Chapter 8

ATHLETICS: FROM UMAC TO NSIC
As the 1992-93 academic year ended, Concordia’s sports teams marked another year of competing in the Upper Midwest Athletic Conference, or UMAC, part of the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA). CSP had been a member of the UMAC for decades. As a conference school, Concordia regularly squared off against opponents such as Pillsbury Baptist of Owatonna; Northwestern of Roseville; Martin Luther of New Ulm; and Mount Senario of Ladysmith, Wisconsin. Seen from the perspective of 2018, times surely have changed. Aside from the competition, this was a very different sports era in other ways, too: team rosters were much smaller than today; the NAIA allowed for no athletic scholarships; facilities, as we saw in an earlier chapter, were limited or simply outdated; and yes, our teams were called the Comets.

Few at the time would have looked into the future, though, and imagined much change in the sports programs and facilities at CSP. And it’s hard to think anyone could have predicted the transformation that began in 1999, when little Concordia left the NAIA and moved up, way up, to compete in NCAA Division II. The years since then have seen an increase in sports programs, an explosion in the number of student-athletes, several new facilities, and undreamed of successes at the conference and even national levels. But we’re getting ahead of ourselves—let’s start by returning to the 1990s, and reviewing CSP Athletics during the UMAC years.

SOCCER
(Previous page) Golden Bear players celebrate a goal during the season-opening 4-2 win over Maryville (Mo.), on September 1, 2017. Soccer, coached by Steve Bellis, had one of its best-ever Division II seasons in 2017, putting together a winning overall record (10-8-1) for the first time since moving to Division II.

COMET FOOTBALL
**BACK IN THE DAY**

Dan O’Brien joined the Comet Football program in 1995, as assistant coach. O’Brien was present for Concordia’s move in 1999 to NCAA Division II and the Northern Sun Conference and, as the school’s first Athletic Director in the Division II era, oversaw the start of unprecedented years of growth. When he started at CSP, though, O’Brien recalls he was just excited about his new position.

I knew I was getting into college football, and that’s what I wanted to do. I loved the game of football; I enjoyed it at the high school level, and I thought, if there’s an opportunity for me to get involved in this thing and do it on an everyday basis, I would really enjoy that. So that was the draw.

I was a public school teacher up in Bemidji at the time, and I took a little bit of a leap of faith. Because I remember, they told me my salary would be $22,000 and, they weren’t sure what the other portion of my job would be, but they would find something where I could make a few extra dollars. Teach a class as an adjunct professor or something.

When O’Brien arrived at CSP, he found a small college little known outside the Twin Cities area.

When I started recruiting, I’d go to a lot of high schools, and they immediately thought I was from Concordia Moorhead. A ton of the coaches didn’t even know where Concordia St. Paul was at the time. The other thing that was a challenge was getting people knowledgeable on the schools we played, and the cities that we played in.

The Athletics staff was small. Tom Rubbelke, a coach and later Athletic Director who spent more than thirty years at CSP, chuckles as he remembers back to the NAIA days.

Tom Cross was the head Football coach and the head Softball coach. He and I were the only two Softball coaches, and I worked a fulltime job so wasn’t here all the time. On his Football staff, I don’t think he had a fulltime coach until he brought Dan O’Brien on in 1995. He finally talked to [then-AD] Dennis Getzlaff and talked him into bringing on a full-time assistant coach. Then Dan would work the defense and Tom took the offense.

Yes, the staff was small—with budgets to match. But O’Brien and others in the Athletics department worked hard to achieve success. Being willing to take on any task, O’Brien says, was just part of the job.

