An NCAA survey has revealed that the leading jock school in the country, the only one that offers 21 different undergraduate sports, is the famous old Massachusetts Institute of Technology. --Sports Illustrated, May 18

They weren't kidding. At MIT there are more sponsored intercollegiate varsity sports than at any other university in the country -- 21 in all. Even a sports enthusiast would have trouble coming up with the names of more than half of them. Alphabetically there are baseball, basketball, crew, cross country, fencing, golf, gymnastics, hockey, indoor track, lacrosse, pistol, rifle, sailing, skiing, soccer, squash, swimming, tennis, track, water polo, and wrestling.

Actually MIT fields 23 varsity teams, as crew consists of both heavyweight and lightweight divisions, and sailing is divided by sex: men's and women's teams. Surprised? You might be, because MIT isn't trying to build an eastern athletic powerhouse. While other collegiate sports programs are taking a second look at their philosophy and objectives, which ultimately means cutbacks and the exclusion of so-called minor sports, Tech continues to thrive.

A familiar adage around the Athletic Department is that if two people get together and decide they want to start a team -- any kind of team -- MIT will provide them with a coach, uniforms, and a place to play. That's not far from the truth. Five years ago an enthusiastic group of freshmen organized themselves into a bona fide gymnastics team and proved they deserved collegiate varsity recognition. With a full-time coach and a workable schedule, MIT gymnasts have since been in the thick of New England championship competition.

More recently, water polo became Tech's 21st varsity sport. Started last fall, water polo immediately became a great spectator event especially when an MIT team squared off with our neighboring rival, Harvard.

While other colleges' athletic departments emphasize certain sports, MIT's belief, expressed by Athletic Director Ross H. "Jim" Smith, is "We try to treat everyone the same." He adds, "Our athletic interests are more closely related to the same objectives of the university in general."

For that reason he says, "Nationally, I think other college programs are coming to our level. We give everyone who comes here a chance to compete on the level he or she can handle. When a student is admitted here he is not identified as an athlete on any form. The admissions office takes the most qualifying consideration; most interesting people and there are athletes who fall into this category. The only recruiting we do is to respond to inquiries, mostly by letter. And then we don't chase anyone."

"Our twelve club sports and nineteen intramurals are just as important. If we based our program on spectator interest we wouldn't enjoy it. Of course, we'd like to have more spectators at our events."

"Coaches today give athletes a chance to participate in the planning of the program. The big difference between today and the past is that the response is no longer 'cause I told you so.' There is less regimentation, but there comes a point in the game, where the game plan has been formulated and the athletes must perform as a team."

Hard-sell athletic recruiting may be unheard of at MIT, but outside recognition of accomplishments is not uncommon. In recent years MIT had All-Americans in Ben Wilson '70 (track and cross country), Svet Brotikhov '68 (soccer), Al Graham '71 (swimming), Fred Andre '71 (wrestling), Guy Ponnara '71 (fencing), John Good '72 (pistol), Dave McComb '70 and Steve Milligan '70 (sailing).

So while other collegiate athletics may be undergoing a metamorphosis, MIT quietly continues to grow in quality as well as quantity.