



VIRTUAL ATHLETIC BOARD MEETING

April 15, 2020 – 2:00 pm

Present: Mark Groza (Chair), Tim Aurand, Joe Bittorf, Thomas Bough, Chris Dawe, Sean Frazier, Marc Falkoff, Pete Garrity, Lesley Gilbert, Kari Hickey, Erika Pinter, Glenn Roby, Amberly Rodriguez, Laura Sala, Kamron Smith

Guests: Debra Boughton, Sr. Assoc. AD/Finance & Operations/SWA; John Cheney, Exec. Assoc. AD; TJ Feuerbach, Sr. Assoc. AD/Development & Revenue Generation; Anton Goff, Sr. Assoc. AD/Director of SAASS; Ryan Sedevie, Sr. Assoc. AD/Collegiate Advancement & External Affairs; Lisa Stocksdale, Assoc. AD/Human Resources & Donor Relations; Courtney Vinson, Sr. Assoc. AD/Sports Administration

- I. **Call to Order** – M. Groza called the meeting to order at 2:02 pm.
- II. **Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes** – Minutes from February 12th meeting were saved in the Microsoft Teams folder for review and will be available on the University website once approved. T. Bough moved to approve; L. Gilbert seconded; motion carried unanimously.
- III. **Faculty Athletics Representative** – M. Groza opened by indicating that this meeting would be focused more on COVID issues and the Athletics department's current responses to the current crisis. He will be adding another meeting on May 20th via Microsoft Teams to delve more into the Athletics department reports.
 - a. **COVID19: NCAA Response** – M. Groza remarked that he would be giving a very high level overview of things that are happening at the NCAA level, then would turn the information over to C. Vinson or S. Frazier to expand upon.
 - i. Spring Sport SA's Granted Additional Year of Eligibility – Spring and winter championships seasons were cut short. As a reaction to that, the NCAA has granted an additional year of eligibility for the spring sport's seniors that were graduating who were in their fourth year of eligibility.
 - ii. Recruiting Dead Period (until at least May 31st) – The recruiting dead period was initially supposed to end mid-April and has now been extended to May 31st. This puts a stop to all sports recruiting with limited exceptions (i.e. electronic communications and phone calls). No in-person recruiting/traveling is allowed during this dead period.
 - iii. NCAA Distributions cut from \$600 million to \$225 million – The cutting of the men's basketball tournament (March Madness is the NCAA's biggest money) was a huge blow to the NCAA. In response, the NCAA distributions to the conferences were cut immensely. For NIU alone, the cut will be somewhere near \$1 million.
- IV. **Athletics Director Update**
 - a. S. Frazier provided a brief introduction of Anton Goff, the new Senior Associate Athletic Director/Director of Student-Athlete Academic Support Services. A. Goff was a former Athletics Director at St. John's University, University of Hartford, and Bowie State University. He has been in the profession for a number of years, coming from a long line of athletic administrators that understand the balance between academics and athletics. A. Goff comes

from a long line of administrators that understand the balance between academics and athletics.

A. Goff also spoke briefly on his background, remarking that in addition to having been the Athletic Director for the three Universities S. Frazier mentioned, he also worked at Kent State as an Academic Counselor, headed two different SAASS units at Michigan State and the University of Maryland, and played football for Bowling Green. His first day was March 1st so his first few weeks have been very interesting. He commended the current SAASS staff on their assistance during this process and expressed his gratitude for the opportunity to be a part of NIU.

- b. S. Frazier picked the conversation back up with an overview on what has been happening in athletics the past few weeks. He indicated that there have been a lot of video chats and calls dealing with crisis management during COVID19. Health and safety are the number 1 concern from all levels (State, campus, administration, the conference, etc.) and the athletics Sr. Staff have been working around the clock with daily meetings to meet these challenges head on. Some of these challenges include the rigors of working with students on adapting to online instruction while dealing with NCAA regulations, in addition to the pending economic downturn. S. Frazier noted that they are working through modeling possibilities for fall, from scenarios of having a postponed or delayed start to the possibility of having no fall sports at all. The Athletics Sr. Staff are also projecting the financial impact for all potential models. S. Frazier remarked that the athletics department has put a moratorium on additional spending and has instituted a review of any requests for purchases over \$5,000. He noted that they are fine-tuning things that they have already been doing from previous experience of high-level reductions in the past.

