



Sports

DIVIDED AMONG THE MANY



Pat Christian

Minnesota State has a \$1.7 million budget for athletic scholarships that provide financial aid to roughly 35 percent of the school's 600 student-athletes.

Finding funding

MSU food fest helps ease athletic scholarship hunger pangs

By Brian Ojanpa
Free Press Staff Writer

MANKATO — When people sample fare at Minnesota State's "Maverick Days-Taste of Mankato" Saturday, they'll also be feeding another appetite — the ongoing hunger for athletic scholarship funding.

The MSU homecoming food fest fund-raiser featuring more than 20 vendors will help underwrite a \$1.7 million athletic scholarship budget.

"And that's grown significantly each year," MSU athletic director Kevin Buisman says of the scholarship kitty funded 50-50 by the university and by athletic department fund-raisers that must stay creative to keep the money flowing.

Of the 600 student-athletes at MSU, about 35 percent receive varying amounts of athletic scholarship aid.

If You Go

What: "Maverick Days-Taste of Mankato"

Where: Minnesota State football practice field outside Blakeslee Stadium

When: 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. Saturday
Costs: Wristband purchases (\$10 adults, \$5 college students and younger, under 5 free) allow wearers to sample fare of more than 20 local vendors

Of the school's sports, football awards the most full scholarships — 36 — though those are split up among the squad's 90 players.

"It's a rare exception when you'd bring someone in on full-scholarship," Buisman says.

At NCAA Division I schools, full-ride scholarships are much more common than at Division II institu-

tions such as MSU, where partial aid is the norm.

The typical MSU football player on scholarship receives 30-40 percent of a full scholarship. In other sports, athletes receive as little as a few hundred dollars a year.

Even so, scholarship aid for NCAA Division I and II athletes nationwide amounts to about \$1 billion each year.

Buisman thinks MSU has caught up with peer schools on the scholarship-money front — with on-field success following accordingly.

"There's a correlation between investment and outcome," he says. "There was a time when there was perhaps a misconception that we were mired in mediocrity, but now we're in the top 2 percent of all Division II schools."

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MSU: Ice fishing tourney planned for upcoming year

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He's alluding to the United States Sports Academy Director's Cup, which annually measures and cites the nation's best overall college athletic programs based on team success rates.

Buisman says it took a purposeful commitment by MSU administration to make that happen.

"We went through a period of athletic review and decided we wanted to fund athletic programs at a level that would be more competitive with our peers in the North Central Conference," Buisman says.

He acknowledges that naysayers may dilute that rosy picture by pointing out the transition to Division I status by several former

NCC schools.

But that's irrelevant to the MSU athletic department's task at hand — namely Taste of Mankato this week and other fund-raising efforts throughout the year.

Scholarship money also is raised with golf tournaments, an annual walk to benefit women's athletics and something new to be added this winter — an ice fishing tournament.

Buisman says other ideas the department is kicking around include a celebrity dinner and auction, and a community trivia challenge, which the University of Wisconsin has had success with.

"Different strokes for different folks," Buisman says. "You never know what's going to work."