

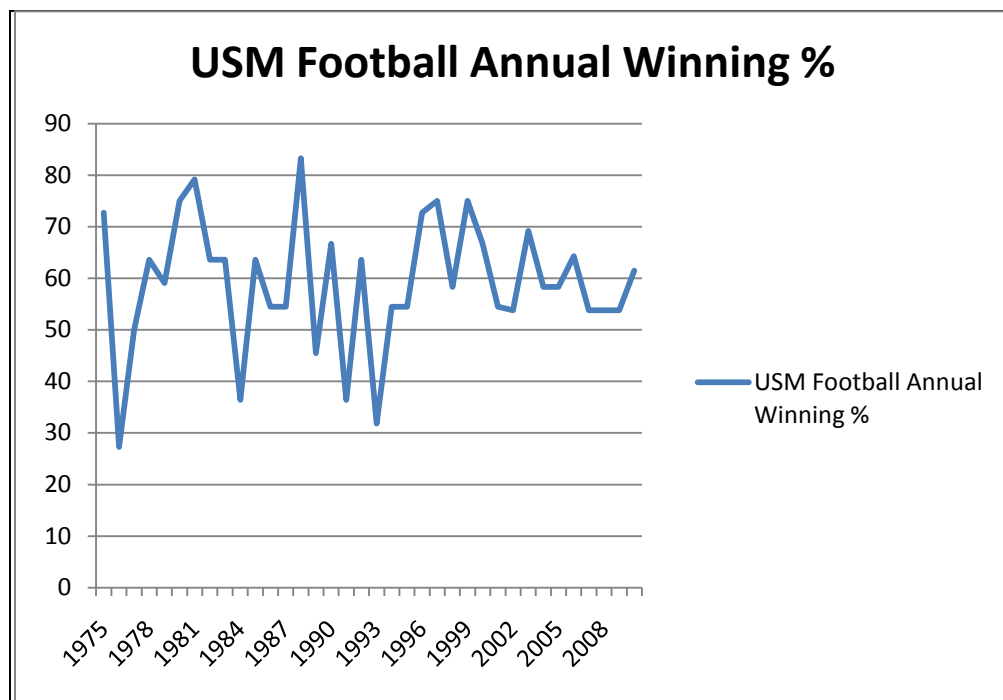
Sex, Sports, & Secret Summits

USM's Approach to Intercollegiate Athletics under Modern Day Presidents

On 12-April-2011, USMNEWS.net [reported on](#) a somewhat secret athletics summit convened by USM president Martha Saunders and USM athletics director Richard Giannini. Almost one week later, on 18-April-2011, Patrick Magee [penned a report](#) for *The Hattiesburg American* about this particular athletics summit, putting that local print media outlet well behind the curve when it comes to uncovering how heavily-involved Saunders has become in Golden Eagles athletics. This particular report offers another timely investigation of USM's relationship with intercollegiate athletics. This investigation points to a number of trends that appear evident in USM athletics. These are:

