

NCAA Convention

Tuesday, January 12, 2021

Virtual

President, NCAA Mark Emmert

State of College Sports



MARK EMMERT: Welcome to the NCAA National Convention and to this session on the State of College Sports. Though it certainly looks different, I look forward to all that we will accomplish at this week's convention. Thank you for being here today, and thank you for all that you do for student-athletes.

This year, to say the least, has been challenging, and we've seen the best and, sadly, the worst of human nature. But to start this session, I want to focus on the best. We want to honor one of our own that has made an incredible impact on college sports. The Pat Summitt Award was created to honor Pat's commitment to the values of college sports and service to its students. This year we are thrilled to recognize one of the leading coaches in NCAA history, who retired during one of the most tumultuous years on record. Let's learn more about this year's Pat Summitt awardee from the University of Connecticut, Nancy Stevens.

NANCY STEVENS: For many of us in coaching, Pat was a role model and an icon. What a trailblazer for women in coaching. You know, what she did, she showed us the way, you know, how to be strong, how to be a great leader, how to win national championships. And I just soaked up every word that I could read, all her books, you know, watched her interviews.

So for me, this award is incredibly special to honor her and her legacy. I think with any athlete it goes back to the type of coaching that inspired you. I had the two best coaches in high school and college, and they inspired me to continue in my sport. And then that just encouraged me to continue as a college coach. They breathed life into my dreams and gave me a glimpse of what was possible. So I wanted to in some small way be able to do that for young women.

Winning championships is empowering, and I think I learned that, you know, playing for a great college coach. And it just, it made me feel as though I could accomplish

almost anything. And if we're able to instill that same feeling in our players, then that's the most important thing.

I think what's -- you know, what really motivates a lot of coaches is that our players, they motivate and inspire us. And, you know, that's what makes this experience full of joy.

Working with them motivates and inspires us, maybe even to a greater degree. I do think that the experience itself is so valuable. It's invaluable. I mean, you can't really put a figure on it. I think it's essential in the lives of these young men and women. And just to be a part of that is an incredible privilege.

In 2017 we did have the perfect season. We were 23-0. And what I did before the season was I went into the locker room and I put on the mirror, it's just this big sign that says "you are enough." To me that was the most important message and I wanted to assure them that they were enough. But it really does go back to that empowerment and how powerful collegiate sport can be, especially with that age group, 18 to 21. It's just that confluence of that age, the experience and the opportunities that they're given. And I think that that's why you see great things happen.

You know, I would say to younger coaches that it's just so important to get to know your coaching colleagues and how fortunate you are and can be if you are on staff with some of the greats. And that has informed my coaching in just remarkable ways.

MARK EMMERT: Thank you so much, Nancy, for your words and for sharing your time with us today. I so enjoyed talking with Nancy and hearing her stories and feeling that energy that she brings to coaching. It's really quite remarkable.

Nancy's also dedicated her honorarium to the University of Connecticut's Department of Neurology to fund a fellowship focused on movement disorders. And I know Pat would love that, Nancy. Thank you very, very much.

If you want to see Nancy's gracious acceptance speech, I



encourage you to find it on NCAA.org. So, thank you again, Nancy, for all that you've done for student-athletes and college sports. You remind us why we do what we do, especially in these challenging times. And we've certainly had quite a few of those challenges.

While this convention is all about looking forward, it's important that we reflect on what's transpired this year. So let's rewind to just 12 short months ago to remember what's just happened.

>> The eighth national championship, unbelievable, for the North Dakota State Bison. We asked you and told you what perfection looks and feels and sounds like. Well, you're looking at it right now.

MARK EMMERT: We agree that student-athletes should be allowed to benefit from their name, image and likeness, commonly known as NIL. And we are in the process of identifying appropriate ways to do so.

>> Kind of hold those out to face the camera. Just tell us what Olympian Made Here means to you.

>> The board's actions have and will continue to underscore our commitment to providing opportunities for nearly half a million NCAA student-athletes. This year we have faced some significant challenges. But with challenges come opportunity.

