THE PHOENIX MERGER DPS

Dan Lewis & Tom Parry

**STUDENTS have hit back at plans that will see the University’s sports teams merged with Newport.**

The proposed merger – which will go ahead in September 2013 – is set to see the University of Glamorgan and University of Wales, Newport come together to form a new ‘super-university’.

As part of the merger plans, Glamorgan’s 44 sports teams will combine with Newport’s 11 to expand the sports sides, which has left mixed feelings among current sports players.

The general consensus among students is that the merger will have a negative effect on the current university teams, with Newport not being able to add anything to the current structure in a sports sense.

Dai Nicholas, who studies Sports Science and Rugby, believes Glamorgan have worked too hard for a merger to go ahead, he said: “In terms of the sports sides I don’t think we should merge the teams.

“Glamorgan have worked hard to get where they are as a team and as individuals. When you look at Newport in a sports sense, they are not going to bring anything to the table. It will also be hard to get to know the new players.”

Director of Sport at the University of Glamorgan, Dr Tudor Williams, believes that it is important to keep the positive student experience at the heart of any major decisions.

He understands student’s fears that a merged university could mean losing the key team spirit, as well as the extra travelling - these are all factors that will be taken into consideration.

Dr Williams said: “We have students based in Cathays and Treforest who travel to and from Glamorgan Sport Park to take part in weekly matches, and students studying at Newport University will likewise travel from surrounding areas – so for me the main focus is to keep the student experience positive.

“If we have a student sport team playing at a certain level and they train either at Glamorgan Sport Park or Treforest and play on a Wednesday, it wouldn’t make sense to me to have a combined team who then have to travel to play their matches at Newport, and also the other way around.

“We must not underestimate the fact that all the student sports teams have a fantastic collective spirit. You want to represent your university no matter what the sport is.

“The distances between the campuses, particularly for training and matches, could particularly affect the student experience if we are not careful.

“For example, we may have a team playing away at Aberystwyth on a Wednesday afternoon and if we had some students from Newport playing in the side they would then have to travel down to Treforest to get the bus up to Aberystwyth, before coming back to Treforest and then back to Newport again – these are the logistics we have to think about.”

A name for the new merged university is expected to be announced later this month, with students having a say in the final naming of the new merged university.

Though another concerned student, Aled Ball, believes that the merger can have a big effect on the quality of sport in the region, as well as some wider financial issues.

The third year Police Science student said: “I don’t think Newport will bring anything to us, we’ll have to bring new boys in and that will take a lot of time for them to gel, so it’s not a good choice.

“I don’t see the need to merge, everyone talks about making Welsh rugby stronger, but this merger can make the leagues less competitive.

“Our second and third teams can lose an opponent to play, and we’ll have to travel further now that we aren’t playing Newport in any leagues. This can affect travel expenses of course - we’ve got to look at this in the short and long term in terms of these decisions.”

Glamorgan currently sit in 37th place in the British Universities & Colleges Sport (BUCS) overall standings, whereas Newport is much further down in 105th position.

Harry Hendricks, a current second year student at Glamorgan, shares the concerns of many students who believe the current level of sport at Newport can have an adverse effect on Glamorgan.

He said: “I don’t think it will improve the competition, when you look at the leagues, Newport’s sides are quite far down.

“So though you do improve the intake, it doesn’t necessarily improve the level of competition.”

But it is because of these concerns that Glamorgan look set to delay the full merging of the current Newport and Glamorgan sports sides into one until September 2014.

Alex Kennedy, Glamorgan’s Student Union Vice President of Student Activities, talked about the two options that the new university sport teams would be faced with.

He said: “We met with an executive from BUCS and she gave us two options. The first option would involve the university playing as one team.

“This means that players from Newport would have to travel to Treforest, Treforest to Newport and ATRiuM either way. So there are a lot of travel complications.”

The former Glamorgan student also talked about how this option would be funded, he added: “The university has spoken to both unions and discussed that if this option went ahead, then both SU’s would be responsible for how much money they would need to fund things such as travel expenses.”