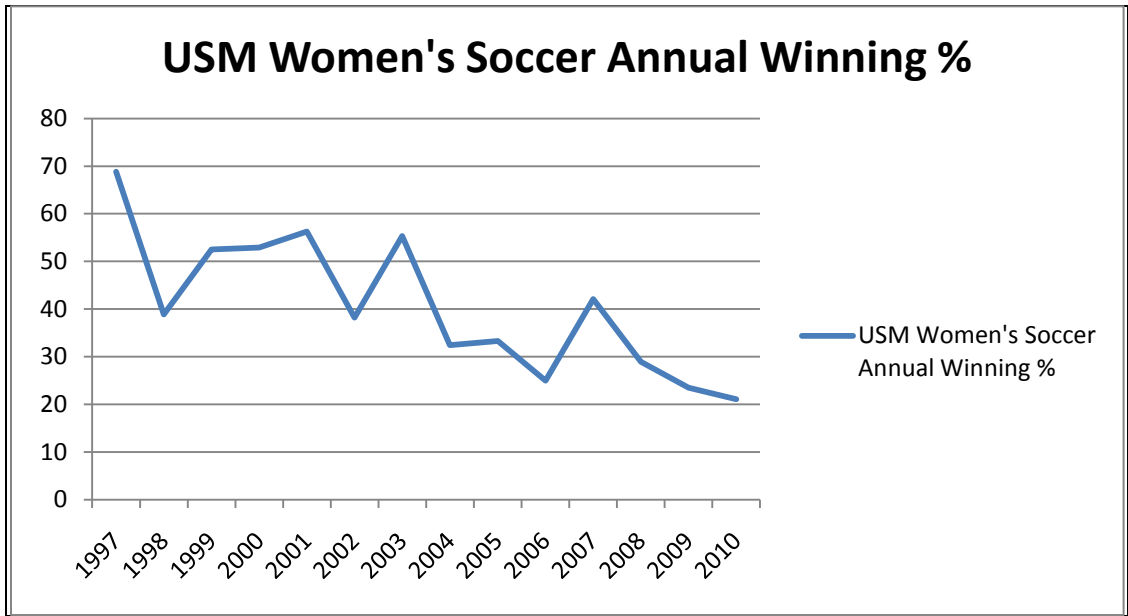
- Major sports (football, men's basketball, baseball) are supported in every possible way, minor sports are not
- Men's sports are supported to an extent that women's sports are not
- The declarations above are more prominent under modern presidents (Shelby Thames, Martha Saunders) than under earlier ones

Football is clearly king at USM. As a recent USMNEWS.net *31st & Pearl* [column points out](#), the institution has thrown enormous sums of money into football, with the result being a stabilization of performance (on an annual basis) at a historical average performance. That story is retold here, via the graphic below:

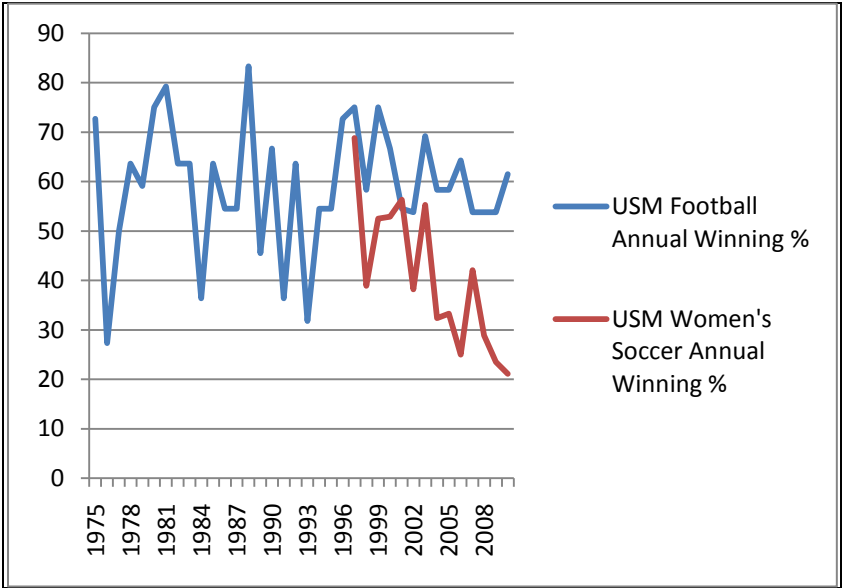


Clearly, the USM football program has not floundered, at least over the modern, Division I period examined above. The average performance level is respectable, and, as pointed out above, the program is now achieving that respectable level of success on a consistent basis relative to earlier in the time frame above.

