

2026 Men's College World Series

Thursday, June 11, 2026
Omaha, Nebraska, USA

Michael Alford
Anthony Holman
Craig Keilitz

State of Baseball Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Welcome to the State of Baseball press conference. Joining us today is the chair of the D-I Baseball Oversight Committee, Michael Alford; the vice president of NCAA Championships, Anthony Holman; and the ABCA executive director, Craig Keilitz.

MICHAEL ALFORD: Well, welcome to Omaha, a special place, everyone. The state of college baseball right now, you see the momentum that is picking up in college baseball. You see how on campus atmospheres are. You see the support and you see the depth of college baseball, how many teams are here for the first time, how many teams reach regionals and super regionals for the first time.

It couldn't be in a better spot for the growth and the support that we're getting not only from our fan bases that love the game, but you're seeing universities also invest into the sport. And that's something that we couldn't be more excited about as a committee member to see the growth and the parity within college baseball right now.

ANTHONY HOLMAN: Welcome, and thanks for being here. One of the things I wanted to share with the group and highlight, Michael and the committee are doing a fantastic job with kind of guiding, giving us a good trajectory and helping us deliver on a number of things related to the parity that he mentioned and the balance and the selection of teams and the seeding and all of those things.

I want to focus a little bit about structure and infrastructure and kind of how we're developing things and some things to point out at the series this weekend or over the next two weeks.

The first is just the addition of a new video board in left field and the replacement of the video board in right field, ribbon

boards, new LED lights. Some other added amenities that MECA and the City of Omaha and our friends at CWS, Inc., continue to show their commitment to this championship and the value that it has in the community.

Not just that group, but the philanthropic community that we have here to support things. And you see that trickling down -- and part of that, and my message to the community is, hey, we've got to keep elevating here because on campus it's getting really nice. You see what was happening in our regional sites and some of those super regionals and the fan amenities they have there and the excitement and some of the bells and whistles.

So we're really excited about that and the investment, as Michael said, the investment that institutions are making in the sport of baseball. And we're thankful for our friends here in Omaha that continue to set the pace for that.

CRAIG KEILITZ: There's not a better spot to be than Omaha, Nebraska in mid-June. I just absolutely love this place. Every time I come back, it gets a little bit more special. But I think Michael hit the nail on the head. How great baseball's been, college baseball, throughout the years.

But it seems like every year we get a little bit better. And Michael's very humble being the chair of the Baseball Oversight Committee, and he's leading the charge making some of these changes that is making our sport much better, and we'll answer some questions on that.

But I've never been so excited about where college baseball is now, but I'm even more excited about where we're going in the future with a few things that are happening that hopefully we can expand on today. Welcome.

Q. Last month, the NCAA announced a two-semester schedule for men's soccer. Is that something that would ever be considered for baseball?

ANTHONY HOLMAN: I'll start, and Michael can share both from his perspective as chair of the Oversight Committee and as an athletic director.



The soccer model has been coming for a couple of years. The coaches have been moving that. It's really closer to the European model that they're trying to affiliate with.

So would we see that in baseball? I don't think so just because of the nature of the sport. And I think Craig's going to talk to you guys a little bit about what you will see is maybe an expansion of our non-championship segment in the fall with the opportunity to play more games, more engagement. But I don't think we'll see a model that's similar to what we're seeing in soccer.

MICHAEL ALFORD: I agree, and mentioning the fall, we are expanding some opportunities in fall ball to grow, and even grow the sport. When you see two teams playing each other that have great brands, we went and played a game in Pensacola, Florida State, I'm speaking for Florida State, we went and played a game in Pensacola, sold out the minor league park, playing Mississippi State in the fall.

So you're just seeing how we can expand our reach, expand the game, showcase the game, and those opportunities in the fall give us a great time to do that, and you're seeing the results and the interest in college baseball.

CRAIG KEILITZ: I think any change we look at would be starting the season in March, not mid-February, and I live in North Carolina. It's supposed to be one of the warm states, and we had six inches of snow as we started practice and then getting into games.