I had the mentality that, if there was something that needed to get done, I was going to do it ... As coaches we would wash towels, and there were times I cut the grass. (chuckles) We were digging ditches to put in a sprinkler system on that field where Sea Foam Stadium is now. I’ll never forget that. That was like a junk lot, a car repair shop, and there was stuff coming up out of that soil. We couldn’t grow any grass on it, but we had our own spot.
Several programs, Tom Rubbelke recalls, “competed well during the 1990s UMAC years.” Team records from the era bear him out. Followers of CSP Athletics know how successful Volleyball has been at the NCAA Division II level. But the program achieved some very positive results in the UMAC as well, and was Concordia’s most successful women’s team during the first part of the decade, dominating the conference. The Comets were five-time UMAC champions (1990-1994), with a conference record of 51-3 during those years. Marla Garbers, a standout performer from 1992-1995, registered 561 kills during the 1994 championship season, a total unsurpassed during the team’s NAIA years. Karen Koegel, who played 1993-1996, set the program’s NAIA-era season record for assists, with 1,024 in 1995; for her career, Koegel totaled 2,908 assists. “She was the leader on the court,” said head coach Liz Perryman. Garbers was elected to the Athletic Hall of Fame in 2008, and Koegel in 2012.

Baseball, coached for many years by Mike Streitz, was also a very successful program during the 1990s. This 1994 season review, published in the Sword in May of that year, makes that point clearly. “Through the season,” boasts the reporter, “there were plenty of positives for Coach Streitz to find. The Comets’ record at home was 11-1. They won their third straight UMAC championship by going undefeated in conference play. As a matter of fact, the Comets’ conference record in that time was 29-1.” Streitz’s team would add conference titles in 1995 and 1997, and place second in 1998 and 1999.

Men’s Basketball, coached by Dennis Getzlaff, posted a fine 20-9 record in 1993-94. The team was led by Jeff Chamberlain, who averaged 15 points and 9 rebounds per game, and the 3-point shooting of Kyle Timmer (75 for 177, more than 42%). The Sword summarized the campaign: “What a season it was. … The team won more games (20) than any basketball team in CSP history. They reached the Midwest Regional sub-region championship game,” continued the article, “only to fall to nationally ranked Northern State University. Perhaps as important as either of these, though, was a perfect 10-0 record in conference play, capturing their first title in two decades.” Following several years of poor results, this season seemed all the
more remarkable. Unfortunately, even though Jeff Chamberlain would graduate in 1997 as Concordia’s all-time leading scorer, success proved fleeting: the Comet men’s team wouldn’t post another winning record until after the turn of the millennium. 6

Following seven winning seasons during the years 1984-1991, Softball struggled during the early to mid-1990s. But Tom Rubbelke, promoted to head coach in 1998 after Tom Cross’s departure, initiated a period of sustained success for the program, one that would last well into the Division II era. Rubbelke’s teams in 1998 and 1999, the last two in the NAIA years, had a combined win-loss record of 55-34 and claimed the UMAC title both years. In 1999, Softball advanced to the postseason, playing in a regional tournament in Kansas City. Pitcher Paige Dopp, a standout performer in the team’s first years in the Northern Sun conference who was named to the Athletic Hall of Fame in 2016, began her CSP career that same year. 7

Men’s Soccer—yes, back in the UMAC years Concordia fielded a men’s team—had several successful seasons. For example, paced by 18 goals and 15 assists from Greg Salarias, the team placed second in the UMAC in 1995 with ten wins, matching the total from 1993. During the next two seasons, though, the team struggled, and produced only four wins in thirty-three matches. As we’ll see, an even greater struggle for this team lay just over the horizon: survival.

After several years of discussions, in 1993 CSP organized a women’s Soccer team. The first years proved to be a learning experience, as early participant Diane Steele admitted in 1994 in the Sword. “With a single dream to play soccer (a dream that began in the Fall of ’93), our team was formed with a majority of its members not having any experience in soccer. What our soccer team did have, though, was lots of spirit.” Somehow that spirit carried the team to a winning record by 1996 (6-5-2). There were some additional growing pains during the final two years of UMAC play, though, and losing records both seasons.

Other programs were less successful. Aside from the standout 1993-94 men’s team, Basketball struggled during the 1990s UMAC years. Wins for both the men’s and women’s teams generally proved quite hard to come by.
Football managed only one winning season in the last half dozen years of UMAC play, a 5-4 record in 1997. However, in spite of lackluster records, the program was blessed with some outstanding student-athletes. Dan O’Brien recalls two who made a difference, both on and off the field: Matt and Lucas Woodford, from Mayer Lutheran. “Lucas was the older brother; he’s a pastor now, graduated and has done really well. Matt was the younger brother, and probably the highest recruited athlete that we got during my time here, before we went Division II.” O’Brien believes that Matt “was probably a Division II football player, but chose to come here and play with his brother [Lucas].”

