

Athletic board may eliminate women's crew club

By Frank Luby

The Board of Athletics will take up the question of whether women's crew should continue as a sports club at the University at the Board's May 18 meeting, according to a letter from Phillip W. Jackson, chairman of the Board of Athletics, to Melanie Jansen of the women's crew club.

The letter, dated April 30, cites "dubious financial transactions of several different sorts, improper care and handling of equipment," the lack of a faculty advisor, and an outstanding bill owed to a Seattle-based racing shell company among its numerous reasons for discussing the removal of women's crew's club status.

Women's crew has received an opportunity to submit a written statement to the Board no later than May 15.

"We do not consider this whole presentation (i.e. Jackson's letter) due process, nor is there anything here (in the letter) that seems to warrant involuntary dissolution (of the club)," said Susan Urbas, co-founder and present coach of the women's crew team.

"It's not fair that they're not explaining the charges, the accusations, and who's complaining," said Jeanne Gravois, a member of the women's crew team.

Jackson refused to elaborate on the allegations in the letter, saying only that the letter "was a private letter to Ms. Jansen, and if she chooses to make it public that's her business." Jackson also refused to comment on what constitutes grounds for removing club status from one of the sports clubs. A source close to the Board of Athletics, however, responded by saying "there are a whole series of extensive financial, membership, and governance irregularities in the operation of that club extending back several years."

Urbas questioned the accusations such as "dubious financial transactions" and so forth but claimed she received no specifics nor clarifications from the Board of Athletics on those "vague" allegations. The letter also cites "improper care and handling of equipment, including the club's van," but Urbas said the equipment is in "tip-top" shape and that the club spent \$1000 in the fall on improvements for its van. Urbas did admit that the outstanding bill and the lack of a faculty advisor "are the only legitimate gripes" expressed in the letter.

According to Ed Van Mason, salesman for George Pocock Racing Shell, Inc. of Seattle, the University of Chicago women's crew still owes the company \$148.24 (including late charges) on a purchase made May 20, 1982. Van Mason said that his company has a history of "confident" dealings with the U of C women's crew, and said in this case Urbas made several promises to pay the account in question. In November, Van Mason received a letter from Urbas which he called "an abject apology for the miserable treatment" with respect to the unpaid bill, but the company has "yet to see any money."

Van Mason said that three months ago "a young man called from another program, and (we told him we were) not interested in selling parts to the U of C, period." Van Mason did retract the restriction, however, calling it "unreasonable." On April 11 he sent a letter to U of C Athletic Director Mary Jean Mulvaney along with a copy of the invoice and the late charges, raising the issue again.

"I put hours into that account," said Van Mason, "and it really hasn't been worth it (in light of the small amount of money owed)." Van Mason said, though, that upon receipt of the payment from the University he'll "write a

letter so that all is forgiven." The letter will go to Urbas and to Mulvaney.

Urbas explained the billing procedure as follows. Since she represents the University, she receives the bill for the purchase. She then submits the bill to the sports club department, and the money for the payment comes from the club's individual account. The process then moves to the comptroller's office. "It's easy to lose track of it (the bill)," said Urbas of the process, adding "it's not entirely our fault."

Urbas said she submitted the payment in this manner twice, the last time last year.

Faculty Advisor

"In the past we were told that the faculty advisor had to have some background in the sport," said Urbas. For a while, she said, Mulvaney served as the faculty advisor, as she rowed when she attended Wellesley. Mulvaney gave up the position several years ago, however, and the last faculty advisor women's crew had, Ralph Austen, left in 1982. For the next years, then, at the sports club allocation meetings, Urbas mentioned that the team "is looking for someone and hasn't found anyone."

Urbas claimed she called Mulvaney and Mulvaney told her that the faculty advisor indeed does not have to have previous experience in the particular sport.

"You don't save this up to say it in a letter," Urbas said. "You let us know."

Gravois considered the Board's apparent actions "not a straightforward way of dealing with someone," and raised the issue of communication between the Board and the club sports themselves.

"There's no reason why someone couldn't have called," Gravois continued, "and said 'you have some organ-

izational problems...clear them up to our satisfaction." She added that she felt the team would "not be allowed to present (its) case," implying a desire for face-to-face communication with the Board instead of the written response requested in Jackson's letter to Jansen.

"What really struck me," Gravois said, "was that if any problems develop within a club, they (the club) can go. The boom can fall at any time."

A source called the Board's request for written 'rebuttals' "a long standing policy". This policy holds equally for any questions concerning the Board of Athletics' actions or policies, whether the "plaintiffs" are faculty, students, or staff.

Overall Operations

Urbas considered the women's crew organization, overall, to "be very maturely run." Urbas said the van has never had an accident, and that women's crew has experienced no accidents with athletes or with equipment on the water. "That's not to say that within the context of limited resources there aren't little things..." Urbas added.

She also called the image of the University's women's crew club "very strong." The general feeling of the team memers indicates enthusiasm, and this year's squad contains many new members. Gravois called women's crew "a positive thing. If the George Pocock thing is all they can come up with — and we're on good terms with the company — and if they weigh that against the positiveness that people get out of the sport, it's a positive thing."

"The point is," said Urbas, "that a group that works this hard, and has a good history, deserves a lot more respect."