“The second option would mean that effectively we would stay separate and each campus would be named as it previously was under the new name.

“For example if the new name was University of South Wales, then in brackets Glamorgan would be classed as Treforest, ATRiuM would be down as Cardiff, and Newport would stay under Newport.

“I emailed the option list out to the different clubs in the university in Fresher’s week and I’ve had about 250 responses which have gone for option two.

“But with option two, people could only play for the campus that they were at. So ATRiuM students wouldn’t be able to play in Treforest and the same for all other campuses.”

Over the summer, Glamorgan invested over £300,000 on the sports facilities, which included refurbishment work on certain areas, such as the main hall in Treforest.

The University of Glamorgan can boast having some of the finest facilities in the country, as seen when the All Blacks visited Glamorgan Sport Park in November to train ahead of their clash with Wales.

Jenny Fotheringham, a maters student from Exeter, trusts that Glamorgan may be at a disadvantage with the new merger, she comments: “I can certainly see more problems than opportunities.

“We are lucky here at Glamorgan because we have brilliant coaching staff, so that may be an advantage for the Newport girls, but for us it’s convenient to have our rugby here in Treforest.

“I don’t know an awful lot about Newport rugby, but I know that they are not in the Premier Division.”

Despite the fears aired by students, Dr Williams believes that by merging with the Newport, both institutions can work hand-in-hand to provide top class facilities for all students, though it may come at a cost.

He said: “Funding is of course key, we have great facilities at Glamorgan but likewise Newport also boasts having some fantastic facilities.

“This includes the Sports Centre which is only 10 years old, and they have very close links to things like the cycling velodrome and Celtic Manor resort from a golf point of view which is on the doorstep. University of Wales, Newport has a great golf programme also as part of the Ryder Cup legacy.

“Between both institutions there are some great facilities, but my gut feeling at the moment is that students will want to stay reasonably local to where their teaching is and where their friends are for the sport.

“For some of the more specialist areas such as cycling, students may then travel from one place to another to take advantage of what they have available to them.”

Plans were abandoned last month to force a three-way merger with Cardiff Met – formerly UWIC – after the Cardiff based university was opposed to the idea.

The merger go ahead comes after the Welsh government led the drive to rearrange higher education in Wales to create a smaller number of larger universities.

Though despite the merger getting the green light, with no legal barriers in the way, Head of Sport, Williams, believes this news can really help Glamorgan in terms of achievements won.

“As far as success goes I believe this will really help us as a university,” he said.

“Sport is buoyant at the moment. We have had an extra 14 sports teams entered this year and sport participation has increased as well as student memberships who are casually using us.

“We have entered partnerships with the Marriott hotel and Pure Gym, so on the back of the Olympics sport is at a high for not just the university but for Britain as a whole.”

“What we need to do quickly is make sure the students are engaged with what is going on. We had our trials weekend recently where 790 students turned up and the whole point of these trials is to let students see what is they are doing and what the brand is.”

“The heart and the soul of the sports teams are in the club itself, whether that’s the first team or the fifth team and it is important that they get the same opportunities right throughout.”

“Glamorgan have 44 teams that play on Wednesday afternoons, where as Newport have 11.”

“We have students based in Cathays and Trefforest who travel to and from Glamorgan Sport Park to take part in weekly matches, and students studying at Newport University will likewise travel from surrounding areas – so for me the main focus is to keep the student experience positive.”

“If we have a student sport team playing at whatever level and they train either at Glamorgan Sport Park or Trefforest and play on a Wednesday, it wouldn’t make sense to me to have a combined team who then have to travel to play their matches at Newport, and also the other way around.”

“We must not underestimate that. All the student sports teams have a fantastic collective spirit, where you want to actually represent your university no matter what the sport is. The distances between the campuses, particularly for training and matches, could particularly affect the student experience if we are not careful.”

“For example, we may have a team playing away at Aberystwyth on a Wednesday afternoon and if we had some students from Newport playing in the side they would then have to travel down to Trefforest to get the bus up to Aberystwyth, before coming back to Trefforest and then back to Newport again – these are the logistics we have to think about.”