>> Good afternoon from New York. We're coming on the air with breaking news. Very sad news to tell the sports world. The LA Times is reporting that retired Los Angeles Lakers basketball star Kobe Bryant has been killed in a helicopter crash. It happened this morning. The chopper reportedly went down just before 10 a.m. local time.

RECE DAVIS: Jay, the NCAA has made the decision to cancel the men's and women's tournament. What's your reaction?

JAY BILAS: I'm not sure there was any other reasonable choice, Rece. We've discussed this throughout the day, including this morning at 9 o'clock on the ACC Network that this is a pandemic, and this is about slowing the spread of this and about flattening the curve of this. And the NCAA has to be -- has no other choice but to be a responsible global citizen here -- no other choice.

MIKE GREENBERG: Breaking news coming into our newsroom in just the last few minutes. The 2020 Olympic Games scheduled for late July into early August of this year in Tokyo will be postponed for a year because of the coronavirus pandemic.

MARK EMMERT: We cannot now, at this point, have fall NCAA championships because there's not enough schools participating. The board also established, the Board of Governors, also said, look, if you don't have half of the schools playing a sport, you can't have a legitimate championship.

[Music playing]

>> I can't breathe. I can't breathe. I can't breathe. I can't breathe. I can't breathe. I can't breathe. I can't breathe. I can't breathe.

>> We are here to create change. Create change for the better of this community. Change isn't going to be easy, but what in this world is easy?

Our family and friends here today. We need to start educating each other on the reality of this country. We need to educate the children and the younger generation on our rights as citizens and the injustices of our system.

This does not end today, and it doesn't end tomorrow. This push for change can never end until we are treated as equals.

>> They're listening. And their decisions are based upon our opinions. A lot of the decisions made in that room come straight from us.

>> We see now more than ever there is so much power in the student-athlete voice.

>> It's bigger than a lot of people think because it doesn't just -- it's not just for fans to show; it's for athletes to feel. You know, our uniforms are part of us at some point, and we feel that. We put that on our jerseys, we put those patches on because they mean something to us.

[MUSIC]

ANDY KATZ: And welcome, everyone, to our NCAA social series here. I'm Andy Katz, pleased to be joined by Dr. Brian Hainline.

DR. BRIAN HAINLINE: The way everyone's working together to get this figured out, we're all optimistic. And like Joni said, we're just going to try to figure out the way, and we think we can.

>> I'm very, very hopeful, and we always find a way. And we're going to for these student-athletes.

>> Take the social responsibility to follow everything that is being advised to us, because even though it may not impact you personally, it might impact someone you love or

someone in your family. And that's something that I saw personally that can be devastating. Be socially responsible, follow social distancing, and we'll all get through this together.

>> I feel like we're entering that, you know, the fourth quarter of a football game and we're down by three touchdowns. You're not going to give up. So my analogy is we're going to keep fighting back, fighting back. And hopefully, you know, come late August that we're going to throw that Hail Mary to end up winning the football contest at the end of the fourth quarter.

>> After the most tumultuous offseason in sports history, two FCS powers led by talented rosters kick off the 2020 season.

>> And here comes Sarah Fuller onto the field. Two weeks ago, she made history as the first female to ever kick off at the Power Five level. Now she can be the first to make an extra point at the Power Five level.

SARAH FULLER: It's been a little chaotic, but I'm very thankful for every opportunity. And again, the whole, you know, Vanderbilt football staff has been incredible, and it's been an awesome journey.

>> It's the first college basketball game of the new season on ESPN, 23rd ranked Ohio State against Illinois State. We're calling this game remotely. But Cory, there is comfort in the sounds of the game, the dribbling of the basketball. It gives us a sense of a little normalcy.

>> A pivotal moment in the U.S. today as the first COVID-19 vaccines were given there. With the prick of a needle, the worst-hit country in the world was given a dose of hope.

