The Blackhawks, a new football club on campus, played their first game against Central Connecticut State University’s club football team at Arute Field in New Britain, Conn., on Sept. 21. The team, which plays in the Yankee Collegiate Football Conference, won its season opener against Central’s team by a score of 12-7 in front of cheering fans who came to the game on a University Fan bus provided by the team. The Blackhawks played four more games, using Dillon Stadium in Hartford as their home field. Their opponents included club teams from Boston University, Eastern Connecticut State University, Clarkson University, and the North Jersey Collegiate Football Club.

How did all this come about? Meet Martin Jones Jr. ’14 and Leonard Texidor ’14. At the end of the fall semester in 2012, Jones, now president of the club, and Texidor, vice president, decided to bring football back to the University of Hartford. The last time students played club football on campus was in 1983.

Beginning in spring semester 2013, the two began completing the necessary paperwork and spreading the word on campus that they were starting a football club. Along with the students came their volunteer coach, Joaquin Williams, and his staff, Tommy Dilcon, Martin Jones Sr., Dave Young, and Wayne Zalinski. The club held several fundraisers, including a domino-stomping, and received funds from the Student Government Association. Team members were asked to pay dues to belong to the club to help with expenses. Jones and Texidor also reached out to local businesses and organizations over the summer and are currently affiliated with the Hartford Fire Department’s Latin Society and with Woody’s and City Steam, both restaurants in downtown Hartford.

It’s not just about the football. The team participated in a backpack drive with the Hartford Fire Department’s Latin Society to benefit the Burns Latino Studies Academy, a middle school in the Hartford Public School System. The team plans to continue its relationship with the kids at the school. Follow the Blackhawks on Facebook at facebook.com/UHartClubFootball.
Football
Is Back on Campus!

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A Winning Formula

University of Hartford student-athletes did not take defending their America East academic championship lightly.

Winners of the previous year’s Academic Cup by a minuscule one-one-hundredths of a point, the Hawks convincingly won the 2012-13 Academic Cup by six points with an overall grade point average (GPA) of 3.24. In the process, University of Hartford student-athletes recorded the highest GPA of any school in the 18-year history of the award. The Academic Cup is presented to the institution whose student-athletes post the highest overall GPA during a given academic year. Prior to 2011-12, the University of Hartford captured the honor only one other time, in 1996-97.

Fifteen of the University’s 16 athletic programs that compete in America East earned a 3.00 GPA or higher during the 2012-13 academic year and a league-high nine teams recorded the highest GPA of their America East peers. The Hawks’ baseball (3.17), women’s basketball (3.34), men’s lacrosse (3.15), men’s soccer (3.36), women’s soccer (3.46), softball (3.47), men’s indoor track and field (3.38), men’s outdoor track and field (3.30) and volleyball (3.58) programs all led the conference in each respective sport for team GPA. The volleyball team’s mark was the highest of any America East squad. Twenty student-athletes registered a perfect 4.0 mark.

“The two sports that were not figured into the equation because they do not compete in America East—men’s and women’s golf—actually would have boosted the cumulative GPA even higher, registering grade point averages of 3.31 and 3.66, respectively. “Congratulations to the University of Hartford, most notably its student-athletes, on this historic achievement,” said America East Commissioner Amy Hurthuser. “It is indicative of the hard work put in and the value placed on academics not only by Hartford but by all nine of our institutions and student-athletes.”

“The coaches have now also given the best all-around students when they are recruiting,” says Alex Coury, assistant athletics director for student-athlete services. “Clearly they want people skilled in their sports, but they are going after students who are getting presidential scholarships and choosing to study fields such as physical therapy and engineering.”

With two primary Department of Athletics advisors (Coury and Arline Robbins) complementing the advisors that students have in their specific majors, the support system for student-athletes has a solid base. Add in two tutors (Harriet Shidroff and Judy Porter) housed in the athletics building, 10 additional student tutors with special expertise in math and science, and coaches who take an active role in their players’ day-to-day classroom work, and the winning formula starts to take shape.

“There are so many eyes on our student-athletes,” Coury says. “An individual must answer to a lot of people if he or she is not doing well in the classroom.”

Among them are older teammates, who are setting a high bar academically for the newer players to follow—and offering them needed reminders when academics are taking a back seat. It is peer pressure in a very positive way. From the start, UHart student-athletes clearly see the emphasis on academics. Athletics advisors work with them extensively in time management skills during the first semester, mapping out charts clearly showing the time distribution for classes, practices, and study hall.

All freshmen have a required number of study hall hours during their first year, with adjustments made thereafter based on academic performance. Student-athletes sign in electronically as they enter and leave study hall, giving them instant information on required study time remaining for the week—and athletics staff a continuous picture of who is in study hall at any given time. Each Monday, coaches get reports on any players who did not meet the required number of hours during the preceding week.

The software system used for this monitoring, according to Coury, has been a huge help to the academic support staff. Its other functions have allowed staff to communicate easily with professors and receive mid-semester progress reporting that allows the advisors to become aware of an issue when there is still time for a student athlete to recover.

It is a system that clearly produces the desired results.

“For me, this second time proved that we were a winner,” says Coury. “It was so close two years ago, but when you win it for a second time—in the decisive way we did—you realize that we really have something special here.”