The women's counterpart to football is soccer, a program that has been in existence at USM since the latter part of the 1990s. How has that program fared? That question is addressed by the graphic below:

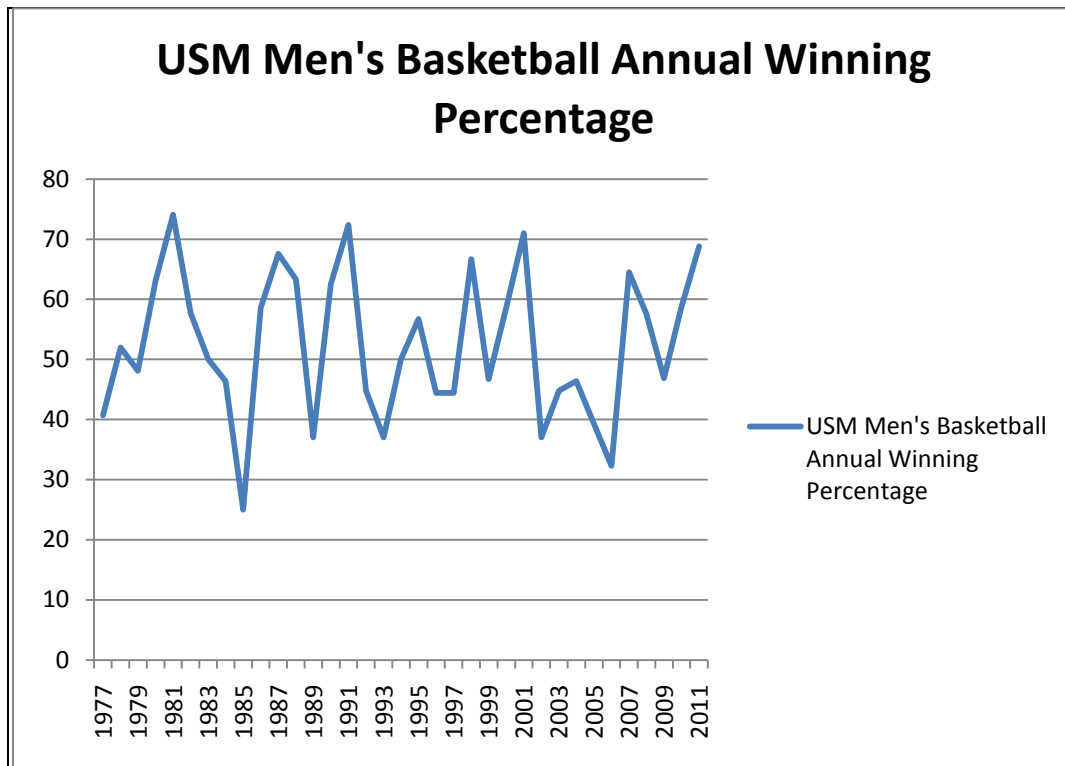


The USM soccer program is clearly floundering, and it has been since its inception. Starting with a winning percentage near 70% in year one (1997), the most recent season (2010) saw only about 20% of the team's contests end in victory. The decline of this program has been steady, and sure.