Lucas Woodford was an excellent student, and completed the pre-seminary program. In addition, he served as president of Student Senate and was involved in Fellowship of Christian Athletes. On the field, he was a standout defensive player and leader; during the 1995 season, he led the UMAC in sacks.

Matt Woodford, 6’1” and 195 pounds, was a quick outside linebacker who also ranked among the league leaders in sacks. “Absolutely fabulous kid,” says O’Brien. “Did well in the classroom, did well on the football field, was a great leader.” He set a number of records during his time as a Comet football player, and is still in the top ten for several of these. He graduated from Concordia in 2000.

Tragically, in December 2004, Matt Woodford was killed in an automobile accident. Dan O’Brien thinks back. “Gosh, it’s painful and hard to understand even to this day; I can get emotional thinking about it. How such a good kid with so much in front of him, with a wife and small children, and such a good leader and good person, ends up leaving us way, way before you’d like to think that he should have.” O’Brien pauses for a minute, then continues. “We don’t understand God’s plan all the time. To be at a school like this when things like that happen, though, it’s helpful to have such a great support system.”
MOVIN’ ON UP

On 20 August 1998, President Bob Holst announced that Concordia was leaving the UMAC, CSP’s long-time athletic home. Concordia had been accepted into NCAA Division II, and would begin to play in the Northern Sun Intercollegiate Conference (NSIC) in Fall 1999. The decision to leave the UMAC was controversial and led to differences of opinion across campus; some students as well as faculty and staff saw the move as risky or even misguided.

But this move to Division II would prove to be successful; it would transform not only CSP Athletics, but campus demographics as well. With more athletes on campus, the student body would become larger than ever before. It would become more diverse, too. And through news coverage and team accomplishments, more people would become aware of Concordia. But this move didn’t just happen on that August day. Let’s follow the path to the news President Holst shared that afternoon.

Dan O’Brien had been named interim Athletic Director prior to the 1997-98 academic year. Not long thereafter, when leadership approached him about taking on the position permanently, O’Brien replied, yes, he was interested. “I loved the idea of leading, and trying to grow and improve our programs.” But he added that he was determined to “make some significant changes here, [and] get us more competitive.” Specifically, O’Brien says, “my mindset was Division III, to try to get into the Minnesota Intercollegiate Athletic Conference [MIAC]. To leave the NAIA.”

President Bob Holst liked the idea as well. “One thing that influenced me was, we were viewed by many as a Bible college. We were not viewed as a liberal arts institution. People view who you are,” Holst explains, “by who you’re playing with. If you’re playing with small Bible colleges, then that’s your type of blood. … People would say to me, ‘do you do more than teach pastors nowadays?’ ‘Yes, we do.’” Holst saw CSP’s image as a challenge. “There was that impression out there, that we were basically an LCMS school, a feeder school for the LCMS—and that era was past. So to me, to get into MIAC would be a good thing.”

This move seemed to offer a good fit for Concordia—all thirteen conference schools were private institutions, and located in Minnesota. Like NAIA, there were no athletic scholarships. And the level of competition would be a step up, O’Brien knew, but manageable. He believed CSP could hold its own.

During 1997 and early 1998, conversations took place internally, as leadership grappled with the question of whether to leave the friendly confines of the UMAC. Simultaneously, talks with representatives of the MIAC moved ahead. CSP formally applied to join that conference, expecting a positive vote—but was turned down.

At this point the story takes an interesting turn. O’Brien had a chance encounter with the then-commissioner of the NSIC, Kurt Patberg, and casually inquired whether Concordia might consider applying to join. Coincidentally, that conference was
looking to expand. But add Concordia? Among Northern Sun member schools were the state universities in Bemidji, Moorhead and Winona, not to mention the University of Minnesota Duluth. All were much larger than CSP. Patberg, reports O’Brien, was initially skeptical.

