



VIRTUAL ATHLETIC BOARD MEETING

May 20, 2020 – 2:00 pm

Present: Mark Groza (Chair), Tim Aurand, Joe Bittorf, Thomas Bough, Chris Dawe, Sean Frazier, Marc Falkoff, Pete Garrity, Lesley Gilbert, 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; Matt Varnadoe, Assistant AD/Director of Compliance

- I. **Call to Order** – M. Groza called the meeting to order at 2:01 pm.
- II. **Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes** – T. Bough moved to approve; L. Gilbert seconded; motion carried unanimously.
- III. **Faculty Athletics Representative** – M. Groza opened the meeting with a quick discussion on two topics he felt relevant to the group from a national perspective and from his perspective as Faculty Athletics Representative: Name, Image and Likeness (NIL), and the transfer portal. M. Groza first discussed NIL, referencing a Q&A-type document provided in the Athletic Board Teams folder. The NCAA is moving in a way that will allow student-athletes, in a limited fashion, to profit off of their status as a student-athlete. No changes have been made yet; these are still just legislative ideas and have not been voted on officially by the NCAA. M. Groza expects that voting will occur sometime in the next academic year.

The conference has created a NIL Working Group of which M. Groza is a part of. The task of this group is to come up with education materials that student-athletes can use to help guide them through the process. M. Groza indicated that the working group will be tapping different constituents on campus for assistance, noting he may be reaching out to some of the faculty members on the board and across campus in the upcoming year to assist with this initiative.

M. Groza also briefly discussed the transfer portal, stating that while not necessarily explicit to the Athletic Board manual, he felt it was something the group should understand. This year marks the 2nd full year of the transfer portal being up and running. NIU had the same number of student-athletes enter the portal this year as they had last year (33), though not all student-athletes that enter the portal actually transfer. While there has been no legislative updates on transfers yet, M. Groza noted he expects there might be something in the fall in terms of allowing undergraduate transfer students to compete right away.

Athletics Director Update – S. Frazier updated the group on the NCAA, MAC and Institutional responses to COVID-19. The NCAA has a lot of legislative things happening right now: NIL is a big issue. There are a number of operational components in what student-athletes will and will not be able to do, in addition to state governance components. S. Frazier remarked that discussions are very fluid now, and he will provide this group and other necessary parties with the final legislative pieces when they have been determined. S. Frazier also brought up the COVID-19 seniors. The NCAA is granting waivers for those spring seniors who lost their eligibility in the

spring due to COVID, allowing them the ability to come back for an extra year of eligibility. While the NCAA allowed these students an extra year, they did not provide a funding model for providing aid to these returning students. Since NIU is not in the financial position to be able to provide aid to these COVID seniors beyond the normal cap, they are asking the coaches to work within their limits. In addition to the waivers for COVID seniors, there has been a drive (particularly by the Group of 5 Conference) for waivers on things like attendance requirements, sport sponsorship, etc.

From the MAC side of things, S. Frazier noted that the MAC just finished their Operational Efficiency Report, which has been adopted by the MAC Commissioner and will go into effect. Some of the recommendations from this group include disbanding eight (8) conference championships, shortening scholarships for football, and looking at home football hotel overnight accommodations. The estimated savings for NIU based on these recommendations was approximately \$88,000, give or take, depending on scheduling. S. Frazier noted that while there may be savings from these reductions, there is also an impact on the student-athlete experience. All sports will be conducting individual meetings with their sport liaison in the conference to work through operationalizing the recommendations.

Institutionally, there have been, and will continue to be, budgetary challenges. Some of the coaches and administrators on campus, including Sean, are taking pay cuts to help mitigate some of these challenges. S. Frazier noted that they are still in the first stage of review in the budgetary process, currently modeling a number of scenarios internally based on several factors (fall sports, cash flow of the University, enrollment, etc.). S. Frazier hopes to have more clarity on the situation in the next 2 ½ - 4 weeks. He noted that they are looking at models ranging from 10-20% cuts. With no football season, the projected loss is somewhere around \$1.5-\$3 million as a lot of the Athletics' operational budget is tied to football in things like multi-media rights and TV contracts. M. Groza added that even with the best-case-scenario (sports play in the fall), the Athletics department will still take a hit and asked S. Frazier what types of things they are doing to try to make up those deficits. C. Dawe remarked on some of the initiatives he's seen (i.e. season ticket re-enrollment, t-shirt sales, etc.). S. Frazier commended his Athletics staff on their creativity during this time in creating a lot of new opportunities and thinking outside of the box on ways to fundraise and monetize our brand (i.e. virtual Huskie Summer Circuit, virtual Victor E. Bash, partnering with a CBD oil company, etc.).

T. Aurand asked if the MAC as a conference is considering reducing the number of sport programs required to be a member of the MAC. S. Frazier answered that there has not been any talk from the MAC on this. M. Groza further commented that the rule to sponsor 16 sport programs is actually a NCAA rule. The rule for the MAC is that each institution is required to have the following four (4) programs: football, men and women's basketball, and volleyball. P. Garrity asked if S. Frazier believes the NCAA will make the determination on fall sports or if it will be up to the conference or each individual institution. S. Frazier responded that institutionally, these decisions will come from the Governor. M. Groza added that a lot of parties are involved in those decisions, but that, ultimately, the State/Governor will dictate what happens.

IV. **Liaison Reports:**

- a. **Diversity Integration Group (D.I.G.)** – C. Vinson provided a Year End Review document to the group via the Athletic Board Teams folder. The goal of D.I.G. this year was to figure out ways to integrate Athletics with campus on diversity initiatives. Highlights from the report

included a recap on some of the events D.I.G. participated in, MAC initiatives, trainings, sponsorships, etc. C. Vinson noted that they were not able to do a lot during the spring due to COVID, including several trainings that will be rescheduled for next year.

- b. **Finance and Facilities** – J. Cheney discussed the Athletics’ Return to Campus plan, noting that we are currently anticipating our region to move into stage 3 of the 5 stages of recovery after June 1st. If that happens, Athletics should be able to bring student-athletes back in small groups between June 1st and June 14th. The department is currently waiting on clarity from Matt Streb and the Governor. J. Cheney also noted that the NCAA voted to establish June 30th/July 1st as the date that athletic related activities can start. June 15th will mark the start of workouts (daily temperature and wellness checks required). J. Cheney continued that all Athletics’ facilities would remain locked down, with restrictions on when students can be there. There will also be protocols for screening, wristbands, timed check-ins, rotations, etc. He noted that there is still lot of coordination to be done on logistics (lockers rooms, laundry, cleaning, etc.). At this point, staff are not required to be tested, but are to answer the wellness questions. T. Bough asked how this filters to the marching band. J. Cheney recommended that the band start working with groups of 10 or less and instill questionnaires in their process such as Athletics is doing.

From a Finance and Facilities Working Group perspective, J. Cheney noted that there are two areas they are working on for fall: digital ticketing/parking and moving to clear bag policy when entering the arena/stadium.

- c. **External Affairs** – R. Sedevie provided a rundown of some current partnerships with Athletics: Tees 4 DC, Tru-Relief, and NIUFanshop.com. Athletics is also currently looking into partnerships with e-sports on campus.

Other initiatives:

- Crumb App – rounds up daily purchases to the next dollar, donating the remaining amount (“spare change”) to NIU Athletics
 - R. Sedevie noted that there is way to limit the total amount per month that can be taken out
- DeKalb County Unites – Mya Groza is spearheading the effort of getting small business surveys out, and Athletics will assist in spreading the word
- Census push – finding unique ways of enticing students
- NW Medicine Phi Sigma – stressing/communicating importance of mental health and providing available resources

Upcoming events:

- Virtual summer orientation
- Virtual open house (5/27 and 7/17)
- Virtual Summer Circuit – typically a multi-day event connecting coaches/athletics administrators with fans/community. This year the event will be virtual via Zoom on June 3rd at 6:00PM, 30-40 minutes long, to be broadcasted on YouTube; there will be an opportunity for fans to ask questions of the head coaches and Sean.
- Virtual Victor E. Bash – transitioned to virtual event that will now span from June 10th – June 19th. There will also be an auction running concurrently.

- June 10th – opening night
- June 12th – virtual event with Sean and Jordan Lynch
- June 15th – 5 or 6 former and current NFL players on Zoom chat
- June 17th – virtual wine/spirits pull
 - P. Garrity asked if Athletics has a Pollyanna Dogma piece included in the wine/spirits pull. R. Sedevie responded that they are working with the NIU Alumni Association on an experience item to be able to do a “brew-your-own mix” with Pollyanna.
- June 19th – wrap up/conclusion

V. **Athletic Department Reports:**

- a. **Men’s & Women’s Basketball Ticket Prices** – J. Cheney shared a document that is available in the Athletic Board Teams folder. There were no real changes in pricing. The only thing that may change in the future is group pricing, otherwise the structure and price point will remain mostly the same.