So I think our game needs that move. Just by a couple of weeks would make all the difference in the world. I don't think we would go to that first semester.

Q. I was thinking about this, since 1950, the tournament has been in Omaha. So this is 76 years, the Spirit of '76, we're starting right now here in Omaha. So a question for Michael, Anthony and Craig, I know I've asked it before, but with the growth of the game that you just mentioned and the popularity, would there be a situation for a little bit of an expansion from the 64 teams to -- could there be a consideration for a play-in round? Or if not exactly a play-in round, could there be a fifth seed that maybe would have to play a four seed within a bracket? I don't know if that would make sense or not with the issues with pitching, but I know people love to see baseball and would like to see more.

MICHAEL ALFORD: Right now, as the committee, we are not looking at expansion. We think we have the perfect number. You look at the competitive balance that we have

in regionals. So as a committee, right now, we think we are in a prime spot. Now, in the future, maybe with the growth of baseball and some other regions of the country, we may be able to take a look at it. But right now, with the competitive balance that we have, we think we're at a perfect spot.

ANTHONY HOLMAN: I can't add anything to that.

Q. Craig, or anybody else who wants to weigh in, speaking of NCAA Tournament, maybe changes, feels like every coach we speak to says let's go to the 32-host format, three weekends. But then we look at other sports, like college basketball, college football, and we say I'm not so big of a fan of their expansion of the tournament without changing the number of teams, necessarily. Just curious, your thoughts, given your exposure to head coaches, and anybody else who wants to weigh in.

CRAIG KEILITZ: It's interesting how things change. Five years ago, I brought it up to our coaches, and sort of maybe it was lukewarm at best to change that format and expand it. The real reason I'd like to see us really evaluate it is to expand our game into regions that we haven't been quite as strong.

So if you think of a Cincinnati getting a regional this year, Wichita State getting one again, a Coastal getting one more years than not. UCF and so forth that haven't traditionally hosted regionals, because when you host a regional, it changes baseball in that city or area forever.

So that's the major reason I'd like us to analyze it, anyways. It is tough because a one versus four is not quite as exciting. It does make it a little bit more difficult with the TV schedule and the amount of money that it costs to do that.

There is excitement with the four teams there, and then the upset. So there's pluses and minuses to everything you look at. The hard thing to know when you're not in the middle of something is how difficult it is to change something and not have it unravel quite a few other things. There's just more dominoes to that. But I'd like us to analyze it and see if it makes sense for our game.

Q. Craig, you mentioned it was lukewarm at the time. I'm assuming you're talking about three weekends of best of three, like normal, regular season has played out. Has it gone from lukewarm to warm or really hot, you know, as far as supporting that? And as far as delaying the season two weeks or longer, how would that affect TV and ESPN and their wishes?

CRAIG KEILITZ: Well, I don't know the second part of that question yet. We'd have to do our due diligence on that, and that would be more in Anthony's bailiwick on that. But it's hard to tell.

You hear two or three coaches that are quoted nationally, and it seems like everybody's on the same page. And that may or may not be true, but it's hard to say until we really dig into it. And we would do that during the convention time and talk with our leadership team before we brought it in front of the full group.

It's real difficult. You can't bring up too many concepts because you have to make sure that the concepts you bring up have a good chance to be viable to be put into place. If you're not, your coaches stop listening.

So I think they've trusted enough, when we bring something to them, it's something that can possibly happen. So we'll have to see over the next January's convention.

Q. And TV?

CRAIG KEILITZ: I think TV wants to cover us. I mean, they want to be a part of it because they're being rewarded very well. But it does come down to manpower and finances and so forth. And ESPN has been such a great partner of ours, but the expansion of TV, I don't want to take a step back. So we'll see how that plays out.

ANTHONY HOLMAN: I think that's fair. Our partners have said that their interest in not only the College World Series but other NCAA Championships deeper into the summer is attractive. The challenge for us staff and on campus, these are still student-athletes. Dorms. Apartments. Support staff. After Memorial Day is really difficult on campus. If you expand that a month, six weeks, you're really stretching resources thin.

