

# Letter to Cal-Berkeley Athletic Director - July 15, 2010

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July 15, 2010

Ms. Sandy Barbour, Director of Athletics  
University of California-Berkeley  
Haas Pavilion #4422  
Berkeley, CA 94720-4422

RE: University of California –Berkeley Budget Issues/Program Retention/Men's Gymnastics

Dear Ms. Barbour:

The purpose of this letter is to assist you with the decision making process regarding the future of your Men's Gymnastics Team at the University of California-Berkeley. It must be a very difficult situation to be in knowing that any decision you make may have an adverse effect on the future of a young person's life. I am sensitive to your situation and offer the following as a way to assist you in your decision making process.

I read with great interest your endorsement of Title IX and its positive impact on you and your career. All of the positive impacts you identify are very similar to those I have experienced as a result of competing in college gymnastics. It was truly a transformational experience, though I didn't know it at the time. So, I am happy for you that you had the opportunity to compete in Field Hockey at Wake Forest and that it has opened up so many doors for you. As you mentioned in your testimony on August 24, 2007, it ultimately provided you with the opportunity for professional advancement to the point that you are now the Athletic Director of the most prestigious public university in the United States.

Furthermore, I am impressed and deeply respectful of your position and that of the University of California-Berkeley stated as follows:

*"While some have chosen to meet the letter of the law by impacting and reducing opportunities for their male student athletes, the Berkeley campus has consistently chosen to meet the spirit and the intent of the law through expansion and enhancement of the opportunities and programs for women." (August 24, 2007. Athletic Director Sandy Barbour's statement on women's athletics at Cal, UC Berkeley News.)*

It is my hope that you and your highly esteemed university keep the above in mind as you filter your way through the impending budget process and make the adjustments that you will ultimately have to make in the near future. After reviewing many documents posted on the Cal-Berkeley website pertaining to budget crisis that you face, I am confident that you have a complete understanding of the costs and benefits associated with your decisions and, ultimately, the positive and negative impacts your decisions will have on various components of your student body, faculty, staff and administration. Surely there will be winners and there will be losers.

In the face of your budget crisis, though, I do have a concern. Ever since Title IX has come into play, decision makers at various colleges and universities across the country have found a need to live within their respective budgets. However, many decision makers have incorrectly ascertained that the dictate to balance gender participation meant that they would have to eliminate men's opportunities while capping women's opportunities. Unfortunately, time after time, intercollegiate men's gymnastics teams across the country have fallen victim the sword of gender equity as they have been chopped from the collegiate sports menu since the implementation of Title IX. It seems this has happened because all sorts of people outside of the sport of Men's Gymnastics have been making decisions about the future of young

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male gymnasts without knowing, caring, or seeking representation for these marvelous athletes relative to their respective intercollegiate opportunities

Those of us who are tuned into men's gymnastics are aware of some very telling facts. For instance, in 1969, there were 234 men's varsity intercollegiate gymnastics teams in the United States. In fact, there was a national championship at Division I, Division II, Division III and Junior College. Today, there are seventeen men's varsity gymnastics programs at the collegiate level and a handful of coached and non-coached college club programs. That is a reduction 217 programs in the past forty one years (and average of 5.3 programs dropped per year). If one considers that the average team size was somewhere between twelve and eighteen gymnast, that yields a reduction of between 2,604 and 3,906 male gymnasts each year that no longer have an opportunity to compete in varsity gymnastics at NCAA institutions.

It is important to note that not one of the slaughtered programs was eliminated due to lack of participant interest. Rather, each team was cut because people outside of the sport, people with no interest in the outcome nor inclination to understand the sport were quite willing to make decisions about eliminating sports opportunities on campus for male gymnasts for all the wrong reasons. Budgetary issues tied to Title IX and gender balance seem to be the prevailing issues and the driving force to eliminate men's sports (including men's gymnastics) on campuses across the country.