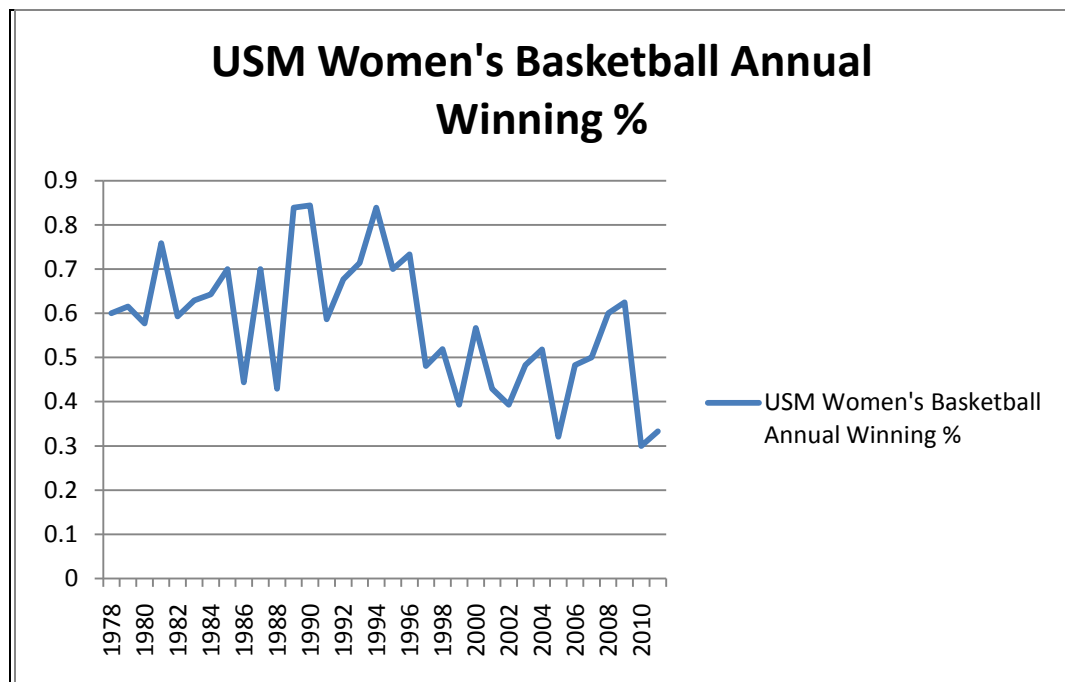


The graphic above combines football and soccer. It shows a major sport (football) doing well, while a minor sport (soccer) struggles. It also shows a men's sport (football) succeeding, while its women's sport counterpart (soccer) is floundering. Finally, the graphic above shows a major/men's sport doing exceptionally well vis-à-vis their minor/women's counterpart under modern USM presidents (Thames, Saunders), compared to relative performances under earlier USM presidents.

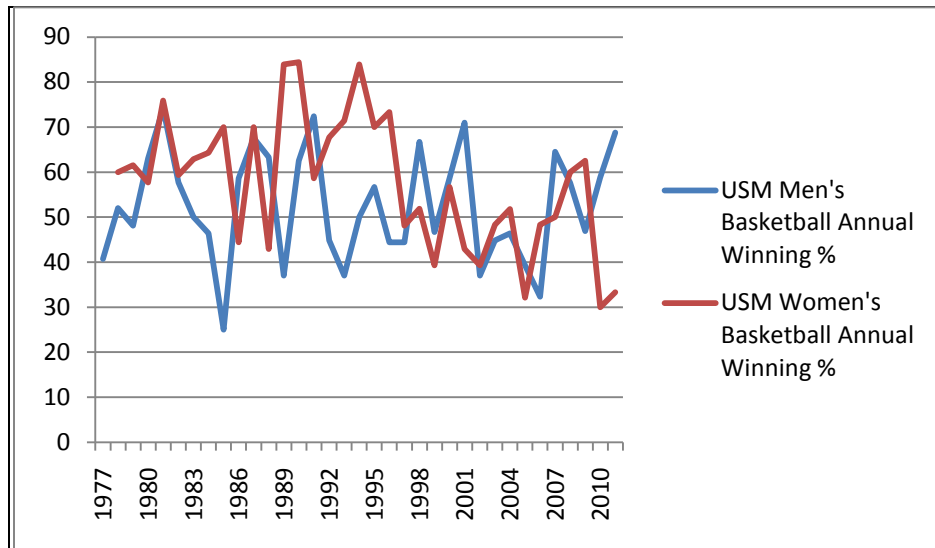
As the graphic below shows, the USM men's basketball program has produced a level of success, since 1977, that rivals that of the football program, though with much more volatility. This result will likely surprise many USMNEWS.net readers and USM sports supporters.