At same time, modeling and efficiency is being measured at the conference level. The Commissioner, along with presidents of other MAC institutions, have appointed an operational efficiency working group with a number of AD's, faculty, and staff to take a look at different areas of efficiency, bracing for possibility of more financial hardship. This group will be delivering a report to each president with recommendations of reductions of spending and cost. S. Frazier noted that this should be happening in the next few weeks. He also noted that the University is doing much of the same, modeling campus reductions based on the COVID19 situation.

Lastly, S. Frazier commented on the decision of funding the extra year of eligibility for the spring COVID19 seniors. There were approximately 35 student-athletes that could take advantage of the extra year of eligibility, but S. Frazier believes it will be closer to 18 or 19 students that may return. To that note, the athletics department has made a commitment that even though they cannot fund all the pieces of that legislation, they will not be denying scholarships to the COVID19 seniors. However, the coaches and staff have been asked to work within their current limits of each individual sport. This decision comes in direct response to the current financial situation and the potential impact to fall sports and the need to preserve equity if having to extend the same opportunity to fall sports.

- V. **COVID 19: Athletic Department Action Plan** – M. Groza asked the SAAC representatives present, Amberly Rodriguez and Kam Smith, if they could provide some insight on the transition from a student and student-athlete perspective. A. Rodriguez indicated that as a student it has

been an adjustment from face-to-face instruction to classes being online. She praised the NIU professors and the SAASS team for their efforts, remarking that they have done a great job in providing resources and walking them through the process. She also remarked that the coaches, the MAC, and the NCAA have done a really good job of keeping the student-athletes in the loop on what is going on. She noted that it has been difficult not having a season to play and that the unknown seems to be what weighs most heavily on them. K. Smith agreed with A. Rodriguez's assessment. He indicated that his professors have been good with assisting during the transition and that as a student-athlete the athletics support staff have been very helpful: Sports Performance has been providing them with daily/weekly workouts, Athletic Training has been keeping up with student-athlete rehab and has been checking in with them every week, and coaches have been having daily communication with their team(s).

- a. **Student-Athlete Well-Being/Performance** – T. Feuerbach discussed the efforts of the Sports Performance staff during the COVID crisis:
- i. Providing the student-athletes with at-home workout plans/videos and logs to keep track of their progress.
 - ii. Sessions on healthy habits, positive talk, lessons on leadership, etc.
 - iii. Mental performance sessions and posting workouts on Twitter
 - iv. Football video sessions
 - Motivation and mobility on Mondays
 - Education sessions on Wednesdays
 - Physical circuits on Fridays
 - v. All team plans vary in some regard, but all have weekly check-ins with the Sports Performance staff via Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Group Me, text, etc.
 - vi. Modifications to individual workout plans can be made for injuries or for student-athletes with access to certain types of equipment.
 - vii. Nutrition Graduate Assistants have been putting healthy eating tips, grocery lists, recipes, etc. on the Instagram account for the student-athletes to follow.

A. Goff provided an overview on some of the things that they have been doing on the well-being side of things. They have put together a committee for student-athlete welfare, comprised of representatives from SAASS, Sports Medicine, Sports Performance, and counseling services, who meet once every couple of weeks. The focus of the group is mental health and providing tools and resources for student-athletes (websites, PowerPoints via Blackboard Collaborate, etc.). Cheyenne and her staff in counseling services were recently certified on TeleMed, so they are now able to provide virtual services to student-athletes across the country. Counseling services has also been doing regular workshops and providing one-on-one sessions to student-athletes upon request.

A. Goff also discussed some of the current operations of the SAASS team, noting that their business is very much an in-person paradigm and that they have been navigating through the challenges of figuring out how to provide the same level of academic support without the in-person component. Existing meetings/previously scheduled appointments with student-athletes are being converted to virtual platforms (Microsoft Teams, Zoom, FaceTime, etc.). SAASS continues to put together reports for coaches and sport supervisors to keep them in the loop on how their student-athletes are doing academically. One area they found challenging was tutoring sessions and the logistics of how to make those work virtually. A. Goff indicated that they were able to get with Blackboard Collaborate and

moved these sessions to online video. He noted that the transition to online tutoring has been a “silver lining” during this crisis, remarking that he and his staff will continue to use these methods even after returning to normal on-campus operations as they provide an opportunity to get in more sessions and sessions while on the road.

- b. **SAASS Grading System/Virtual Academic Support** – A. Goff transitioned into discussing the S/U grading system for this semester. Once grades have been posted, the student-athletes will have a chance to choose to keep their grade, or change it to an S or U. SAASS will work with advisors on campus, and will monitor each student-athlete’s grade to assist them in making the decision (i.e. if A, take the letter grade, if F, take the U). A. Goff remarked that if the student-athlete’s grade is lower than his/her cumulative GPA, they will recommend they take the S; if above or equal to, they will recommend to take the grade.
- c. **Compliance/Conference/National updates** – C. Vinson discussed current changes from a Compliance standpoint. The recruiting dead period has been extended to May 31st and the signing period begins today through August 1st. Both of these timelines were altered based on the current situation with COVID19. C. Vinson also discussed the Group of 5 Waiver, which was put forth to the president of the NCAA asking for relief on specific legislation that will provide cost savings in areas such as football attendance requirements, minimum number of contests, financial aid requirements, summer access, sports sponsorship, etc. over the next four years. Two changes

The NCAA put together a Q&A of basic questions that were being asked related to COVID19 to help the membership navigate through this crisis. Some of the questions C. Vinson specifically put forward were related to financial aid (i.e. non-countable vs. accountable aid funding COVID19 seniors, part-time enrollment specifically for COVID19 seniors who have not graduated as of Spring 2020, etc.). The NCAA has not provided much guidance as to the impact on incoming student-athletes/freshman, but it is clear from the high school perspective that the NCAA will have to mirror some of their reactions to models used during Hurricane Katrina. The Compliance office has been receiving a lot of transcripts and the both the Compliance staff and the staff in Records and Registration have been putting together evaluations to get back to coaches so they can make recruiting decisions, sight-unseen.

T. Aurand asked if NIU is granting spring sport student-athletes another year of eligibility what their scholarships will look like. C. Vinson responded that in terms of financial aid limitations for the spring sports that were affected by COVID19, they are allowed to go over their maximum limitations specifically for their COVID19 seniors (i.e. softball gets 12 scholarships; if they bring back 2 COVID19 seniors, it would then be permissible for them to provide 14 scholarships). With that being said, C. Vinson noted that the department made the decision that these sports would have to operate within their maximum financial aid limits; so if the COVID19 seniors want to come back and their coaches have room in their scholarships they can give them aid, if not, they would have to come back as a walk-on or look at other non-countable aid (i.e. graduate assistantships). M. Groza added that, essentially, the “bucket” of money for each sport will be the same, and that it will be up to the coaches to divvy up. C. Vinson also clarified that the currently committed funds cannot be changed for any student-athletes other than the COVID19 seniors.

- d. **Camps** – J. Cheney indicated that all athletics summer camps (and all on-campus summer camps in general) have been cancelled through the summer, currently until August 1st. Coaches are looking into fall options, but nothing has been finalized yet.
- e. **Donor/Fan Engagement** – T. Feuerbach went over some of the things the HAF staff have been doing during this time:
 - i. Making telephone calls to donors and season ticket holders to demonstrate appreciation for their support as well as letting season ticket holders know that the renewal deadline has been pushed back to May 15th
 - ii. Video chats with Huskie Fan Advisory Board (HFAB)
 - iii. Video chats with key groups of supporters (some including head coaches)
 - iv. Providing head coaches with donor lists so they can make calls and send notes
 - v. Created a new HAF newsletter which includes articles, video content (student-athlete videos), resources for student-athletes, information related to the University and correspondence from the President, information related to the NCAA and spring sports, mental health, etc.
 - vi. Survey for football, men’s basketball and women’s basketball should be going out this week from the Marketing team