Men's intercollegiate gymnastics seems to have been caught in the cross-hairs as various college and university decision making committees went about their respective business to balance the budget and target the paths of least resistance. The most peculiar thing about these committee appointments is that there never seemed to be any representation on the committee by a gymnastics coach, college gymnast or alumni gymnast.

After reviewing the content of the University of California-Berkeley's decision making committee, it is apparent that decisions about the future of men's intercollegiate gymnastics will once again fall in the laps of the uninitiated. The committee will once again be comprised of individuals whose programs or jobs appear to be safe, if only they can cut someone else's program or profession. For this reason, the following is offered for your consideration.

## **MEN'S GYMNASTICS IS THE WORLD'S TOUGHEST SPORT**

Men's gymnastics pushes the boundaries of human physical performance to its highest level, far beyond that of any other sport. A few years ago, a study was conducted to determine the comparative difficulty of various sports. The attached document provides a summary of the findings. Through this study, it was revealed that men's gymnastics is the world's toughest sport. In fact, the physical demands placed on elite male gymnasts far exceed that of any other athlete.

Please understand that I have great respect for all young people, male and female, who choose to compete in intercollegiate athletics (regardless of chosen sport) while pursuing a college education. The additional training burdens placed on these student-athletes requires discipline and finely tunes time management skills in order to be successful on the playing field and in the classroom.

When one considers the opportunities available to emerging student-athletes, it is apparent that our culture and, in turn, colleges and universities across the country favor sports that require considerably less individual physical skill and body control than that of a male gymnast. Case in point is as follows:

1. A football or basketball player, for the most part, places one's left foot in front of one's right foot, then places one's right foot in front of one's left foot over and over again until one achieves one's

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goal. In football, offensive linemen move their feet in such a manner that they can push a defensive lineman away from catching the ball carrier while defensive linemen move their feet in such a manner that they can catch the ball carrier. They bump each other around over and over while grunting and groaning. It is really impressive. The quarterback, running backs and the pass receivers put one foot in front of the other in such a way that they can pass the ball, catch the ball or carry the ball across a white chalk line to score a touchdown...and the crowd goes wild. Sometimes, a whole stadium full of people stand up and cheer. And, some universities make a whole lot of money because of this.

2. In basketball, the player puts one foot in front of the other while bouncing a ball. The goal is to put a round ball into a metal hoop that is twice the size of the ball. The average college level basketball player throws the ball at the hoop in a variety of ways and misses approximately fifty percent of the time. Often times, a person six foot-seven inches tall jumps a foot off the ground and throws the ball downward into the hoop. This process is performed over and over again until time runs out and the team with the most points wins. It is all very fun to watch. And once again, some universities make a whole lot of money because of this.
3. In men's gymnastics, an athlete jumps up and grabs a high-bar, propels himself to a handstand, swings around the bar in an extended position (called a giant swing). He lets go of the bar and flies over the bar while doing a back flip with a full twist in a lay-out position, grabs the bar, performs another giant, releases the bar and does a back flip with a full twist in a tuck position, grabs the bar, performs another giant and releases again only to do another back flip over the bar and catches the bar again. He proceeds to perform a one and a half twist to grab the bar in an el-grip handstand, hops out and does a few more flips and twists in various grip positions. He looks like he's dancing on the bar ...and he makes it look so easy. Finally, he lets go of the bar and performs a triple twisting double back flip in a layout position, drops out of the sky, and sticks his landing. The fans cheer and the uninitiated wonder, "how the hell did he do all that?"

The high bar, along with five other events (Floor exercise, pommel horse, still rings, vault and parallel bars) test the male gymnast's strength, flexibility, coordination, and anaerobic conditioning like no other sport or activity. However, very few universities make very much money because of this.

It is obvious to anyone who is watching any of these college athletes that each is an exceptional athlete and very good at what each is doing. But the truth of the matter is, the male gymnast is a much more highly skilled and well conditioned athlete than the football player, the basketball player or any other athlete on campus. This is not intended as a disrespectful assessment of other athletes. Each athlete at the college level is an exceptional athlete in his or her own right. The male gymnast, however, is a truly exceptional athlete who belongs on campus just like any other athlete in any other sport.