So I think there's an openness to it. It certainly would be nontraditional. But to Craig's point, if it accompanied a delay in starting the season that made it a little more appealing in playing in March and not February for some of our northern states, I think folks would have a discussion about it. But I think Michael should weigh in from a campus perspective and the strain it puts on you the longer you go into the season.

MICHAEL ALFORD: Great point. It is a strain on campus, the more you push it back getting into the summer months. The education comes in play. Finals come into play, there's just a lot of factors that you need to weigh in when you push things back into the summertime.

And then on the 32, that's something that is interesting. As a committee, we discussed it briefly. There's a lot of concern that it's going to take away from some of the excitement of regionals. It's going to take away the opportunities of a St. John's to go on a run and some of those great regionals. And then to play a format, super, you come here and you play another regional format, and then you basically play a super again in the finals.

So to disrupt that cadence is something that also needs to be really looked at.

Q. Michael, I've been around college baseball long enough that I actually got to see you play.

MICHAEL ALFORD: Wow, we're getting old. (Laughter).

Q. Second, I covered the fall game in Pensacola, and if I remember right, it sold out in 80 minutes. And it was a tremendous atmosphere. It was more like postseason instead of offseason.

MICHAEL ALFORD: Correct.

Q. And I remember thinking that day, this is what will help college baseball grow, you can have that many people show up on a Southeastern Conference football day. We hear a lot of people clamoring for change in the postseason designations in home team and visitor team. A lot of people don't seem to understand that. They think if you host, it's carte blanche. And even some of my good friends in our group, we debate that. And like I said, I've been around long enough to understand the process and why things like that are necessary to maintain the integrity of what you're doing. You're basically logistically placing these games there. So can you talk a little bit about how important that is to maintain the integrity of the competition?

MICHAEL ALFORD: You hit the nail on the head when it comes to the integrity. Because you are placing -- you earn that opportunity to host as an institution. And you had a good enough season.

But then you go in, you're one of four. Back when I played, you were one of eight. So one of four. So you have that opportunity, and then it's everyone's opportunity. You're at an NCAA Tournament. Everyone should have that opportunity to be the home team, rotate through the process of who is home and who is visitors.

So you're 100 percent correct, it's about maintaining the integrity of the game. You already have an advantage of being able to host with the home crowd, and we saw the

electric atmospheres.

These regionals and supers were the best atmospheres I've ever seen in the sport of college baseball across the whole board.

One thing we changed a couple years ago for our home team, you get to use your home locker room. A couple years ago, couldn't even use your locker room during a game. But we're allowing that now. So we're taking little steps. But the integrity of rotating home and away is just part of the game.

Q. Craig, how long of a process did it take for DSR to get approved for the selection committee? And, Michael, if you'd like to add to it.

CRAIG KEILITZ: It was fairly quick. They made a presentation to us in the national office at the ABCA. We thought there was a really good validity to their whole process. It's just another RPI rating system we thought would be good.

We brought them to the convention, met in front of our leadership team. And then Michael sat in the meeting and thought they were fantastic. So then Anthony invited them in for the meetings, and they thought it was good.

So they used it this year. And I think it certainly didn't hurt the process. But it's been interesting and give us another metric to look at. It's interesting, this may be the least amount of complaints that I've ever had and the most compliments I've ever gotten on how good the field selection was.

So it might have had a bearing, or it just might have been leadership with the director. But just another good metric.

MICHAEL ALFORD: It was something definitely we dug into. We like it. The more metrics we can have helped us separate maybe when you look at something that was odd. Somebody's RPI might be odd. Let's look at the KPI and the DSR and see what they say. Because every once in a while in some of those metrics you do get something that raises your eyebrow a little bit and you dive deeper into it. And it just gave us another ability to really examine a team, especially when we're comparing teams.

