

# Walking the Talk

by Susan Green-Lewis

Judging by student attendance at women's soccer matches, men's/women's track meets, and men's and women's basketball games, one would think that USM is a small Mississippi high school. It has been this way for quite some time. Perhaps part of the problem is the lack of excellence surrounding these programs. Last season, the soccer team was a dismal 4-13-0 (wins-losses-ties) on the season. At the time of this writing, the soccer team is only 3-6-1, with the toughest portion of its schedule remaining. Scott Ebke's women's soccer program is a disheartening 12-32-2. Ebke was hired by USM president Martha Saunders.

Track coach Kevin Stephen, another Saunders hire, went 9-26-0 during the 2009-10 academic year. His overall performance at USM is a disturbing 20-67-0. Over on the basketball side, Lady Eagles coach Joye Lee-McNelis has not succeeded in turning around the fortunes of the program. Last season, after several years at the helm, Lee-McNelis' Lady Eagles were 9-21-0. Her record over the past two seasons is a dismal 29-33-0. On the men's side, *controversial* USM coach Larry Eustachy is only 35-31-0 over the same period. Since coming to USM several years ago, Eustachy's teams have lost about as many times as they have won, with a number of wins coming against William Carey, Spring Hill, and other lower level colleges.

Given the data above, it's no wonder why USM students are not interested in supporting these programs by attending their contests. What, then, should be done?



In her recent [editorial viewpoint](#) for *WDAM-TV News*, Saunders explained that the Southern Miss of the future will be shaped by areas of student interest and demand (the needs and plans of the students). According to Saunders, that vision guided the USM administration in cutting academic programs that, even though they were good programs, USM students exhibited little interest (in terms of majors) in having. Applying that philosophy across the whole institution demands that the poorly performing sports programs that are not attracting more than trivial numbers of students, like the few programs listed above, should be eliminated. Keep in mind – even Saunders admitted that the recently-cut academic majors were of high quality, a fact that makes a stronger case for keeping them and cutting these poorly performing athletics programs instead. Thus, if the academic programs had to go, then Saunders should “walk the talk” and send these particular sports programs packing.