In that conversation and others that quickly followed, O’Brien made the case: above all, CSP offered a Twin Cities location (the conference lacked one), and would diversify the NSIC by adding a private school (at that time, all schools were public). He also needed to pivot, though, and sell the move internally. After all, while the UMAC had schools similar to Concordia, the NSIC was filled with public institutions with student bodies numbering in the thousands. Perhaps this was a mountain too tall to climb?

Fortunately, several in leadership were outspoken supporters of the move to Division II. Speaking at the time, President Holst said the switch would be a “means to enhance the value of a Concordia St. Paul education. We will be able to recruit more and better students because the level of competition will be higher.” And enrollment mattered. As we’ve seen previously, low student numbers during those years caused ongoing concern. This, Holst believed, could help to address that. O’Brien argued that the move to Division II could add 100 students by 2001-02, thus boosting the student body by more than 20%. Athletics represented an innovative way to address enrollment.

Eric LaMott, currently the Provost, was part of the tough conversations about whether to go down the NSIC path. He also was a supporter. “We talked about ways to garner visibility for the institution. … Again, you’re associated with who your competitors are in that environment. We had the desire to move into a different space, and so it took a little bit of thought on the front end.” He argued that this “raised the visibility and credibility of the institution, from being a small college that is faith-career focused only, to a broader constituency.”

Raising visibility, LaMott said repeatedly at the time, meant more than just in the metro area. It also represented “every one of those pockets where other competitor schools were. Before, Concordia had no name visibility, no name recognition. All of a sudden it was recognized in Duluth, and other places.”
Exactly right, adds O’Brien. “When you drive by the Gangelhoff Center and see those national championship banners—the Volleyball program has been unbelievable. It has given national attention to Concordia University, and I’m convinced it’s brought students in who never would have come to this school. And I think that’s great,” he says proudly. “That’s how the world is—it’s a melting pot of different people from different places. It’s given young men and women an experience of what the world’s going to be like when they are done here at Concordia.”

LaMott admits some called the move risky, pointing to the increased costs that came with athletic scholarships, the extra on-campus housing that would be required, additional staff in Athletics, and facilities upgrades required by the NCAA. But he pushes back. “I would say it was a greater risk not to do it. … The risk in not doing it is that we continue to lose market share from a business standpoint in terms of the ability for the institution to grow and have a different or an expanded frame of reference relative to its capacity to deliver education. Whether people like it or not,” he says, “sports is tied to universities, and a university’s values are associated with that.”

Holst put the matter more succinctly when asked about the risks. Speaking in Fall 1998, several months after the announcement, he stated that there were two risks: “to expect different results by doing the same thing, or to change.”12 Once again, as with the decision to move from college to university, add graduate programs, or create the laptop initiative, Concordia had taken a bold step and embraced change. Next stop: NCAA Division II.
GOLDEN BEARS FOOTBALL
(Above) James McNear quarterbacked the Golden Bears from 2002-05. In his career, he threw 68 TD passes, and led the team to an overall 33-13 record (including 19-0 at home) and two Mineral Bowl appearances. McNear, the CSP and NSIC total offense record holder, was elected to the Athletic Hall of Fame in 2018.

(Below) Running back Chris Washington carries the ball in 2002 in a 26-21 win over UW-River Falls at Griffin Stadium. Washington rushed for more than 5,200 yards during his career (2000-03), the CSP and NSIC rushing record. He was elected to the Athletic Hall of Fame in 2018.

GOLDEN BEARS:
EARLY SUCCESSES
Feverish activity marked Spring and Summer 1999, as Concordia prepared for its inaugural season in NCAA Division II. Excitement was high, but expectations were modest. “We wanted to be able to compete for championships,” recalls Eric LaMott, “but we wanted to be at least in the mid-level. We didn’t want to be the floor mat in anything. So we tried to resource effectively to the boundaries that we could afford to, to do that, and grow from there.” Accordingly, scholarship numbers slowly increased from season to season, and assistant coaches were added as resources permitted.

