported biannually to the Standing Committee on the status of women's athletics for more than twenty years --- starting well before Title IX became a household word in college athletics.

We have just completed a lengthy self-study of our intercollegiate athletic program, part of the process through which it will be reviewed for accreditation by the NCAA. (For those with Web access, the report can be found at http://www.harvard.edu/ncaa_self_study.) The self-study was carried out by four subcommittees, chaired by members of the faculty Standing Committee and studying academic integrity, fiscal integrity, governance and compliance with rules, and commitment to equity. The study finds Harvard to be in full compliance with all relevant standards, and the report itself contains a number of interesting statistics about the unusual nature of our program. For example, participants in varsity athletics graduate at the same rate as the student body at large: 97%, an extremely high rate by any measure.

In keeping with our philosophy of "athletics for all students," Harvard supports a wide variety of athletic activities in addition to its extensive varsity program. There are a number of JV teams providing opportunities for intercollegiate competition for students who cannot or wish not to compete at the varsity level. Twenty-nine club sports, from Aikido to Ultimate Frisbee, are supervised by the Athletic Department. Some of them, such as rugby for both men and women, have large numbers of participants and considerable traditions of their own. The program of intramural competition between the Houses and in the Freshman Yard is healthy; visit any House dining hall and you will find notices for inter-House competitions open to all students. In addition, students participate in many recreational classes and individual fitness activities. Indeed, while the broad interest in athletic activities is a source of pride and satisfaction for Harvard, it also presents us with a major challenge: to provide adequate facilities for all who wish to make use of them. The strain on our physical resources for intercollegiate athletes and for students who are simply working out to keep fit is a constant concern and an important priority as we plan for the future.

=====
MISSION OF THE DEPARTMENT OF ATHLETICS

The Department of Athletics is committed to providing "Athletics for All Students." Competitive and recreational athletics are an integral part of the educational process and experience. Students should have opportunities to participate and compete as appropriate to their interests and skills.

Harvard values the lessons that have long been taught by athletic participation: the pursuit of excellence through personal development and teamwork; ethical and responsible behavior on the field and off; adherence to the spirit of rules as well as to their letter; leadership and strength of character; and sportsmanship --- including respect for one's opponents, acceptance of victory with humility, and acknowledgement of defeat with grace. In teaching these lessons to its students, Harvard instills habits that will lead students to better and healthier lives. While winning is not an end in itself, we believe that the efforts by our intercollegiate teams to be their best will lead them to succeed regularly.

Athletic participation is a way for students to grow and learn and enjoy themselves and to use and develop their personal, physical, and intellectual skills. The entire Department, including coaches, medical and training staff, facilities and equipment personnel, and administrators, works to achieve these goals, honors the values of the College, and supports the principles of the Ivy League and the NCAA.