



## VIRTUAL ATHLETIC BOARD MEETING

April 14, 2021 – 2:00 pm

**Present:** Mark Groza (Chair), Ehsan Asoudegi, Pete Garrity, Lesley Gilbert, Kari Hickey, Michael Konen, Malcolm Roebuck, Laura Sala, Glenn Roby, Tim Aurand, Sean Frazier

**Guests:** Debra Boughton, Sr. Assoc. AD/Finance & Operations/SWA; Rashon Burno, Men's Basketball Head Coach; John Cheney, Exec. Assoc. AD; Lisa DeRango, Sr. Assoc. AD/Human Resources & Donor Relations; 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; Matt Varnadoe, Assistant AD/Compliance

- I. **Call to Order** – M. Groza called the meeting to order at 2:02 pm.
  - II. **Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes** – P. Garrity moved to approve; G. Roby seconded; motion carried unanimously.
  - III. **Faculty Athletics Representative** – M. Groza commented on the recent vote by the Mid-American Conference to eliminate the intra-conference transfer policy. This policy previously stated that if a student-athlete transferred from one MAC institution to another, they would be required to sit out a year or go through an appeals process. M. Groza noted that the whole policy has now been rescinded, likely in anticipation of changes the NCAA is making to their policies regarding transfers.
  - IV. **Athletics Director Update** – S. Frazier provided a quick update on the current events in Athletics (review document available in the Athletic Board Teams folder). They are currently experiencing a very busy Spring semester, having most sport teams competing at once (Men/Women's Soccer, Volleyball, Baseball, Softball, Men/Women's Tennis and Men/Women's Golf) and S. Frazier provided kudos to the staff, the University, and to the student-athletes for their efforts in making this Spring a success. There have been several additions to the Athletics' staff: Rashon Burno, Men's Basketball head coach; Collin Bruning, Assistant Athletic Director/Ticket Operations; Steven Donohue, Assistant Athletic Director/Development. S. Frazier introduced the group to Rashon, who was selected as the new Men's Basketball head coach after an exhaustive search conducted by the search committee comprised of M. Groza, D. Boughton, C. Vinson, and S. Frazier. R. Burno revealed his excitement at having the opportunity to join the Huskies. He has been able to observe how the current student-athletes operate on the court and in the classroom and is impressed with their willingness to learn under a new coaching structure. P. Garrity asked where Coach Burno is at in the process of deciding on his assistant coaches. R. Burno responded that he is still conducting interviews, looking to hire staff with a wide range of experience, and would likely have his decision within 1-2 weeks. M. Groza asked about the number of new recruits they might anticipate seeing on the rosters come Fall. R. Burno answered that recruiting has been going well, currently with five commits (pending NLI's), and they still have two scholarships available that they are deciding how to allocate.
- S. Frazier touched base on key points in the Athletic Director Update:

- The HAF membership guide (digital) is ready for distribution. The Press Release announcing its availability will be going out today.
- The Football season ticket renewal deadline is June 1<sup>st</sup>.
  - Athletics is anticipating some level of fans in the stands this Fall.
- HAF renewal deadline is June 30<sup>th</sup>.
- The Victor E. Bash, NIU Athletics' premier fundraising event, will be held virtually again this year June 3-11.
  - R. Sedevie indicated that the VEB will incorporate the student-athlete Victor's Award show to kick off and would also include the Virtual Summer Circuit with head coaches. Additionally, the event will have an online auction and a wine and spirits pull.

P. Garrity had a question regarding athletes that want to use the extra year of eligibility to come back next year, wondering what NIU's policy will be on scholarships for student-athletes wishing to return. J. Cheney answered that each sport would have to look at several factors (i.e. who on their team is interested in returning, how much money is available, Title IX components, etc.) and decide on a case-by-case basis. P. Garrity remarked that he recalled a discussion on this topic previously, and the main takeaway was that there are no guarantees; if a scholarship is available, Athletics' will do their best to accommodate returning student-athletes. J. Cheney added that while the legislation allows NIU Athletics to exceed the previous scholarship allotment numbers set by the NCAA, it would still need to fit financially.

V. **Liaison Reports:**

- a. **Diversity Integration Group (D.I.G.)** – L. DeRango went over the document provided in the Athletic Board Team folder in C. Vinson's absence. Due to complications brought on by COVID, the Diversity Integration Group was unable to complete all items on their action plan, originally developed in 2016. This past year was used to review many of those items to see what still made sense, what was already accomplished and what could possibly be accomplished in FY22. L. DeRango pointed out the list presented on the screen as items the group is hoping to tackle this coming fiscal year. C. Vinson wanted her to stress that they are currently flushing these ideas out now (bullet points are ones she thinks they will be able to accomplish) and will have an updated document/plan to submit to the Board later this year. D.I.G. will also be sending out an End-of-the-Year survey in the next few weeks to staff to gain feedback on how everyone is doing and what the group can do to assist.
- b. **External Affairs** – G. Roby provided an update on the many happenings in Athletics, on campus, and in the community (report available in the Athletic Board Teams folder) including: Spring Showcase (was April 10<sup>th</sup>); HAF renewals; 5-Year Department review/highlights document; sport capacity updates (currently 25% capacity with hopes of 60% by Fall); The Victor's and Summer Circuit; Women's Basketball Golf outing at River Heights; the Brigham Novak Golf Outing; potential Meijer sponsorship through Huskie Sports Properties; Welcome Week; First State Bank Opening Day 5K; Homecoming (10/02); the re-celebrate of NIU's 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary (postponed last year); summer classes/orientation (virtual); High School graduations in May and June at the Convocation Center; IHSA Football State Championships (volunteer opportunities); and vaccination clinics held in the Convocation Center.