### **RAMIFICATIONS OF THE DECISIONS**

Please be aware that your decisions may have far reaching ramifications of which you should be aware and to which you should be sensitive. These include: campus oriented ramifications as well as state, regional, national and international ramifications.

#### **On Campus Ramifications**

The quality of life on campus is based on a collage of faculty, staff and student opportunities and activities. This includes academic, athletic, social, cultural and environmental factors. To

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eliminate any of these is to damage the transformational experience one gains from being part of a college or university. If we, as a culture, did not believe in the value of this experience, there would be no need for the University of California-Berkeley or any other college or university to exist. To eliminate the men's gymnastics team from the University of California-Berkeley would dim the glow of a sterling University.

To say that the student-athlete experience is only meant for everyone but a male gymnast is to steal a future from a very talented young man and to change his future into something less than it could or should be. Many of these student-athletes (male gymnasts) matriculate into highly esteemed professionals in their respective fields of endeavor simply because of the lessons they learned about the value of goals setting, hard work, time management, team work and all the other things that go into developing oneself into a highly competitive NCAA athlete. Each year, the men's gymnastics team graduates student-athletes that have and will continue to ultimately make the University proud. To eliminate the male gymnast from campus is tantamount to accepting a lesser national stature in the set of all colleges and universities in the country.

### **Ripple effect**

There is an overriding concern by many in the national men's gymnastics community that the elimination of men's gymnastics from the varsity sports menu at Cal-Berkeley will set up a domino effect in the remaining colleges and universities in the country. Thus, your decision to drop the men's gymnastics team may provide the impetus for other colleges and universities to drop their men's gymnastics team. So, your decision may have far reaching negative effects on the men's gymnastics community and opportunities available to upcoming generations of male gymnasts. To me, that would be unconscionable.

Beyond that, the declining collegiate opportunity for male gymnasts has already stolen from many young gymnasts across the country. Many exceptionally talented young gymnasts and their respective parents look at the dwindling field of collegiate opportunities and opt out for another sport in order to position the matriculating student-athlete for a possible college scholarship. Unfortunately, the "Opt Out" will never know or experience how great an athlete he could really be.

This ultimately has a negative effect on the USA Gymnastics club industry because it provides disincentive for boys to pursue gymnastics. Thus, enrollment suffers, retention of athletes suffers and ultimately the clubs bottom line suffers. Not that you should or do care about this but the bottom line is that many of our most talented male gymnasts do not reach maturity in the sport and do not populate our national teams, thus making our World and Olympic Teams less than they could ultimately be.

### **INTEREST OR OPPORTUNITY???**

One excuse previously used by many athletic directors in your situation to drop men's gymnastics is "declining interest". As you know from your experiences with the implementation of Title IX and the growth of women's opportunities in sports at the collegiate level, it is not a matter of interest. It is a matter of opportunity. One of the tenants of the women's movement has proven to be true. When opportunity was provided to women to compete in sports during college, the number of female participants grew dramatically. Cheers to all for seeing the light and providing women with such opportunities to participate in college athletics!

Relative to the men's gymnastics program, though, the declining opportunity for men to compete in collegiate gymnastics has been miraculously coincidental with the implementation and enforcement of

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Title IX. This gender balancing issue has forced colleges and universities to make cuts in men's programs and men's gymnastics has been skewered by the athletic directors, chancellors, budget committees, boards of regents, etc. in a rather cowardly exercise to follow what each thought was the path of least resistance. But let's not pretend this is a function of lack of interest. When opportunity did exist, there were 234 NCAA men's gymnastics teams in the country, each carrying twelve to twenty five (and sometimes more) aspiring collegiate male gymnasts. There were young men competing in colleges all across the country. In California alone, there were teams at USC, UCLA, Cal State-Las Angeles, Cal State- Fullerton, Chico State, Sacramento State and more. How is it they all disappeared since the implementation of Title IX?