Yes, there now would be a new conference and new opponents—and a new team name and mascot. In keeping with the theme of change, no longer would CSP teams be known as the Comets. This decision, pointed out the Sword, was not taken lightly. “In a poll [in early 1999] the student body showed definite interest in changing the mascot. … Students were asked questions like, ‘Should we keep the same mascot or change it?’ and ‘What is a good name for a new mascot?’” Concordia did stay true to tradition in deciding how to proceed: the Public Relations office created a task force to discuss and debate the issue, and a mascot committee whose task was, perhaps not surprisingly, to select the mascot.

More than a hundred suggestions poured in. Would it be Kangaroos, or maybe Gorillas? “Round after round the committee voted,” the Sword reported, as its members narrowed down the list and finally identified the winner: Golden Bears. The new Golden Bear then was brought to life by a professional design firm and the suit created by a costume company.

The first appearance of the new mascot, on Saturday 9 October 1999, coincided with another landmark event: CSP’s first home Division II Football victory. Prior to kickoff, there was an appropriately named ‘Golden Bear Bash.’ And then the main event, in front of an enthusiastic crowd of nearly 2,700 at Griffin Stadium.

Dan O’Brien was now Athletic Director and head coach, and he faced a lot of skeptics prior to that first NSIC season. “There weren’t very many believers to start with,” he admits. “We heard that it’s going to take three, four, five years before you win a game in the conference, because you’ve got to develop your kids.” But he remained confident.

O’Brien’s team had won a first conference game two weeks before, beating a weak Minnesota Morris team on the road. But the opponent for the game on 9 October was the mighty University of Minnesota Duluth. “They had been a top Division II program for many, many years,” says O’Brien. “But I think they overlooked us a little bit. We were running option, and they couldn’t stop Michael Allen, our quarterback.” In a competitive game, the Golden Bears jumped out to an early 14-0 lead, and hung on to win, 35-27. The local media took note: Concordia’s upset win made the local newspapers.
The victory over UMD represented the highpoint of that initial season. In spite of more defeats than victories, CSP Football had arrived. Led from 2000 by new head coach Shannon Currier, the program posted a winning record that season (7-3), and the first of three consecutive third place finishes in the Northern Sun. And in 2003, the Golden Bears finished 8-4, were co-NSIC champions with a 7-1 league record, and earned a trip to the Mineral Water Bowl. Another league championship and bowl appearance followed in 2005, under Mark Mauer. The years 2000-2006 represent the most successful period in the program’s history, before or since.

Football, however, wasn’t the only program quickly to become competitive. Several teams demonstrated that CSP Athletics was able to adjust to the NSIC and field strong teams sooner than many had expected. Softball, for example, conference champions in the last two UMAC seasons, just kept on winning. The team rolled to a 35-14-1 record in their first Northern Sun season, and in 2001 became the first Golden Bear program to win a conference tournament.

And this proved to be just a prologue: with strong contributions from student-athletes like Kristen Schmidt, Amanda Yurek and two-sport performer Jennifer Pozzani, the program earned three consecutive NCAA Sweet Sixteen appearances (2004-06) including a region title in 2005. Coached since 2005 by Bob Bartel, Softball returned to the NCAA tournament stage in 2010 and 2012; overall, the program posted winning records in the tough Northern Sun conference for fourteen consecutive seasons, 2000-2013. Schmidt and Pozzani are both CSP and NSIC Hall of Fame honorees.

While Softball was the first sport to win an NSIC championship, it was women’s Basketball that first qualified for the NCAA tournament. And it didn’t take long for them to get there. Following a difficult first season in Division II (6-21), in 2000 Concordia named Paul Fessler as head coach. Within two years, he had turned the program around: in 2001-02, the women’s team posted a 22-7 record—the most wins in their history. The
next season brought the NCAA appearance, following another strong showing and a 21-8 record.

Lisa Harfield was an outstanding player on these teams. She led the team in scoring each of her four years, was named to the all-NSIC first team on three occasions, and left Concordia after the 2002-03 season as the all-time leading scorer in women's Basketball history, with 1,469 points. Harfield also competed at a high level at CSP with the Soccer and Softball programs, and was inducted into the Hall of Fame by both the NSIC and CSP.

