The University of Northern Iowa announced in late June that it will reinstate its women’s tennis and women’s swimming and diving programs. Those programs were dropped in May, along with men’s tennis and men’s swimming and diving, because of budget cuts.

Institution representatives said the women’s programs were reinstated because Trial Lawyers for Public Justice, a Washington, D.C. firm representing female student-athletes at Northern Iowa, had indicated that it would sue.

“We are caught between Iowa’s expenditure reductions and the national drive to increase intercollegiate athletics opportunities for women,” said Rick Hartzell, Northern Iowa’s athletics director. “The action we are taking now is in the best interests of gender equity. We will focus on re-establishing these programs.”

Hartzell said both programs will have the same level of funding and support that they did before the May announcement. Last year, there were eight women on the tennis roster and 20 on the swimming roster.

The reinstatement was proposed by George Carroll, an Iowa assistant attorney general assigned to the regents’ universities, and supported by Northern Iowa administrators.

Rebecca Epstein, an attorney with Trial Lawyers for Public Justice, told the Associated Press that her organization was pleased with the school’s decision.

“It’s a victory for women athletes and everyone who cares about gender equity in sports,” she said. “We are disappointed, though, that the school did not reinstate the men’s team as well, but that was the school’s decision to make.”

The cost to reinstate the programs will be about $150,000, depending on the cost of scholarships. The university is still deciding how to compensate for its budget shortfall.

“Financial pressure still exists,” said Northern Iowa President Robert Koob. “We still have a budget problem in athletics. It’s imperative that all associated with our athletics programs continue to work diligently to raise needed funds for endowing scholarship opportunities for our student-athletes and other operational support.”

Danny May will be offered the head women’s swimming coaching position that he previously held, and a search will be conducted to fill the vacant women’s tennis coaching position.

--Compiled by Kay Hawes