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N.C. State trails ACC schools in spending per sport

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North Carolina State University

NCSU AD Debbie Yow has a challenge in spending.

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RALEIGH – Not long after she became **North Carolina State University's** athletics director, Debbie Yow asked her staff to run a comparison showing how the Wolfpack's per sport spending stacks up against that of its Atlantic Coast Conference competitors.

The numbers were not encouraging.

According to the comparison, which uses financial data the schools report to the federal government, NCSU spent an average of \$2.3 million per sport in 2008-09 – next to last in the 12-member conference. The ranking was based on NCSU having total expenditures of \$52.7 million and 23 sports.

Florida State topped the list, spending an average of \$3.8 million on its 19 sports. Locally, **Duke University** clocked in at fifth, with \$2.7 million per sport, while UNC-Chapel Hill was sixth with \$2.6 million per sport. Duke has 26 sports; UNC has 28.

It's notoriously hard to get an "apples-to-apples" comparison of athletics department finances since schools use different accounting methods. Even so, the numbers prompt an important question: Should NCSU fans be worried about being so low on the list? Chad McEvoy, an associate professor of sport management at **Illinois State University**, thinks so.

"It's definitely something that I would be concerned about a little bit," he says. "If they can't generate the revenue of some of their peer institutions, can they compete on the playing field long-term?"

More money allows schools to hire better coaches. And athletics administrators have long argued that pricey facilities will help attract more talented recruits.

NCSU Senior Associate Athletics Director David Horning agrees that the amount of money that's spent on a sports team can impact that team's wins and losses, and he says NCSU is looking at ways to improve its revenue generation.

"We've got to give our programs a chance to be successful," says Horning, who identifies several ways NCSU can increase its haul.

One is a new media rights deal struck by the conference, which will boost revenue for all ACC schools in coming years. NCSU also is looking to generate more money from its licensing and sports marketing programs.

Producing more wins on the gridiron and men's basketball court also would help sell more tickets.

Looking at an average per sport expenditure number has its disadvantages. Schools typically spend much more on football and men's basketball than they do on other sports. And there's also a hierarchy among non-revenue sports, depending on tradition and other factors.

"Honestly, at every school, I would argue that the sports are tiered in some way," says Duke Associate Director of Athletics Mitch Moser.

A number of factors impact how much a school spends on an individual sport, including the size of the team and staff, the equipment and facilities that are needed and the travel requirements for both competitions and recruiting. Coaches' salaries, which often are determined by experience levels and won-loss records, also have a big impact.

How do schools decide what to spend per sport each year? UNC Senior Associate Athletics Director Martina Ballen says that UNC typically starts with the current year's budget and then tells coaches to let administrators know if they need increases and, if so, why.

"We look at each request and then look at their justifications and try to figure out what needs to happen," she says.

Not everybody thinks that bigger athletics budgets are a good idea. Kadie Otto, an assistant professor of sport management at **Western Carolina University**, says there's sometimes a big difference between how academic facilities such as classrooms look compared to athletics facilities – and the students see what is being prioritized.

"It's definitely out of perspective," Otto says of athletics spending. "It does send a message as to what you value and why."