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Sports

UNH one among five new football programs in 2009

Thursday, September 3, 2009 9:39 PM EDT

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The chance for locals to play football at the college level may still be slim, but the likelihood of that taking place has now slightly increased. A total of 17 colleges and universities around the country are set to send a football team onto the field for the first time over the next five years.

A handful of those schools will snap the ball this season. One of those is the University of New Haven.

"Everybody is so excited. The buzz around our campus is just fantastic. The students are excited [as well as] the faculty and staff," UNH Athletic Director Deborah Chin said.

A number of local students are currently enrolled at the University of New Haven. Eleven area student-athletes, including six from Bristol, can currently be found on a Charger roster of some kind. Only one area athlete — Newington's Tyler Parker — is a member of the UNH football program.

Parker was a three-time All-CCC South selection at Newington High.

Without a conference to call home, New Haven dropped its football program in 2003, citing the extensive travel costs that came as a result of playing as a Division II Independent for the program's demise.

"The worst professional experience I ever endured in my life was telling those young men that we were going to drop football in 2003," Chin said. "...It was devastating to our student body and alumni. Homecoming around soccer is not the same when you have had football."

The Chargers' six-year football hiatus will come to an end on Saturday against Lincoln University in Pennsylvania.

"It's exciting to be back on the gridiron," UNH coach Peter Rossomando said. "The team can't wait to start the season."

New Haven joins a list of nearly 30 schools which have added football during the last decade.

The 17 newcomers will boost the overall number of four-year institutions carrying the sport to 742.

While there are over 1 million high school football participants only 66,000 are currently given the chance to play at the next level.

Joining UNH in launching a program this season are Old Dominion University (Norfolk, Va.), the University of Incarnate Word (San Antonio), Anna Maria College (Paxton, Mass.) and Caselton State College (Caselton, Vt.).

The University of South Alabama (Mobile, Ala.), Georgia State University (Atlanta), Lamar University (Beaumont, Texas), the University of Texas at San Antonio, the Univeristy of North Carolina at Charlotte, LeMoyne-Owen College (Memphis, Tenn.), Pacific University (Forest Grove, Ore.), Presentation College (Aberdeen, S.D.), Stevenson University (Owings Mills, Md.), Hendrix College (Conway, Ark.), Lindsey Wilson College (Columbia, Ky.) and Notre Dame College (South Euclid, Ohio) are the others that will add football some time between 2010 and 2013.

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