

# Football, enrollment soar at Notre Dame College

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A dream seven years in the making will become a reality Saturday evening when the Notre Dame College football team plays its first official intercollegiate game at Korb Field in Lyndhurst.

The Falcons, coached by Adam Howard, will face the Mercyhurst College Lakers. Kickoff is scheduled for 7 p.m.

Adding football to the menu of athletic programs offered at the private Catholic college in South Euclid was the brainchild of NDC President Andrew P. Roth.

A 64-year-old Canton native and graduate of Canton McKinley High School and John Carroll University, Roth came to NDC in 2003 from Mercyhurst, a private Catholic College in Erie, Pa., that launched its football program in 1981 as part of an overall strategy to boost enrollment.

Roth was convinced a similar plan would work at NDC, founded in 1922 by the Sisters of Notre Dame. The four-year, liberal arts institution admitted only women until going coed in 2001.

"Nothing creates community cohesion faster than football. It's just our culture," Roth said Monday.

The plan, which also includes enhancements of NDC's academic programs, on-campus housing and extracurricular programs, is having the desired effect.

In 2003, NDC had 894 full-time, part-time and graduate students.

Projected enrollment for the 2010-11 academic year is 1,926. Roth said that number will be closer to 2,200 including online enrollees. Students begin class on Monday.

"Athletics is part of a mosaic of programs and initiatives we're using to increase enrollment," Roth said. "I believe in the avalanche theory. You kick loose a few pebbles, get them rolling down a hill and eventually you get momentum.

"At Notre Dame College, I believe we have that momentum. We will build this

institution," said Roth, who admitted to being nervous and excited about Saturday's debut game.

"It will be a great moment for Notre Dame College and a great moment for the South Euclid-Lyndhurst community," he said.

Roth credited NDC Athletic Director Sue Hlavacek and Vice President for Enrollment David Armstrong for playing key roles in implementing the plan to use athletics to drive enrollment.

NDC had four intercollegiate sports programs when Hlavacek was hired in 1996. The total now is 22, with women's varsity crew slated to be added next year as the 23rd. Hlavacek said "about 800" NDC students participate in intercollegiate athletics.

"Athletic programs have brought a whole new spirit to the campus, an intangible spirit," Hlavacek said. "The Board of Trustees has been with us all along on this. They believe in Dr. Roth's vision of athletics making this a better place."

Hlavacek recently was named Northeast Region Athletic Director of the Year by the National Association of College Directors of Athletics. The Cleveland native and former two-sport star at Cleveland State University also won the Administrator of the Year Award from National Association of Collegiate Women's Athletic Administrators.

Howard was hired as NDC's first football head coach in January 2009. After a stellar playing career at Wilmington College, Howard was an assistant coach at University of Dayton, Wilmington and Baldwin-Wallace College.

"Academics always will be No. 1 at Notre Dame College," Howard said. "But there are some behavioral things you learn in football that fit into the academic area and help put a whole person together. Life is competitive. This is an opportunity for these players to learn what it means to compete."

The Falcons debuted last season as a club team, playing an eight-game slate and finishing 8-0.

NDC is the second area college to launch a football program in recent years.

Lake Erie College in Painesville rolled out its program in 2007, playing the first season on club status. LEC opens its third official intercollegiate season on Sept. 2 in Erie, Pa., versus Gannon University.

LEC now is a fully-fledged NCAA Division II program and first-year member of the Great Lakes Intercollegiate Athletic Conference.

NDC is in its second year of NCAA Division II candidacy and is not yet affiliated with a conference.