MARK EMMERT: What a tumultuous year this has been since we were last together in Anaheim. We have all collectively -- college sports, the nation, the world -- have been through a lot, to say the least.

We've wrestled with daunting challenges. We've seen enormous suffering. We've seen stark injustices. But we've also had some enormous accomplishments. And to me, the biggest lesson in thinking about all of this is that while we're dealing with crises, we need to stay true to our values.

And when I look out on campuses, when I saw what you all were doing, I saw much more than just insurmountable problems. I've seen campus communities working to do the right thing, to stay to their values and to help and protect student-athletes and their communities.

We've seen innovation and flexibility and creativity, including right here in the governance of the NCAA.

And along with that we have some corollary lessons that we need to learn, and the biggest one of those is when we cooperate, remarkable things can happen. And, sadly, we've also learned that when we're divided, we simply fail, and sometimes catastrophically.

Now, people have been showing their values and focusing on students and student success in extraordinary ways. All of you, but especially the student-athletes, have demonstrated unparalleled resiliency over the past 12 months.

And these circumstances, this extraordinary, awful year has presented a great opportunity to truly showcase those values and to reinforce our mission of what we are and what we stand for.

So as we edge into 2021, as odd and difficult as that transition has already begun, it's an opportunity for us to make our case in our words and our deeds to our critics and our world about what we stand for and what counts.

Now, we all know that many of our critics, indeed some of the critics even within college sports, say that college sports is nothing more than an entertainment industry. There are those that think in fact that we should even take that part that's most entertaining and most lucrative and carve it off the association, set it over here and turn that into a pure entertainment industry with paid professionals.

I couldn't disagree more. We are not just the entertainment industry. The single most important outcome for all but a tiny fraction of our athletes is to graduate from college with a meaningful degree.

Now, that doesn't mean we're supposed to be naive. That doesn't mean we're supposed to pretend that parts of college sports aren't extremely entertaining, that they attract enormous crowds. Of course they do. And a very small part of college sports does indeed generate an enormous amount of revenue.

One of the big issues for me and I know for you isn't whether or not sports produced big revenue. It's what do we do with the revenue? Do we line it up with what we care about? Do we spend those dollars on the things that matter the most for the young men and women who play these games?

We have to continue to act, as we go into '21, consistent with our values and in the best interests of our

student-athletes. And I have to say that's one of the reasons I'm especially frustrated and even disappointed today. We were all, all three divisions, ready to take and are ready to take a big step in the transition to support our students in our actions around name, image and likeness, and to demonstrate our values in support of our young people in doing things that the rest of the student bodies get to do.

But because of an enormous amount of issues surrounding all of this, issues that, frankly, are beyond our control, it is now a very ill-advised thing for us to do at this stage.

So we have to pause on this progress. And I'm very disappointed in that. More importantly, all of our college athletes are profoundly disappointed and I suspect even angry.

But we need to make clear we're still committed, we're still determined to move forward with name, image and likeness modernizations and certainly with changing Division I transfer rules. We promised this to our students. We're going to get it done. We're going to -- it's going to take a little bit longer than we anticipated; there's no question of that. But we're going to do it in a way that's consistent with all the laws that are applicable to the NCAA.

We think we've done that already. We think we have it right. But it's been called into question. And so now we need to pause to answer those questions. But, again, let me be clear, our commitment to the modernization of our rules and doing what's best for our student-athletes remains resolute.

And in that context, 2021 is a seminal year for college sports. We have a lot of unfinished business. First and foremost, we've got to finish NIL. Once we receive clarification on where the law stands, we've got to accomplish this goal. We have to do it in a way that supports, doesn't diminish amateurism. We have to make clear that this is not about pay for play, no matter what a headline might say. This is not about converting student-athletes into employees. It's not about student-athletes having a business relationship with their school.

But we can't equivocate on this. We're committed to taking action on NIL and to the fairness issues around D-I transfers. I'm disappointed that the transfer rule can't take place at this time. But we're going to get there.