Furthermore, before the year 1972, there was a preponderance of boys competing in high school gymnastics throughout the United States. In Minnesota (where I grew up) for example, there were seventy-five (75) boy's high school gymnastics teams. At Robbinsdale High School (where I went to high school), there were seventy-five boys on the high school team. Minnesota was a very average state relative to opportunity. In California, Texas, Illinois, New York and other states, the numbers were many times that.

Relative to the current opportunity, I can tell you there are many young male gymnasts in this country who want to compete in gymnastics at the college level. Just last week, a fifteen year old Junior Olympic gymnast that I coach performed a full twisting triple back off high bar. He is a phenomenal athlete. He asked me if he could be my first recruit when I start a college team. He wants to compete in college! He and countless numbers of Junior Olympic male gymnasts want to compete in college when it is their turn. They are well coached, smart, socially conscious, well educated and dedicated to success. Every college or university should be proud to have young men like this at their institutions.

So, what do I tell him? Do I tell him that even though he is the best athlete in his class, he is not going to have a chance to compete in college? "Sorry, son, if only you had played football or basketball or you played women's field hockey." Or do I tell him, "because of people like Sandy Barbour, the Athletic Director at the University of California-Berkeley, who had the courage to stand up for what is right, there are collegiate opportunities available to you and other young male gymnasts like you."

### **THE ROLE OF COLLEGE SPORTS AS A BUSINESS**

It is true that a college athletic department has a stream of revenues and expenses and the athletic director must ultimately be responsible for balancing the budget. However, after reviewing numerous coaches' contracts that are readily available on line, it is apparent that nowhere in any contract is there a stipulation that a coach turn a profit with his or her program. The contracts outline a set of compensations and bonuses based on performance of athletes and teams at conference or national championships. Nowhere is it written that a coach's responsibility is to generate a profit.

Since that is the case, why is the decision of a college or university to retain or cut a program (team) based on bottom line financial performance? Is it the coach's job to "make money"? If it is, then put it in the contract. Set the priorities. Give the coach some guidelines. Give the coach the tools to make the program profitable. If the coach can't do it, then find a coach who can or hire an assistant whose job it is to make the program sustainable (profitable). Use these sports as an opportunity for your students in business and marketing to hone their skills by developing effective business plans and marketing these sports to the community. Set some meaningful (and achievable) goals and objectives. Identify opportunities and constraints. Perform a benefit-cost analysis for each sport and identify the primary secondary and tertiary components of each. Identify alternatives of which "Do nothing" and "program elimination" are real options. Formulate alternatives that can propel the operation of the team to financial

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success. Select an appropriate alternative and implement it. Put some energy into it. Identify tasks which must be done systematically and on a daily basis and determine who is going to do them...and hold each person accountable to that which each is responsible. Pursue it with a vengeance!!! Monitor the process and the results. And if it's not working, modify the plan accordingly, make necessary adjustment in delivery and move ahead.

Please do not say it can't be done. It can be done! In the infamous words of Bella Karoli "You can do eeeet!" You just need to find the right people to do it. And the right people are out there. There are lots of coaches who have run a business and would love to coach and run a profitable program at the collegiate level. There are also lots of private gymnastics clubs all across the country that are profitable and could serve as business models for a college/university program.

The point is, if your decision to retain a team or eliminate it is based on bottom line, then the university should clarify this position with the coaching staff, the University community and with prospective students (whether they are student-athletes or not).