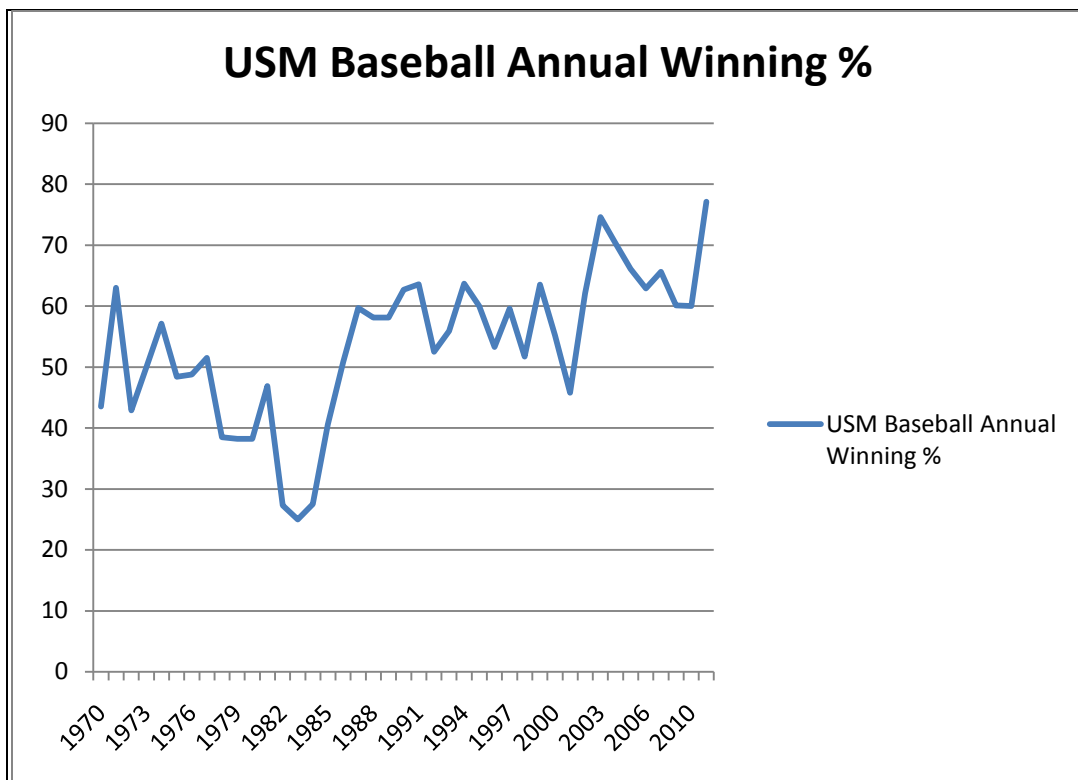
The next graphic, below, shows the performance of the USM women's basketball program since 1978. That program was arguably the crown jewel of USM's athletics department during the late 1980s and early 1990s. Since the end of the Kay James era, the program's performance has resembled that of the soccer program described above. Under current coach Joye Lee-McNelis, the program is falling off of a cliff, a point made numerous times at USMNEWS.net and other places.



