

Revived FIU forges ahead

The news that Florida International University was adding football worried Karl Kremser. Not that he's got anything against the guys in helmets and pads. On the contrary, he was once among them.

Kremser, FIU's men's soccer coach since 1980, had teammates named Larry Csonka and Bob Griese in 1969 when he converted 13 field goals and 26 extra points for the Miami Dolphins.

"I'm not anti-football," Kremser says. "I walked on at Tennessee and got a scholarship. I know what that's all about."

But Kremser also knew that when football strains an athletic department's budget, other men's sports are likely victims. Title

IX protects the women's sports.

"We already dropped men's golf and men's tennis," Kremser says. "The other sports that usually go are men's gymnastics, men's wrestling and men's swimming. FIU had none of those. Of course, I was worried. But when we were debating introducing football, students, coaches and faculty were told no other sports would be dropped."

Then on Dec. 16, after FIU football completed its first season, averaging fewer than 8,000 for home games, the school announced the elimination of its most successful sport.

"Here was an 'International' university dropping its international sport," says Kremser, who had guided FIU to two Division II national titles, a runner-up Division I finish and sent numerous players to the pros. His program represented 4 percent of the athletic budget.

The news spread fast, thanks to a front-page *Miami Herald* story — the headline read: "FIU kills men's soccer program: School decides to use funds for its fledgling football team" — and the magic of the Internet.

"A firestorm of protest erupted," says Kremser.

Within 24 hours, FIU announced it was re-examining its decision. City administrators chastised the school. MLS players and coaches offered assistance and scheduled fund-raising events.

FIU men's coach Karl Kremser credits a "firestorm of protest" for saving his program.

Ten days after the death sentence, FIU announced men's soccer would stay.

"One good thing is that this revealed the support we have," Kremser says. "And I want to thank every-

one. That support has been galvanized, and the mechanisms are in place to safeguard our program far into the future.

"I always had a great deal of pride in the style of soccer we played, but I had become complacent over 23 years here. A men's college soccer coach always has to be ready to protect his turf."

Indeed, two other Division I men's programs, Charleston Southern and TCU, were dropped during the offseason.

— Mike Woitalla

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