## **SOLUTIONS**

Of course the solution to this situation is very much dependent upon the Institutional Mission and Vision. So, unless the Cal-Berkeley Mission has changed, it is stated on the Athletic Department web site as:

### ***Mission***

***To Teach, Serve, Compete and Excel***

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### ***Vision***

***To be the best intercollegiate athletic program in the country***

*We define this in the following ways:*

- A student-athlete experience that uniquely combines the campus' academic rigor with a commitment to high performance athletics*
  - Being a great campus and community partner*
  - A place where individuals can grow and develop to their utmost potential*
  - A fulfilling place to work*
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### ***Values***

- Integrity***
- Passion***
- Respect***
- Teamwork***
- Innovation***
- Diversity***
- Professionalism***

The words "profit" or "Self Sustaining" are nowhere to be found within the Mission or Vision. Nonetheless, it is essential to generate sufficient revenues and to control costs in such a way as to support the various teams so they can operate at the levels of excellence expected of Cal-Berkeley's teams and athletes.

Faced with a budget crisis confronting the University of California-Berkeley and just about every other public college/university in the country, it is reasonable to expect that adjustments need to be made in the

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budgetary process in order to maintain any semblance of institutional integrity and quality of service. This begs the consideration of numerous questions concerning the Business Model followed by the university.

Is it the role of an athletic department to turn a profit? If so, should an athletic department only maintain programs (teams) that are profitable? Or self-sustaining? If "self-sustaining" is the criteria, does that mean an athletic department is willing to eliminate all teams (men's and women's) that are not self-sustaining?

Or, is there an optimal solution subject to a variety of opportunities and constraints available that will allow for participation by both men and women in a wide variety of sports. My guess is that the latter is preferable. Furthermore, my guess is that there is a market solution that will allow for expanded opportunities if people are willing to be less greedy and more accommodating of others.

We live in a free market society. As such, some feel there is a market solution to just about everything. Relative to the men's gymnastics team and every other team, it is a market solution subject to numerous public and private constraints, impacts, and concerns.

I salute you and the rest of the athletic department for individual willingness to take temporary pay cuts. That is one crucial step that demonstrates responsible leadership by you and your coaching staff. However, that will probably not be enough. Therefore, in good faith, I offer the following suggestions:

1. Establish a National fundraising effort for the Cal –Berkeley Men's Gymnastics Team to stabilize its financial future. While the CalGymnasticsForever Fund is a start, there is a need for directed funds to be honored by the Athletic Department. That is to say, it is necessary to ensure that a person donating or pledging support will be guaranteed that the funds will go directly to benefit the Cal Berkeley-Men's Gymnastics Team and no other program (team).
2. Hire a full time coach (not an interim coach) and send a strong message of your intent to continue the existence of a nationally competitive men's gymnastics team. Hire a coach with a strong gymnastics background coupled with strong business acumen to carry the program forward. Set meaningful goals and objectives related to competitive success as well as financial success.
3. Create a set of profitable meets, events, camps, clinics, fund raising campaigns, etc. that will ensure a positive bottom line.
4. Encourage other Pac-10 universities to re-establish Men's gymnastics teams so there is a conference championship with geographic travel advantages for all.
5. Create a financial system in which all donations may be directed in a "sports specific" manner. There may be thousands of people across the country ready and willing to pull the trigger on a donation to the Cal-Berkeley Men's Gymnastics Team but are reluctant to do so because they fear that the money will be directed to a general fund for sports and not used for their intended purpose. It must be guaranteed by the University that all funds generated by and for the men's gymnastics team will be used for the preservation and continuation of the Cal-Berkeley Men's gymnastics team.

### **DO NOT MAKE LONG TERM DECISIONS BASED ON SHORT TERM NEEDS**

We are dealing with a set of long term challenges. Please do not resort to short term solutions. Be positive, forward thinking and know that the budget crisis is temporary. Economic upturns and downturns

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are cyclical and tend to be temporary. The marketplace is at work and adjustments are being made through a very "silent hand". Your brilliant Economics and Business Managements professors and experts can certainly address that in some meaningful way. Please do not make long term decisions based on short term needs and information.

Utilize the knowledge, the genius, and all the creative juices and wherewithal you have at your disposal at your self-proclaimed "greatest public university in the country". Take a national leadership role in sustaining and creating opportunities for a most unique and talented set of true student-athletes to be on campuses such as great universities as the University of California-Berkeley. Create a model that can serve as a template for other colleges/universities to utilize in resolving this situation. Then share it.