“For our own teams we are talking about significant numbers here, with between 500-600 students who belong to the 44 sports teams we have got. We increased our numbers at Glamorgan by 14 teams this year from what we had last year, so there is a high number of students we are talking about.”

“But there are certainly other issues we are talking about here, because although we have around 600 students involved with sports teams every Wednesday, we also have 1,500 students who are members of our Sports Centre who come in for leisure classes, health and fitness sessions and to use the gym and so on, so the sports teams are only about 40% of the activities we carry out each week.”

“We have arrangements at the moment for our students based in Cardiff to use PureGym or the Marriot Hotel and they do something similar in Newport. We must not forget about these gym memberships and people who want to use the classes every week, these are the bread and butter where the high use is, so again if we had a membership system it is important that the students based in Newport and Caerleon have an option to go to facilities close by rather than coming down Glamorgan to play their tennis, badminton or rugby for example.”

“British Universities & Colleges Sport (BUCS) have played our hand a little with regards to the merger and told us there are two possible choices available to us: We can either come together as one university, where our 44 teams and their 11 teams will merge together to make one team and that will be the team entered into the BUCS league. So for example if we have three men rugby teams and Newport have two, we will mix together and have five sides, but the second best side may be up in Newport, so the students based here would have to travel to Newport.”

“The second option would be staying as we are as parallel institutions, so we would have ‘new university Glamorgan’ and ‘new university Newport’ teams entering the BUCS league in a similar way as we are at the moment.”

“What BUCS have said is that once we decide to come together as one university that is it. But you can however start together as parallel teams very similar to where we are at the moment, and then come together at a later date - so those are the choices we have open to us.”

“Based on what I have said previously, student experience really is key, not just student experience for new coming students, but also for those currently with us. If students are currently in the first or second year, then they will be in the second and third year respectively when this potentially goes through.

There’s an expectation if you are currently playing at a team in Glamorgan or Newport for some continuity and minimal change. When you come back after the summer you don’t expect to have to jump on a coach to a different location to play your sport, you want it to be the same.”

“So our initial thoughts at the moment are to have two parallel systems for the first year to see how it goes and make sure the student experience is there. We can be one university at a later date, or in fact three different sides – with Newport, Trefforest and Cardiff (Atrium) being separate sides. But my view on it is that we have some fantastic facilities here at Glamorgan, as do Newport, and we will make sure to keep the students at the heart of what we do.”

“I would suggest that all past honours for the various sides remain if the merger goes through – it’s important that the records will always be there. There’s an overall BUCS table and I believe we finished 44th last year in the table, but that starts afresh every year.”

“As far as rebranding kits goes, it will be key. There has to be a logo, if you look at anything from Cardiff City to the Blues there is always a logo and I believe that the sports teams will be the major ambassador of getting that brand out there. If we’ve got 600 students wearing the kit when they play on Wednesdays, add to this all the hoodies and tracksuits plus the people on the sports courses, there will be over 1,000 people getting this brand out there. As the Vice Chancellor has already said, the new brand is going to be the new university – the sport kit will be a big part of getting that name out there.”

“I can’t comment on the funding, but what I can say that there are two areas to look at: The Student’s Union, who have a cost to join the various sports teams, the cost of kit and also the transport to and from games. The second issue regards the joining of the gyms, whether that is a premium membership or a gold membership, we will have to look at facilities at both campuses to make sure it is fair for students. If they are currently getting a better deal at one or the other campus, then we will look at equalling that out – we want students to see that there is fair play here in terms of what is happening.”

“For the first year there may not be a lot of change if we are talking about September 2013, but my understanding is that it won’t be until September 2014 that we start moving students from one campus to the other if the merger comes off.”

“Funding is of course key, we have great facilities at Glamorgan but likewise Newport also have some fantastic facilities such as the Sports Centre which is only 10 years old and they have very close links to things like the cycling velodrome and Celtic Manor resort from a gold point of view which is on the doorstep who have a great golf programme as part of the Ryder Cup legacy.”

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