Harfield’s departure didn’t slow women’s Basketball. The program followed that first NCAA tournament appearance with nine additional ones during Fessler’s fifteen years as head coach (2000-2015). Concordia had eleven seasons of 20+ wins, won the Northern Sun regular season title five times, and captured the conference tournament four times. Pozzani was a two-time NSIC defensive player of the year. Fessler was a three-time NSIC coach of the year.

There were a number of other exceptional players during Fessler’s years as head coach. Several stand out: Katie LaViolette (2004-08), Amanda Behnke (2005-08), Jineen Williams (2009-
Baseball was yet another program that didn’t take long to adjust to its new Division II surroundings. In just their fourth season (2003), the Golden Bear nine finished with a 23-10 record, good for fourth in the NSIC, and was tournament co-champions. And this was just the start: Beginning with that season, Baseball has had eleven winning campaigns, and won the conference tournament or been runners up four times. There was also an NCAA tournament appearance, in 2008.

Instrumental in the continued success of the program has been Mark McKenzie, head coach since 2000. His overall record, a stellar 445-334, represents by far the most wins of any Concordia Baseball coach—and records go back to the 1920s. McKenzie has developed some very good players during his tenure. Golden Bear Baseball players have been recognized as all-NSIC first team thirty-eight times, and as all-Central Region first team eight times. In addition, five players—Matt Borman (2007), Brenden Furrow (2010), Bryan Lippincott (2012), Kyle Dalton (2014) and Gus Varland (2018)—have been selected as first team All-American. Lippincott was also twice honored by the NCAA as Academic All-American of the Year.

Overseeing these early examples of team success was Dan O’Brien, Athletic Director (initially interim) from 1997. But when he departed in 2002, the positive results of Concordia sports programs didn’t cease. Under successors David Herbster (2002-04), Tom Rubbelke (2004-16), and Mark McKenzie (since 2016), CSP's athletic programs demonstrated continued success.


GOLDEN BEARS: A TURNAROUND, AND THE FIRST NATIONAL TITLE

After years of losing records—the last winning season had been 1993-94—men’s Basketball experienced a turnaround. From 2004-05 through 2007-08, the program achieved a level of success that, although it didn’t feature titles or NCAA tournament qualification, nevertheless represented its best ever four-year period. An overall record of 71-43, and three top four conference finishes, stand in strong contrast to the preceding decades of futility.

Two transformational players paced these teams. Brian Jamros (2002-05), a smooth shooting guard from Moose Lake, Minnesota, was a two-time first team all-NSIC selection. During his senior season he connected on 46% of his 3-point attempts (107-232), led the team in scoring, and was a key player on a squad that finished 18-11. Craig Heiman (2006-10), also a shooting guard, was the program’s first and only player to be named three times to the all-NSIC first team. He led the Golden Bears in scoring each of his final three seasons, and is now the program’s all-time scoring leader.

Against this background of surprising early competitiveness, the Volleyball program took a giant leap forward and vaulted to national dominance. True, Volleyball had been successful in the early 1990s, as we saw above, but the final years in UMAC and the first ones in the Northern Sun saw poor performances. The initial Division II campaign in 1999, for example, saw the team finish 0-18 in conference matches.
This began to change under head coach Geoff Carlston (2000-02), who steered the program to a winning record and fourth place NSIC finish during his last season. The next step, winning conference and then national NCAA titles, dates from 2003 when, after Carlston departed, former assistant Brady Starkey was elevated to head coach. That season, the Golden Bears stormed to a 32-4 record, won the Northern Sun title, and advanced to the championship match in the NCAA tournament. While the team fell one step short, losing the final to North Alabama, nevertheless it represented a new level of success for CSP Athletics in the Division II era.

That was only the beginning: The dominance of Concordia in NCAA Division II Volleyball since 2003 is hard to overstate. Winning the Northern Sun title and qualifying for the NCAA tournament became annual events. And after three more strong showings on the national stage, at the 2007 competition in Topeka, Kansas, the Golden Bears defeated Western Washington in the final match to win the national title. This was Concordia’s first NCAA championship in any sport.