Ms. Barbour, I did my post-graduate work at Michigan State University where it was my good fortune to serve as assistant men's gymnastics coach along with a coaching legend named George Szypula. During that time, I grew very fond of the MSU and my blood turned green because of it. Of the five freshmen gymnasts who arrived at the same time I did, they all went on to become very successful contributors to society, including: A dentist, a lawyer, a CEO of a high tech firm, a COO of a Fortune 500 company and a very successful entrepreneur. That's five for five and I am very proud of each of them. I am a die-hard MSU fan. But when they dropped the men's gymnastics team because of much foolishness (in my humble opinion) I lost considerable respect for those responsible for this loss. I still bleed green and white and cheer for the football and basketball team as well as all the other teams. I want them to be successful. But if you retain the men's gymnastics team at Cal-Berkeley and help it grow to be a self-sustaining entity so that young male gymnasts could continue to pursue their dreams and get a great education, I bet I could get my veins to bleed a little Cal Bear Blue and Gold.

### **WHY PURSUE THIS COURSE OF ACTION**

Anyone thinking person who has been actively involved in sports or any other activity for that matter likely realizes that one's success is ultimately a function of a lot of people working together to create an opportunity that would otherwise not be available.

Somewhere out there, there is a kid who will make a decision to go to college based on his opportunity to compete as a collegiate gymnast. He might not go to college for any other reason. He will get to college and will study because he needs to stay eligible. And, during that transformational experience, he will discover that he is capable of more than he ever dreamed possible. He will graduate and go to grad school and coach to pay his way. He will find someone who believes in his ability who will convince him to get a Ph.D. And he will. He will continue to coach because he loves it. He will work in the real world gaining meaningful professional experience that will catapult him into a position of responsibility. He will affect many young men's lives in a very positive way. He might start a gym or become an athletic director of a major university (someone like you at Berkeley). But he will always continue to coach because that is in his heart. And he will positively influence the future of many young people's lives.

Then, one or more of the kids he coached might go through the same life changing process. He will grow up and become a coach. And, he will positively affect future generations of young people. And on and on! As you know, this is the "Life Cycle of Sport". It is important to the future advancement of sport and of society.

### **A PERSONAL CONTRIBUTION AND COMMITMENT**

One of my personal goals is to preserve, protect and expand collegiate gymnastics opportunities for young men throughout the country. Even though I am not a Cal-Berkeley alumnus, I am willing to invest

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a considerable amount of time and energy to ensure the continuation and success of the Cal-Berkeley Men's Gymnastics Team and any other college/university in this country. Furthermore, I am willing to direct resources toward this effort by way of a national fundraising campaign. The essential contingency of this effort is the guarantee by the recipient college/university that any money raised for this effort is guaranteed to be utilized by and for the establishment, re-establishment or continuation of a varsity men's gymnastics team on campus. Ultimately, the goal is to generate and maintain at least one public college/university collegiate varsity men's gymnastics team in every state in the country.

I invite you to join in this effort and to take a leadership role by preserving and protecting the University of California-Berkeley Men's Gymnastics Team and to help expand opportunities across the country for men's gymnastics at the collegiate level. First, I invite you to take a leadership role in the re-establishment of a varsity men's gymnastics team at every PAC-10 university. Furthermore, I invite you to take a leadership role in nurturing the expansion of varsity men's gymnastics at the college/university level throughout the country.

Ms. Barbour, I thank you for taking the time to read this letter and to seriously consider the content. This is a very serious effort to change the course of the future for a very special group of athletes who deserve a transformational opportunity in their lives. If you have any questions concerning the content of this letter or if I can assist you in any way, please feel free to contact me. I offer you my service and will work diligently with you and your athletic department toward achieving a positive solution from which all can benefit.

Respectfully yours,

*Bob Wuornos*

Cc: Dr. Robert J. Birgeneau, Chancellor  
Barry Weiner, Men's Gymnastics Coach