Because when you're comparing six teams on the board and you're getting deep, and you know me, I talk about eye tests, I watch games and really dive into the eye test, get past the metrics, but that is something that we definitely used a lot in comparing teams. And it helped us.

Q. So you mentioned that it was a fast process, and

that's kind of what I feared. Because when you schedule out nonconference, for instance, and you use the metric of nonconference strength of schedule in kind of narrowing that field, do you feel it was a little bit of a rug pull for some teams that scheduled in a way to strengthen RPI, or not even a tough schedule, but a team like Mercer who had 40-plus wins, regular season conference schedule, top 30 RPI, but this is the first year that we're going to use DSR and weight it a good amount? Do you think that was a little bit of a rug pull on some teams that scheduled in a certain way?

CRAIG KEILITZ: Two points to that. Our coaches weighed in and thought it was great. They already had their scheduling done. They felt good about it. Then the second most important thing, if we use their metric system to pick our teams, absolutely. But that was just a tool they looked at and analyzed. It might not have changed anything, and it might have given them a better look at two or three different teams. So with our coaches weighing in, not at all.

Q. Michael, in the NCAA basketball tournament, we typically get a seed list 1 through 64 true. This year, it was announced that you were ranking 1 through 32 and the 2 seeds. First question is, did you ever release publicly the 1-32 rankings? And, two, the way that we understood the pod system, the bottom half of the 2 seeds seemed a little bit weaker, and the 3s were stronger this year. If you look at the records in the NCAA Tournaments, the 2 seeds lost a lot of those opening-round games against the 3s this year, and the inflated record of the 2s, a lot of those wins are against the 4s. So I was interested in what kind of weight went into the seeding of 17 through 32. DSR, KPI, RPI, what played the biggest factor there?

MICHAEL ALFORD: It's hard to say without going team by team, of course, but it all factored in. But I think being able to rank them 1 through 32, that's where you saw the competitive balance of regionals this year, more than ever, being able to send some of those teams in a true 1 through 32.

Now, the pod system, going back in memory, really it kind of went 1 through 32 where we placed them. There's a couple instances -- we ranked 1 through 32 not seeing the crossover, where you have a crossover at the same conference.

So, okay, now we're going to swip 1 and 2 and move them just one down. And that only happened a few times. So it was like a Virginia Tech going all the way out to UCLA. It was a true 1 through 32 ranking, and we thought it brought

the competitive nature to this year's tournament, for sure.

ANTHONY HOLMAN: It's important. You ask the question about releasing the 1 through 32. There was no kind of ambiguity about it, but we were cautious not to do that because you may not then see them because of conference match-ups where you have to move one spot or modification for travel purposes in those instances.

We didn't want to release 1 through 32 and then you see the bracket and be like that doesn't match up. So there's a 1 or 2 spot movement based on some other bracketing principles that we have to manage.

MICHAEL ALFORD: Yeah, but it held pretty true. It held pretty true.

Q. For any of you guys, you mentioned the parity being alive and well in college baseball. I'm curious how challenging it is to balance that reality with the fact that there is a massive historic presence from the Power 4s when it comes to the selection and how you guys are trying to maintain balance between keeping parity alive and giving representation to non-P4s and the big dogs?

MICHAEL ALFORD: Well, you take Troy example, then going back to kind of a question earlier, Troy heard us last year when they did not get in and we talked about strength of schedule. And you saw them go out and challenge themselves this year, and I think it made them a better team. And they went out and played a hard schedule and got that opportunity and then produced.

You see Little Rock, what they would do. Unfortunately, for me, St. John's. And you saw what they were able to do. So you're seeing the parity, and it could be the roster limits. We have small data points on that right now. But you're looking at roster limits and some other teams getting maybe the back of the bullpen at a Power 4 is now middle relief and getting those opportunities at a group of five and producing.

So you're seeing more student-athletes get opportunities, in my opinion, once again, small data point, but getting more opportunities there, making those mid-majors even better programs right now and giving them more opportunity. So I think the future's bright for the parity of college baseball.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports

