

NCAA Convention

Tuesday, January 12, 2021

Virtual

John DeGioia

NCAA Convention Welcome and Board of Governors Report

JOHN DEGIOIA: It is my pleasure to welcome you to the 2021 NCAA Convention. For the first time, we're holding our convention virtually. And we're grateful to each of you for your participation and engagement.

In previous years, this session would include three elements: The NCAA Board of Governors Report; our Memorial Resolutions, and the NCAA president's State of College Sports address.

This year Mark Emmert will present the State of College Sports address on Tuesday, at 12:30 p.m. Eastern Time. His presentation may also be viewed later on the NCAA website. The past ten months have been unlike any we have ever experienced. The global pandemic has placed new demands on all of us. We have had to adjust how we go about our daily lives and to pause many of the activities that provide meaning for us and for our communities.

We have had to find new ways to engage and to take the steps necessary to protect one another and the health of our communities. This period has been difficult for all of us, and especially our students who are being asked to navigate these disruptions at a formative time in their lives.

And I'm grateful to everyone who has contributed to our response. As we reflect on the last year, we are reminded of our purpose and our mission as an organization: What is our purpose of this membership organization? What are our responsibilities? To whom are we accountable? Why do we do all of this? What brings all of us-1100 colleges and universities cross three divisions-together in this organization, established more than a century ago?

What holds us together, now, in this new century? Throughout our history we have been guided by the conviction that intercollegiate athletics provides an extracurricular opportunity of invaluable worth in support of the formation of our young people. Every year we are able to provide these opportunities to 500,000 students, participating in 24 sports across three divisions.



It is not a question of whether we engage these questions, but how do we move forward? Each of our institutions have faced these same questions about our mission and purpose in our respective communities. For each of our institutions, there are unique aspects to the answer of mission and purpose, depending on our individual histories, our circumstances, our context.

Yet, there is a commitment that all institutions of higher learning share: To discover, create and share knowledge, and to provide opportunities for young people to join us in this work.

At the very core of the idea of education is a belief in progress - that our future can be better than our past; that, through a deeper grasp of our reality, the knowledge we are discovering; the opportunity to engage young people; the exchange of ideas and energy and passion and commitment, that we can build a better future.

This foundational element of each of our missions is as important today as it has ever been, as we look ahead to this new year and the many issues we are grappling with, in higher education and in our society.

As a membership organization, we recognize the need to modernize our practices. One issue we have been focused on, as a modernization effort, is Name, Image and Likeness. We have been focused on this for some time, through the formation of our special Working Group in May 2019, and the guiding principles established by our Board, based on their work. As we prepared for this meeting, as many of you know, we received outreach from the Department of Justice regarding this work.

And we will need to pause at this moment. There is no question intercollegiate athletics will change.

Over the course of this presentation, I'd like to walk through a few other issues that we are facing within intercollegiate athletics and the approaches of the Board of Governors in response, beginning with our work over these past months to address COVID-19.

In early March, the NCAA COVID-19 Advisory Panel was



formed to guide the Association's response to the pandemic. The emphasis of the group, which included leading medical, public health and epidemiology experts, was the health of our students, members, and the public.

Later in March, with advice from the Division I men's and women's basketball committees, and in consultation with public health officials, and our COVID-19 Advisory Panel, the Board of Governors decided to cancel the Division I men's and women's 2020 basketball tournaments and all remaining winter and spring NCAA championships. This was an excruciating decision. But it was the right decision.

Over the summer, we continued to monitor the trajectory of the pandemic and the new information that emerged about the virus, and the public health guidelines about prevention and response.

We created an expanded COVID-19 Advisory Group and issued the "Resocialization of Collegiate Sport" document. This details health and safety guidelines for athletics departments, coaches, medical and health personnel, and students engaged in intercollegiate athletics for training, practice and competition during this national public health crisis.

These guidelines have been consistently updated based on the latest information related to the pandemic. Throughout these months, we were guided by a commitment to flexibility. We recognized how disruptive the pandemic has been in the lives of our young people.

We directed the divisions to ensure that all students engaged in athletics, be provided an opportunity to opt out of participation due to concerns about contracting COVID-19; and if a student chooses to opt out, the individual's athletics scholarship commitment must be honored. We also recognized the need for eligibility-related accommodations for those who opt out or for those whose seasons were interrupted or cut short.

And we were clear that any COVID-19-related health costs related to infections that were the result of sports participation would be the responsibility of each member school.

In August, the Board directed schools and conferences to meet specific requirements during the preseason, regular season and postseason if they intended to conduct fall sports in 2020.

We also directed each division to determine its ability to meet the health and safety requirements to conduct fall championships.

Given the ongoing threat of the pandemic this fall, the Board noted it would only support moving forward with NCAA fall championships and other postseason play if and only if strict conditions were applied and followed.

In response to the Board's directives, Division II and Division III made the decision to cancel fall championships. Division I decided to work toward hosting scaled-back fall championships in the spring.

As we watched the fall season unfold in Division I, there were interruptions and cancellations -- these had been anticipated -- as we worked to keep our students safe while also providing them some opportunities to participate in athletics.

We can all appreciate the impact the pandemic has had on our young people who have seen their seasons cut short. For some, especially seniors, who were prepared for seasons they had been working towards since their earliest days in youth sports.

The next period will require our continued attention to the public health guidelines and continued flexibility in order to continue athletics participation as safely as possible.

Another issue at the forefront of our national dialogue this year has been the issue of racial justice. We have been reminded of our responsibility to confront the present-day manifestations of racism and discrimination in our society. Many of you have helped your campuses and communities advance a commitment to equity and justice. We're grateful to you, and especially to the work of our student leaders who have been important voices in advocating for diversity, inclusion and social justice.

I'd especially like to recognize those on the Student-Athlete Advisory Committees at the division level and the board of governor's Student-Athlete Engagement Committee. Our students could not be better served than by their colleagues on these committees.

Through their efforts, they created a Unity pledge, a pledge to stand together and against racism, discrimination and hate. The pledge and logo that they launched have contributed to important dialogue within our teams and athletics departments. All of our schools have received a patch with the Unity pledge logo for their uniforms. Our student leaders have encouraged their peers, coaches and administrators to wear the logo and use the statement as part of conversations happening in their conferences, on their campuses, and in their teams.

Since 2001, the NCAA has had a policy regarding Confederate Flags. This past June, the Board of

Governors voted to expand this policy prohibiting NCAA championship events from being played in states where the symbol has a prominent presence. There is no place for symbols. No place for acts of discrimination and oppression in college athletics.

All of us have a responsibility to ensure that every student is safe. An important part of this work is our response to sexual violence and misconduct on our college campuses. We voted as a board last spring to expand our campus sexual violence policy to require all incoming, current, and transfer students engaged in intercollegiate athletics to disclose, annually, whether their conduct has resulted in an investigation, discipline through a Title IX proceeding, or criminal conviction for sexual, interpersonal, or other acts of violence.

As part of the policy, a failure by the student to provide an accurate and full disclosure may result in penalties, including a loss of athletics eligibility, determined by each school. In addition, every school must take reasonable steps to confirm the information provided by prospective, continuing, and transfer students engaged in athletics and provide this information to other member schools if the student attempts to enroll in a different college or university.

Schools must also have policies in place to gather conduct-related information from former schools attended by recruited prospects or transfer students engaged in athletics.

At the October meeting, the Board approved a task force charged with developing operational guidelines, best practices and supporting documentation that campuses can use to implement this expanded policy.

Their work will enable member schools to use the resources developed to better prepare for the 2022-23 attestation requirements. This expanded policy is one more tool for our schools to use to address sexual misconduct on our campuses. The Board of Governors provides oversight on issues involving litigation and federal and state legislation impacting the Association.

Of particular focus at this time is the decision announced in December by the Supreme Court of the United States that they will hear this term, the most important case for our organization in a generation.

We are also engaged in discussions with members of both the United States Senate and House of Representatives regarding proposed legislation that may come before both branches in the coming session.

Finally, as part of its duties, the Board approved the 2020-21 budget, which was revised due to the financial challenges resulting from COVID-19.

As many of you are aware, over 75 percent of the Association's revenue was lost when we canceled last year's Division I men's and women's basketball championships along with remaining winter and spring championships.

Because we were prepared with a contingency plan that included event cancellation insurance and healthy financial reserves, we were able to recoup a portion of the losses. In addition, the NCAA national office has made significant operational budget adjustments, which have included personnel actions and other mitigating measures. This past year has caused us to reconsider the finances of intercollegiate athletics and how to best move forward in a way that will provide for prolonged viability.

We had identified the long-term financial sustainability of intercollegiate athletics as a critical area for review before the pandemic began. And our work in this area is already underway.

The financial impact of COVID-19 has underscored its importance. We support nearly a half million students through NCAA sports each year. Thanks to the hard work of so many, we have been able to manage in these difficult circumstances and to advance important commitments to improving the context for our students engaged in intercollegiate athletics.

As is our practice, in this opening session, we take a moment to reflect on those who have dedicated their lives in support of our students. All of us are part of a national community, a community committed to excellence and to the value of athletic competition in shaping the formation of our young people. Each one of us has a role to play in sustaining these values and to providing these opportunities for our students.

In memoriam: I invite us all now to pause a moment for those who we have lost this year -- our colleagues, friends and former students. Each one will be missed. We take this moment to remember them and their contributions. A memorial page with each of their names is on our NCAA website.

Thank you for joining me in this moment of remembrance. Now across our campuses and conferences, we have thousands of colleagues dedicated to college sports, enabling the work of our Association and supporting the experiences of our students. I wish to invite us to congratulate and recognize all those in our membership

who plan to retire during this year.

On behalf of our Board, I wish to express our deep appreciation to each of you, for your commitment, dedication, and service in supporting our students and our programs.

Thank you for everything you have enabled us to accomplish, together as an association, and for our students.

It is with hope and optimism that we begin this new year together. To everyone gathered virtually with us today, thank you. I look forward to our time together and the work we will continue to advance on behalf of our students. Thank you for all that you do for your campuses, your conferences, and this larger community committed to intercollegiate athletics. You all have my very best wishes. And thank you.

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