

Like all departments within the university, the University of Minnesota Athletics Department includes mission statements and core values on its website. Some of these operational standards promised to its athletes include Communication, Diversity, Empathy, and Character. These values are not only expected of each sports program, but also of the athletic department, its leaders including AD Mark Coyle, and even the president of the university, Joan Gable. As the University tread the treacherous waters of the COVID-19 pandemic, the leaders let the boat sink. Or in other words, three men's sports programs could no longer "Row the Boat" as other programs like the football team continued their smooth sailing. The university has not kept its promises in any way towards these three programs, and to add insult to injury, has refused to discuss any alternative options other than cutting the three sports.

This year I am a freshman, new school, new friends, new teammates, and finally a NEW PROGRAM. I am on the very first Minnesota Men's Gymnastics GYMACT Team. The way I like to think of it is that GYMACT is the D2 of men's gymnastics. We can still compete against D1 teams like any other NCAA team, but we do not receive any benefits from the university at all. We are forced to raise money for every single expense that the program runs into. We buy all of our gear and equipment. Two things that remain the same, however, are our practice facility and our determination to become better gymnasts and better people. We practice in Historic Cooke Hall 3 hours a day, for 6 days a week. While it is very exhausting, all the work that we put in will be worth it in the future. Many great gymnasts have also done this at Cooke Hall in the past including a few familiar names such as John Roethlisberger and Shane Wiskus who have both been on Olympic teams and are still large advocates for Minnesota Gymnastics. The difference between the programs that those legends knew and the one that we know today is the University supported the old program. Now that the program is no longer within the athletic association it is almost impossible for other greats such as Shane and John to join the program in the future.

My original plan was to go D1 for gymnastics, but that all turned upside-down when both the University of Iowa and Minnesota decided to cut their men's gymnastics programs citing budget deficits and Title IX compliance. I was told by many teams that I would have been the next one taken for a roster spot and was only left with the opportunity to walk on to a program and hope I got a spot, or join a GYMACT Team. When I was younger, I attended the Minnesota Men's Gymnastics Camp for 8 years in a row. I knew the program inside and out and once I heard a GYMACT team was going to be put together, I knew that this was the place for me. Had the University kept this program, there was a pretty decent chance that I would be one of the freshmen in the program right now. The one goal I worked for my entire life, gone with one careless decision. All of the responsibility for this lies among the University's leadership.

The operational standards promised to the program before it was cut were quickly and swiftly broken. Clear communication after the initial message quickly dwindled as many of the Board of Regents, Athletic Director, and President would not answer our questions or even allow us to communicate any ideas that we had to fix the situation. The words used to describe the expected communication include, "authentic, open, honest, respectful" communication. The university failed to meet the requirements of their programs and themselves.

The University also failed to meet its requirements on diversity by citing that the programs were cut due to Title IX compliance. While I do understand that they must be within compliance, why not add new women's programs to further their diversity and continue to make the athletic department a better place. If the university would make the excuse of being short on money, in response to adding new women's programs, then where did the money come from to extend Mark Coyle, to extend Joan Gable's contract, and to extend PJ Fleck's contract (after leading the team to yet another mediocre season).

By cutting the program, they failed to reach the objective of being empathetic. The exact words on the website include, "genuine concern and care for athletes, teammates, colleagues". In what way is cutting these programs within this value. No empathy for these athletes that lost

what they worked for their entire life, no empathy for the coaches that lost their jobs because of their decision, no empathy towards the alumni that worked so hard to put these programs where they are now, no empathy for the younger generations who always wanted to grow up to be a Golden Gopher athlete. The website should actually include the word “apathy”, not empathy.

Character is defined as “the M never comes off, let our decisions and actions be guided by how it reflects on our program”. How do these decisions and actions reflect the athletic department? They took the easy way out and refused to consider other alternative options. The M never comes off of our chest as gymnasts, we represent the University whether we are NCAA or GYMACT affiliated and we work to improve the reputation of this university whether they show good character or not.

Yann Martel, the Canadian author that wrote *Life of Pi*, once said, “Quickly you make rash decisions. You dismiss your last allies: hope and trust. There, you've defeated yourself. Fear, which is but an impression, has triumphed over you”. The University let fear triumph over them and made a rash decision losing hope and trust from many of their programs. Now they deal with the consequences as they continue to spend their money irresponsibly and are asking for 936 million from legislators. The money doesn't add up, and it seems as if there is something more personal and outright childish than money and Title IX compliance.

Thank you for your time,

Kellen Ryan