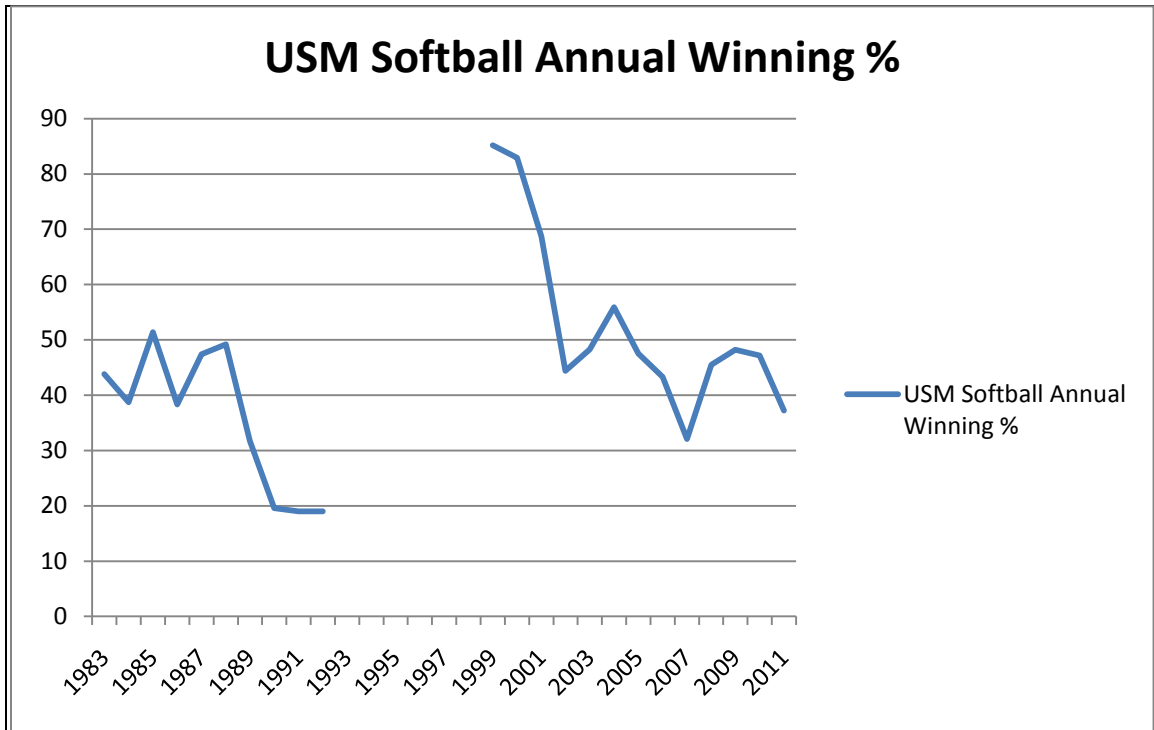
The smaller graphic below puts the two programs together. Clearly, the fortunes of USM's men's and women's basketball programs have been reversed. This process appears to have been accomplished in the mid-1990s. Today, the men's basketball program is rising about as fast as the women's program is falling.



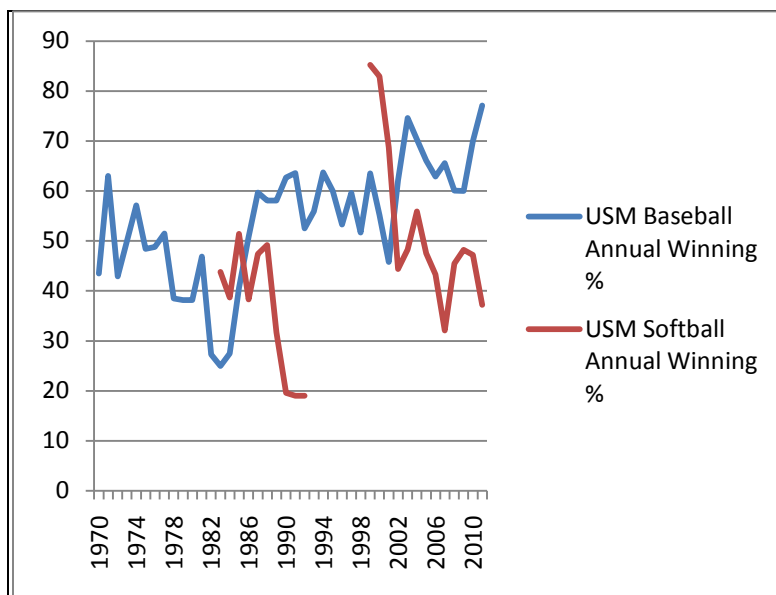
Again, the graphic above shows a major sport (men's basketball) doing better, while a minor sport (women's basketball) struggles. It also shows a men's sport (men's basketball) doing better, while its women's sport counterpart (women's basketball) is floundering. Finally, the graphic above shows a major/men's sport doing exceptionally well vis-à-vis their minor/women's counterpart under modern USM presidents (Thames, Saunders), compared to relative performances under earlier USM presidents. Under Saunders, the men's program is further ahead of the women's program than it has been during any other period since 1977.