And in the interim we need to continue to exercise compassion and flexibility towards students in all of our waiver transfers and in all the ways we've been doing it all

throughout 2021. We have to get right after those things and we have to do what's right and what's fair.

And while we're talking about fairness and focus on our athletes, there's more to be done in 2021 than just finishing NIL. And if we're going to be fair, it means taking action where we know it matters. For example, we need to make certain that college sports is inclusive and fair to all. In particular, we've got to continue to make better progress with coaching and administrative ranks that better reflect our society and our athletes. We know full well that the numbers are not good today.

We also need to make sure that we're doing all we can in our systems of keeping people accountable and holding them accountable for misbehavior and have real consequences to those who violate our rules, but do it in a way that doesn't harm the innocent.

We have a wonderful system with many people working very, very hard on it, but we know that we can do better than we do right now.

In health and safety, promoting fairness and staying focused on our student-athletes means three more things for us. First, foremost and always, it means we've got to deal with COVID-19, and we've got to make sure that in 2021 we're persistent, we're disciplined and we follow the science.

We've got to stay the course until society is safe and our students and coaches can re-engage in athletics in the way that we all want to.

Secondly, we need to continue to drive evidence-based health and wellness protocols in all of the areas related to health and wellness. We've made wonderful strides around concussion protocols and mental health and independent medical care. We've got to keep that up. We're not done there. We've got a lot of work to do there.

But we need to add another key step there. We need to add some teeth to our health and safety protocols. We need to create a system -- and we can do it in 2021 -- that holds each other accountable for the commitments we make to promote and advocate and conduct those protocols. We need to do that.

And then we need to do, yet again, one important thing. We need to put our money where our mouth is on academic success.

Let's be clear. We have reason to be incredibly proud of the success we've made and what our students have made in terms of graduation in all three divisions. It's been

remarkable to see the progress. We have need to stay to that goal. We need to provide academic support while student-athletes are playing, but we also need to continue that support after eligibility is over.

Post-eligibility support should be the norm, not the exception. Many of you are doing it now. Many schools are providing student-athletes an opportunity to come back and finish their degree. That needs to be an expectation for student-athletes, rather than something that occurs occasionally.

That's what we need to do in 2021. And let's be clear: This is going to be a genuinely pivotal historic year for college sports.

All of this is about the young men and women that play the games and we want to make sure that this is always about college students playing other college students.

We want to get back to college sports in full form in 2021 in a better way than before -- not just returning to what we were, but being better than we were before 2020.

I want to thank you all, in closing, for everything you did in 2020 and what you're going to do together in 2021.

Now, let's remind ourselves what college sports means to all our students and to all of us.

>> Dear college sports.

>> Dear college sports.

>> Dear college sports.

>> There's light at the end of the tunnel. We can see it.

>> A return to normal and all the things we love about sports. We're filled with hope just thinking about it.

>> Fans in stadiums and arenas. The hugs, high fives and dog piles. The championship moments. Even the heartbreaking losses. They're coming.

>> While this pandemic is not over and continues to impact our lives, you've taught us to be resilient even in the face of diversity.

>> To control what we can control, and put the greater good before ourselves. We've put those lessons to work.

>> We've found strength in each other, even when we were kept apart.

>> We've found unity across campuses, conferences and divisions.

>> We've found out our voices carry weight.

>> Weight we'll continue to use for positive change.

>> If 2020 taught us anything, it's that nothing's guaranteed. We lost experiences and opportunities we may have taken for granted.

>> The bonding time with our second families. The taste of a hard-earned victory. The comeback stories.

>> Now we're ready for the greatest comeback you've ever seen.

To campuses, classrooms and competition.

>> To moments together, face-to-face, hand-in-hand, arm-in-arm.

>> To more celebrations in uniform and graduations in cap and gown.

>> You take us to places we never imagined. You hold us to a higher standard. You bring out the best in us.

>> So when we look forward, we see the light at the end of the tunnel.

>> We see a future full of promise.

>> We see a better world for you, for all of us, for college sports.

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