- b. **Ticketed Sport Attendance and Revenue Gen Outcomes** – J. Cheney shared another document in the Athletic Board Teams folder. There are four (4) tickets sports, a lot in the red right now due to being short on projected revenue. J. Cheney noted that there were many factors on football’s lost revenue: all five (5) football home games had rain, they had a less successful season, and there was less hype on Coach Hammock’s homecoming than they were hoping for. In general, the men and women’s basketball and volleyball numbers were about what they expected. J. Cheney remarked that they are working through FY21 projections now. P. Garrity had a question on the third line of the handout. J. Cheney responded that there was a copy error, and that the third line was actually the totals line (the amounts below the line should be disregarded).

- c. **End of Year Compliance Report** – M. Varnadoe shared a document with the Board in the Athletic Board Teams folder. He noted that the Athletic Board serves as a committee to compliance on items related to financial aid (i.e. cancellation and reduction hearings). All athletic aid agreements are 1-year agreements. NCAA rules dictate that notice of athletic financial aid must be sent by July 1st of the upcoming year. This notice will come from the financial aid office, but is vetted through compliance first. If student-athlete aid is reduced or not renewed, the Athletic Board comes in. The NCAA requires that all reductions/non-renewals can be appealed. A hearing must be requested by the student-athlete within 15 days of the notice date. The Athletic Board will then serve as judge at the hearing, and will make the ultimate decision on whether the reduction/non-renewal will remain or if the student-athlete should retain their original aid. The only exception to the appeals process is for this year only due to COVID-19; if Athletics decides to reduce/cancel athletic aid to a COVID senior, the NCAA does not require the department to provide an appeal opportunity. M. Varnadoe also discussed institutional control at NIU. He noted several ways NIU works towards this effort including setting adequate compliance measures, providing appropriate and timely education, providing sufficient monitoring, and taking swift action when things come up. Institutional control is evaluated by NCAA enforcement staff.

M. Varnadoe discussed Jump Forward, which is a monitoring software used by NIU that is very compliance specific. All student-athletes and coaches have access to JumpForward. Student-athletes can fill out forms and check their CARA, and coaches can use for

recruiting/planning. He also talked about eligibility policies and procedures, noting the difference between initial eligibility versus continuing eligibility. Initial eligibility is for incoming freshman and transfers. Continuing eligibility is mostly conducted outside of the Athletic department with Records and Registration at the beginning of each term, then sent to the FAR for review. M. Varnadoe moved onto a discussion about education, which is, in his opinion, one of the biggest components of compliance. For student-athletes, compliance offers beginning of year educational sessions, timely education emails (around Super Bowl, Masters, World Series, etc.), and end-of-year education sessions. For staff, compliance provides sport specific monthly meetings, annual education sessions within the department, and individual education for new hires and student managers. The compliance office also provides education to local high schools.

M. Varnadoe also went over NCAA violations. There are three (3) levels of violations: Level I (severe breach of conduct); Level II (significant breach of conduct); and Level III (inadvertent/isolated breach of conduct). Level I and Level II violations are considered serious violations by the NCAA, and are therefore publicized within the system. M. Varnadoe noted that NIU had a total of 12 violations, all Level III, since the last compliance presentation with the Athletic Board, and remarked that this is fairly good for the academic year. M. Varnadoe then went through the violations and waivers from last year (details provided in the handout). M. Groza noted that the number of violations and type of violation are consistent with what we have seen from NIU in the past, and reminded the group that the details of the violations provided in M. Varnadoe's handouts were not subject to the publication rules of the Level I and Level II violations and, as such, should remain confidential.

M. Varnadoe closed his presentation with a brief description of the transfer portal. Student-athletes are not allowed to speak to another 4-year institution until they have been placed in the portal. Once entered into portal, NIU is allowed to cancel/reduce aid for next term. This information is disclosed to the student-athlete prior to entering the portal. There are currently 33 student-athletes in the portal.

- VI. **Announcements/Adjournment** – M. Groza thanked the current members of the Board for their service and remarked that they will be welcoming new members in the next academic year. J. Bittorf added that he will be retiring as of June 1st, so the Board will need a new representative from the College of Engineering and Engineering Technology.

P. Garrity made motion to adjourn the meeting; L. Gilbert seconded; meeting closed at 3:40 pm.

Minutes Approved by Board: September 16, 2020