P. Garrity asked how Summer Circuit was going to operate this year. R. Sedevie responded that they will be hosting virtually again, similar to last year. The one-hour event will be live via Zoom, and will most likely take place on Wednesday, June 9<sup>th</sup> (completed schedule should be ready in the next few days). Coaches will have an opportunity to give everyone an update on their individual programs and for fans to engage/ask questions.

VI.

**Athletic Department Reports:**

- a. **Ticket Prices** – J. Cheney provided an update on the ticket prices for Fall (document available in the Athletic Board Teams folder). All items that are highlighted were not in the original discussions held back in November. All single game football pricing is located on the left. Tickets will be digital this year unless requested otherwise. J. Cheney also pointed out a change in a previously listed price of \$132 for the seats on the 50-yard line (also highlighted in yellow); the cost will be \$150, as the seats are essentially in a premium location but not a Benchback/Chairback seat. Mini-plans will be available to purchase as four- games or three-game packages. The four-game plan will include three Saturday games (one required to be BGSU and the other two any other Saturday game) and one MAcTion game. The three-game package is the same, minus one Saturday game. Another update will be to game day parking. In an attempt to diminish cash exchange, reduce staffing needs at parking lots, and raise more money, the cost for parking will be added to the single ticket sales. P. Garrity asked if there will be any changes to the gameday experience. J. Cheney noted that there will not be any significant changes, though there are discussions on adjustments to the Yard such as reducing live/stage entertainment to open the area up as more of a corporate tailgate/sponsorship location, and no longer having a video board during weekday games. There will still be some sort of “beer garden” in the Endzone, and Sodexo/Fan Food are working out ways for people to pre-order concessions through an app to reduce lines and wait times.
- b. **Year-End Compliance Report** – M. Varnadoe did an overview PowerPoint presentation (available in the Athletic Board Teams folder). He discussed Institutional Control (are we in control of the Athletics’ department?) and noted the Athletic Board’s role in this area as the reviewing committee involved in hearings/appeals of Athletic financial aid cancellation/reductions. All athletic aid agreements are now one-year agreements and are renewed annually or by July 1<sup>st</sup>. Notification of these renewals will come from the NIU Financial Aid office (after collaboration with the Huskie Athletic Compliance office). If the student’s aid was reduced or not renewed, the student-athlete has the right to appeal this decision within 15 days from the date of notice (per NCAA, appeal opportunities are not required for COVID seniors if their athletic aid is reduced or not renewed).

M. Varnadoe remarked that the Compliance office is currently going through two eligibility audits, which are used to ensure that processes and policies are working appropriately. The first audit is a standard audit through the NCAA. Schools are selected at random; each school must go through this audit at least once every ten years. The second audit is an internal NIU audit, which is conducted two to three times per year. Both audits should be completed within the next month.

M. Varnadoe supplied a brief summary of some the educational efforts the Compliance office provides to student-athletes, staff/coaches, and the community. He indicated that

they would like to elevate the social media aspect of their education efforts in the next few years, and that they will be focusing on NIL education once the legislation passes this year. He followed up with an overview of the NCAA violation structure (three levels):

1. Level I – severe breach = significant, big time violations
2. Level II – significant breach = major violation, but not as bad as level I
  - a. I and II divided into 3 categories: aggravated, standard and mitigated
3. Level III – minor breach of conduct

At NIU, there were 6 violations this year (as of this morning, one more was added). Many of these violations were minor and were self-reported by the coach, who reported the error immediately.

M. Varnadoe closed with a quick discussion on NCAA waivers, the transfer portal, and NIL. This was the second straight year that there were more waivers approved than violations, which is a good thing. As far as the transfer portal goes, student-athletes are required to enter the portal prior to talking to other schools or outside parties. Once a student-athlete enters the portal, they are subject to potential reductions in Athletic aid for the next term or the cutting of services provided with the Athletic department. M. Varnadoe pointed out that in 2019-20, 36 student-athletes entered the transfer portal. To date for the 2020-21 academic year, 51 student-athletes have entered. He believes that COVID played a big factor in the elevated numbers this year in addition to student-athletes hearing rumors that they do not have to sit out a year upon transfer. As far as NIL goes, there are no new updates. M. Groza briefly reminded the group that the student information provided in the PowerPoint presentation should remain confidential. M. Roebuck asked if NIU is no longer going to assist students in finding funding for NIL. M. Varnadoe answered that, as the legislation is currently written, NIU cannot have any involvement in the setting up of endorsements, etc. for any student-athletes. M. Roebuck felt that when this topic was discussed in a previous Athletic Board meeting, there seemed to be more student-athlete support. M. Varnadoe expanded that while NIU can provide education, they are unable to get involved in terms of the deals, agents, etc. P. Garrity asked about the student-athletes that ran into academic issues, asking if only two student-athletes had issues this year. M. Varnadoe responded that there were additional students on the list, but their appeals were approved by the NCAA. The two students that P. Garrity was referring to were denied due to a rule specific to Football student-athletes requiring them to pass nine credit hours in the Fall term. In this situation, the student-athletes were denied as they did not meet this requirement.

- VII. **Announcements/Adjournment** – M. Groza closed the meeting by thanking then members of the Board that are transitioning out. He noted that anyone interested in renewing should consult with their supervisors or whomever appoints for the Athletic Board in their area. Lastly, the Board will continue to meet four times per year, potentially under some type of hybrid structure depending on what the Fall looks like.

G. Roby made a motion to adjourn the meeting; L. Gilbert seconded; meeting closed at 3:04 pm.