R. Sedevie discussed upcoming fan engagement events, including the Victor E. Bash and the Huskie Summer Circuit. The Victor E. Bash will be transitioning to a virtual event sometime mid-late June and will become a week long program. The Summer Circuit will also be transitioning to a virtual event, and will be scheduled for the beginning of June. Also during this time, the athletics staff has been working hard to support the local community and its partners, doing everything they can to support the DeKalb County Unites Initiatives and supporting small/local businesses.

- f. **Evaluation of Staff and Coaches** – L. Stocksdales discussed the process of coach and staff evaluations. For coaches, an anonymous Qualtrics survey is sent out to units/areas that would touch base with that coach. After the survey has been completed, the sport administrator then takes that information and completes the Performance Evaluation form referenced in the Athletic Board Teams folder. Coaches are also asked at this time to conduct a self-evaluation. This year will be a little different as the spring sport programs did not finish their seasons. For these particular evaluations, “COVID19” will be notated on areas that cannot fairly be assessed (i.e. team outcomes). L. Stocksdales noted that evaluations will still happen this year despite the unique ending to the spring season, and that they will be conducted virtually until a return-to-campus date has been set. For the Sr. Staff, the evaluation process is very similar. The Qualtrics 360 survey is sent out to various units to critique each of the staff members. S. Frazier then collects this information to go over with the Sr. Staff member one-on-one.

- VI. **Open Forum Q&A** – M. Groza opened the floor to questions. L. Gilbert asked if there was a deadline for when a final decision would be made on the fall sport season. J. Cheney answered that there is not a set deadline, but noted that there will be a medical acclimatization period that will have to be taken into consideration. He remarked that if things were not getting back to normal by mid-July, there are a multitude of scenarios that have been modeled ranging from shortening the season or starting in October. C. Dawe asked if those decisions were made at the conference or national level. J. Cheney answered that he believes the decisions will primarily be

led by medical professionals, followed by NCAA, the conference commissioners and other various committees from there. M. Groza interjected that he felt if the University was not back to allowing groups of over 100 by early to mid-July, he felt it unlikely that the fall season would kick-off on time.

T. Aurand noted that a large part of the athletics budget is funded by student athletic fees, and wondered if any students have come forward for refunds on since they were unable to partake in spring sports. J. Cheney responded that all students were given a refund of \$25/credit hour for fees in general, but that the breakdown of where that \$25 comes from is still being determined.

C. Dawe asked if there has been any conversations on cutting sports. M. Groza interjected that discussions are happening nationally, but the ultimate decision of sport sponsorship will come down to the institution. D. Boughton added that it is in the purview of this governing body to partake in those discussions as it relates to sports sponsorship. She noted that if this was the direction the department was looking into, the Athletic Board would be consulted. She also remarked that while institutions do have the ability to decide what sports they offer, there are other factors that have to be considered (i.e. Title IX regulations). M. Groza's understanding is that there have not been any discussions from NIU on this so far that he knows, but if or when they do occur, this group will be at the forefront of those discussions (bylaw "The Board shall be consulted on any changes in conference affiliation, sport sponsorship, and NCAA division status"). C. Dawe asked what the timeline would be on making those decisions. D. Boughton responded that there are no specific deadlines, but that they would presumably try to make those decisions in a fashion that would still allow student-athletes the opportunity to find another institution if they needed.

VII. **Announcements/Adjournment** – M. Groza reminded the group that the situation continues to be fluid, and that he hopes there will be additional clarity on some of the group's questions by the next meeting on May 20th.

G. Roby made motion to adjourn the meeting; C. Dawe seconded; meeting closed at 3:13 pm.

Upcoming Meetings: Wednesday May 20, 2020

Approved May 20, 2020