

Athletic program is in jeopardy at WPCC

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Due to a lack of facilities, money and student participation, the three-year-old athletic program at Western Piedmont Community College may soon be discontinued.

College president Jim Richardson said today the school's Student Government Association (SGA) is expected to vote later this month to end its share of financial support for the athletic program.

According to Richardson, the school's athletic program was budgeted for \$11,000 this season and of that total \$6,000 was funded by the SGA.

"If they vote to discontinue funding, I don't know where we'll get the money," Richardson said today. "That'll kill it (the athletic program)."

Once funding is discontinued by the SGA, Richardson

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says he will recommend to the school's board of trustees at their May meeting that the program be ended.

"Our biggest problem is a lack of athletic facilities," Richardson said. "Participation hasn't been good either. But we have to play all our (basketball) games at the Collett Street Recreation Center and that causes a lot of problems."

Since adopting an athletic program three years ago, WPCC has fielded teams in five sports — men's basketball, women's basketball, cross country, golf and tennis.

Women's basketball and cross country fell victim to lack of player participation after the first year and were dropped. Tennis was discontinued this season for the same reason, leaving only men's basketball and golf.

The Pioneer basketball team, competing in the Western Tarheel Athletic Conference, finished the season with a 7-15 record after winning three games by forfeit.

"Several schools (of similar size) have dropped their athletic programs," added Richardson. "In the conference we play in, we don't give scholarships. And in order to have a schedule we have to play the traditional junior colleges that give scholarships — schools like Brevard College, Lees McRae and Montreat-Anderson. They get the better athletes, and, frankly, they beat the dickens out

of us. League rules say we have to have three sports to compete in the conference.

"The problem goes back to facilities, though. We're one of two community colleges in the North Carolina Community College system that doesn't have a gym. We had an accreditation visit the other day. Eleven people came here for four days and one of their recommendations was that we build an athletic facility for physical education.

"We're putting the team and the coach in a no-win situation. We're saying we want to have a team but we don't have the facility. That's not fair to them. If we had a facility on campus, it would cut down their work hours tremendously."

Men's basketball coach and athletic director Chuck Galyon says he has mixed emotions about losing the athletic program.

★ Please turn to page 12

★ From page one

"In one sense, I'll hate to see it go," he said. "But, I don't think I'll lose any sleep over it. We had to practice at odd times. Because we don't give scholarships, we can't receive any commitment from the student-athlete. I can't threaten them with (the loss of) a scholarship if they are not doing right. If they want to quit, I'm out one more ball player.

"One thing that pleases me is the four or five kids that went on to four-

year institutions. I know many of them wouldn't have gone had it not been for basketball.

"The thing that upset me was that we didn't have a written agreement from the SGA that they would fund x-number of dollars for five years. Instead, it's been a year-by-year situation. I've seen that before and it doesn't work. The SGA feels like that amount of money was not justified for the amount of students it served."

Three former basketball players from WPCC are now playing for four-year colleges: Jeff King, Maurice

Beam and Bruce Gidney.

Western Piedmont first attempted to have an athletic program when the college was founded, but it was dropped for similar reasons.