

From Underdogs to

Top Dogs

By Bob Weiner
Photos by Bob Ewell

Team effort:
UAlbany wins
recognition as
the No. 1 athletic
program in the
America
East
Conference.



The Commissioner's Cup

The University at Albany's athletic programs have catapulted from underdogs to top dogs in just six seasons of competing at the Division I level. Knocking off perennial America East Conference powerhouse Boston University, the Great Danes captured the 2004-05 Stuart P. Haskell Jr. Commissioner's Cup, which recognizes the league's No. 1 program upon completion of varsity competition each spring.

UAlbany, which owns a proud tradition of athletic prowess dating back to its many decades of success at both the non-scholarship Division III and partial-scholarship Division II levels, emphatically proved it belonged in one of the most respected mid-major conference affiliations in the country. The Great Danes won championships in volleyball, men's lacrosse, men's outdoor track and field and softball. In addition, UAlbany was runner-up in men's indoor track and field, and women's golf. The men's soccer, volleyball, men's lacrosse and softball teams either won or shared regular-season titles.

The Commissioner's Cup was determined by the use of a scoring system that distributed points based on a team's finish in the standings and the number of teams competing in that sport. Albany registered 380 points, followed by three-time defending Commissioner's Cup winner Boston University (368), Binghamton University (357), University of Maine (332), Northeastern University (316), University of New Hampshire (308), Stony Brook University (266), University of Vermont (242), University of Maryland-Baltimore County (236) and University of Hartford (151).

Director of Athletics Lee McElroy was thrilled by the announcement. "The Commissioner's Cup represents the hard work, dedication and tireless efforts of UAlbany's student-athletes, coaches, administrative staff and campus leadership," he said. "This teamwork approach has allowed us to build a comprehensive athletic program for men and women that strives for excellence with the goal of performing at a consistent level."

Making the news even sweeter was the fact that the Great Danes outscored the conference's longstanding athletic and academic kingpin. "What this does for us is really something," McElroy said. "BU won the last three Commissioner's Cups, and they've been the pre-eminent program in the conference, as well as one of the best in the country. The fact that it took us only four years in the league to accomplish this feat speaks volumes for the quality of our athletes, coaches, staff and administration. It all ties in to how we do academically."

Head lacrosse coach Scott Marr said winning the



The softball team celebrates its conference championship.

Commissioner's Cup was verification of his belief in the UAlbany athletic programs all along. "It's an outstanding honor," said Marr, whose team earned its third trip to the NCAA tournament last spring. "Six years ago, we didn't even have a conference affiliation. Now, our sports teams are winning titles everywhere. It speaks volumes for Dr. McElroy's leadership and for the outstanding focus of all of our athletes, coaches and staff."

Marr said many of UAlbany's veteran coaches, like head football coach Bob Ford, also share in the Danes' overall success. "Winning is contagious," said Marr. "Coach Ford has been successful for such a very long time. I've turned to him and asked him a lot of questions over the years. He helped me quite a bit. Also, our new president, Kermit Hall, has been extremely supportive of all our athletic endeavors. Combined with good academics, and the upgraded facilities we've received, these kinds of awards do nothing but make our programs better and help us recruit even better student-athletes."

Roberto Vives, who recently completed his 20th year as head coach of the track and field programs, continued to

guide successful teams as the Great Danes upgraded from Division III to Division I. The Commissioner's Cup is one of the pinnacles of his career.

"This is tremendous," said Vives. "I know we're moving in the right direction, but I never thought we would be where we are now in such a short time period. And don't forget that both our basketball teams are poised to have perhaps their best seasons ever in the winter."

"We don't compromise academics, and yet we are continuing to build stronger and stronger athletic programs with some great student-athletes. I can't tell you how many great people I've coached down through the years," he added.

McElroy said UAlbany will celebrate the Commissioner's Cup once school is back in session this fall with a number of special events, including one at homecoming.

"We've worked hard to be the best all-around program in our conference," McElroy said. "We believe in this university." ■

Bob Weiner, B.A.'83, is an award-winning sports writer for the Daily Gazette in Schenectady, N.Y.

President Hall to Study Future of College Sports

The NCAA has named UAlbany President Kermit Hall to a presidential task force charged with studying the future of college sports.

The task force of college and university leaders is conducting its work through four subcommittees. President Hall's ten-member subcommittee, Presidential Leadership of Internal and External Constituencies, is chaired by Gerald Turner, president of Southern Methodist University.

"This is an important effort to discuss and address the next steps in shaping the future of intercollegiate athletics," NCAA President Myles Brand said in announcing the panel in May. "The leadership of presidents and chancellors is critical in this effort."

"College athletics done well is a tremendous asset and service to our student-athletes, university community, alumni and sports in general," President Hall said. "I'm honored to join my colleagues in helping to chart the next level of intercollegiate play."