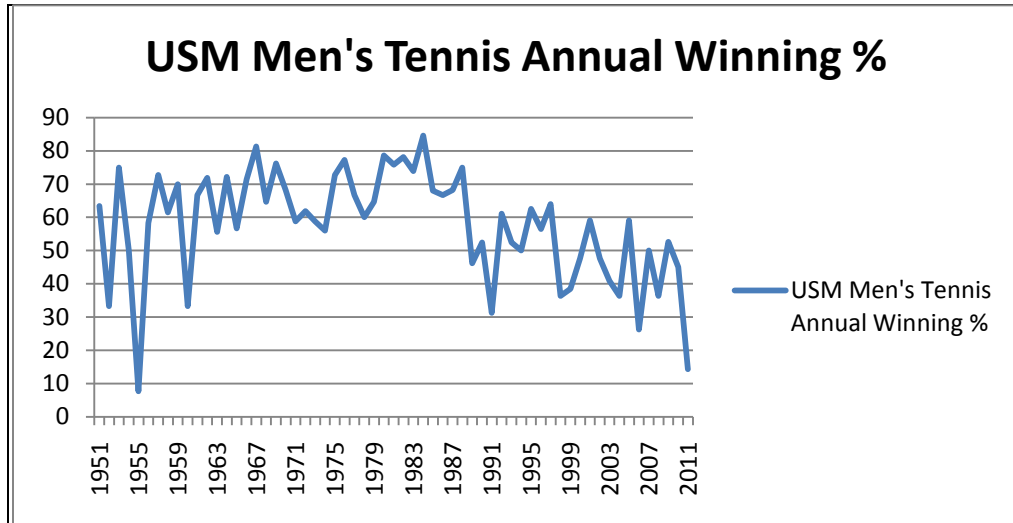
The graphic above shows that USM's baseball program represents a major reclamation project, beginning back in the mid-1980s. That process has continued into the current season, which has so far (through late-April-2011) been better than any other since 1970. USM softball, on the other hand, is a different story, as the graphic below shows:



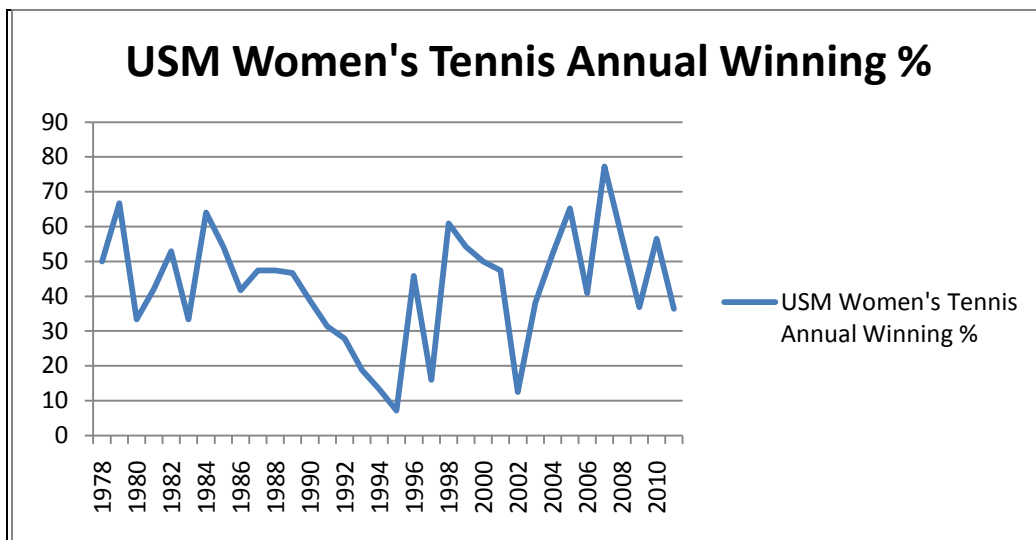
Softball at USM began in the early 1980s, but was discontinued in the early 1990s. It was, however, restarted in the late 1990s. Both stints resemble proverbial races to the bottom. It is also really interesting that the second stint began under former coach Lu Harris-Champer, who is now the head coach at Georgia. Champer's brief stint at USM arguably came with the highest level of success of any sports program in the Division I history of the institution.