Maggie McNamara, a first team All-American that season, said afterwards that “it’s hard to say how I feel about being a national champion. Amazing, I guess. It’s hard to put into words, and I don’t really think it has hit me yet.” A welcome home celebration in the Gangelhoff Center allowed the campus community to share in the moment.

There have been more of these special moments to share—eight more, to be exact. The 2007 title proved to be just the first of an NCAA-record seven consecutive national championships (2007-2013), and nine overall, the most recent in 2017. A long list of outstanding student-athletes have contributed to the ongoing success of the program. CSP
Volleyball players have been named first-team All-American an impressive twenty-six times. In addition, McNamara was a two-time National Player of the Year (2008, 2009) as well as Division II Female Athlete of the Year (2009). Ellie Duffy (2012) and Riley Hanson (2018) were recognized by the NCAA with the Today’s Top 10 Award, a prestigious honor that includes women and men, and all NCAA divisions. Mary Slinger (2009) and Duffy (2012) were finalists for another major award, the NCAA Woman of the Year. Starkey received the National Coach of the Year award in 2007, 2010 and 2011.

Concordia’s sports programs, as we’ve seen, competed relatively well once the university moved to NCAA Division II. Many adjusted quickly, and several won conference titles or tournaments. But for one program, men’s Soccer, it spelled the end. The Northern Sun didn’t have that sport, so CSP was forced to make a decision: carry Soccer as a Division III sport, and play as an independent, or turn it into a club sport, effectively an intramural program with minimal support. Despite lobbying from players, the program was moved to club status, and after several years it disappeared.

Another reason to consider the future of men’s Soccer was the total number of male and female student-athletes. Title IX, according to the NCAA, “requires that women and men be provided equitable opportunities to participate in sports.” Participation numbers are one part of this. In the same way that ending the men’s program reduced the number of male student-athletes, keeping women’s Soccer boosted female numbers. “When it comes to Athletics and Title IX,” says Regan McAthie, Associate Athletic Director and Senior Woman Administrator, “it’s something that you constantly have to keep an eye on when you’re making decisions: am I making a decision that’s going to be equitable for all my student-athletes?”
This applies to facilities, too, McAthie continues. “Just this last year [2017] we added locker rooms for five teams, and four of those were women’s teams that previously did not have any space to call their own.” One of these locker rooms was for the new Lacrosse program, which started play in 2017. “The addition of women’s Lacrosse helped us to try to balance some of our participation numbers,” she argues.

And creating the Lacrosse program was another innovative idea, a theme that runs through this book. “We’re the first and only Division II women’s Lacrosse program that offers scholarships in the five state area,” McAthie says proudly of the program she worked hard to create. “We have to have a head start in developing that program if we’re going to be competitive and successful at it, because other schools will follow us.”

After many years of playing at the NAIA level, in the late 1990s President Bob Holst and Athletic Director Dan O’Brien led Concordia’s bold move to NCAA Division II. Since then, the number of students participating in sports programs has sharply increased. As of mid-2018, there were nearly 350 student-athletes on campus, more than twice as many as back in the UMAC days. A desire to be innovative has seen more sports added, too—Lacrosse, as we saw above, and also Golf. And from the time the new Golden Bears began playing at this level, in Fall 1999, several programs have demonstrated that Concordia is able to compete—and to win.
REFERENCES

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2 Tom Rubbelke interview, 4 June 2018. Other Rubbelke quotes from this same interview.
7 Dopp played on the 1999 team that went 31-14. During her three NSIC seasons (2000-2002), she had a 49-30 record and a 1.73 ERA, with 445 strikeouts in 545.1 innings.
9 Bob Holst interview, 19 April 2018. Other Holst quotes from this same interview.
11 Eric LaMott interview, 27 January 2017. Other LaMott quotes from this same interview.
12 Holst quoted in Adams, “NCAA Division II.”
17 Regan McAthie interview, 19 April 2018. Other McAthie quotes from this same interview.
18 Nicole Grimit and Regan McAthie in Athletics provided figures on the number of student-athletes, 8 August 2018.