The graphic above combines baseball and softball. It shows a major sport (baseball) doing well, while a minor sport (softball) struggles. It also shows a men's sport (baseball) succeeding, while its women's sport counterpart (softball) is floundering. Finally, the graphic above shows a major/men's sport doing exceptionally well vis-à-vis their minor/women's counterpart under modern USM presidents (Thames, Saunders), compared to relative performances under earlier USM presidents.

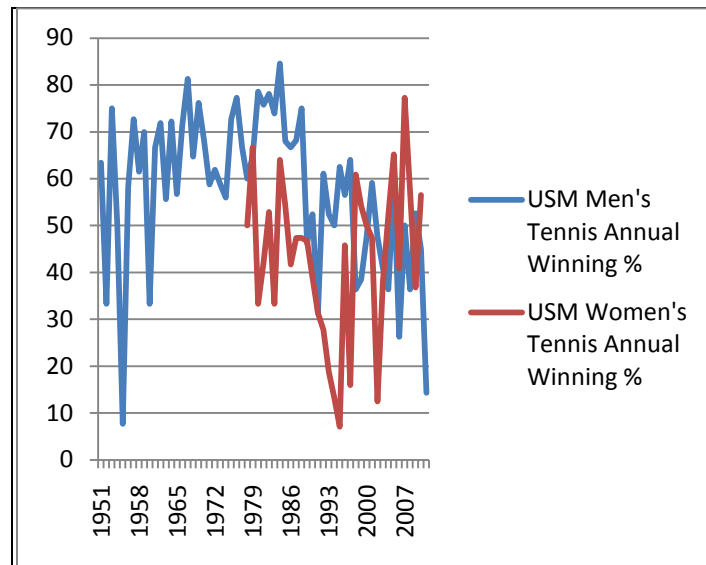


As the insert above points out, the USM men's tennis program, which began in the early 1950s, was a very successful one through the late 1980s, when it began to flounder. The current, first-year coach, Ki Kroll, is about to produce one of worst seasons in program history. As a minor sport, men's tennis is being neglected in a big way by USM officials. The neglect has been worse under both Thames and Saunders than under earlier USM presidents.



The historical performance of the women's tennis program has been a bit of a mixed bag. It enjoyed moderate successes from the late 1970s through the mid-1980s, then it suffered a major slide from the late 1980s to the early 1990s. The trend since about 2004 has been downward, though a pocket (or two) of success was attained since then. The decline has been steep since about midway through the Thames administration through today, under Saunders. As a minor USM sports program, the general degree of

neglect shown by the graphic above is to be expected, given the way USM officials seem to manage the institution's intercollegiate athletics endeavors.



Combining historical performances into one graphic shows that both programs have been neglected since the late 1970s, when both existed together. It's also clear that the men's average performance has been better than that of the women's tennis program, using the complete history in each case. The modern period looks to be one where the women's program is outpacing that of the men, though much of that is due to the dismal performance of Kroll in 2011 *and* an abnormal level of success on the women's side back in 2007.

It seems clear that each of the three hypotheses-type statements at the top of this report are supported in every sports comparison, with the possible exception of the men's tennis-women's tennis comparison under modern presidents vis-à-vis earlier presidents. Perhaps the more controversial aspect of the findings here is not with the major sport-minor sport comparisons, but instead with the men's sport-women's sport comparisons. Though USM may comply with Title IX when it comes to athletics participation (via scholarship numbers, etc.), it certainly does not appear to be putting forth the same level of attention/effort across men's and women's sports programs. It seems as though the women's programs are being allowed to flounder so that resources can be freed to instead provide support for the men's programs. In most cases, this sort of *unstated* policy appears to be magnified under current USM president Martha Saunders, the first *female* president in the institution's history.



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