



VIRTUAL ATHLETIC BOARD MEETING (MS Teams)
September 16, 2020 – 2:00 pm

Present: Mark Groza (Chair), Tim Aurand, Sean Frazier, Pete Garrity, Lesley Gilbert, Kari Hickey, Michael Konen, Heidi Kuehl, Glenn Roby, Amberly Rodriguez, Malcolm Roebuck, Laura Sala, Kamron Smith

Guests: Debra Boughton, Sr. Assoc. AD/Finance & Operations/SWA; 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; Courtney Vinson, Sr. Assoc. AD/Sports Administration

- I. **Call to Order** – M. Groza called the meeting to order at 2:00pm.
- II. **Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes** – L. Gilbert moved to approve; P. Garrity seconded; motion carried unanimously.
- III. **Faculty Athletics Representative** – M. Groza opened the meeting with a brief introduction and overview of the structure of the Athletic Board. Liaisons from the Board participate within the three active working groups in the Athletic department: Diversity Integration Group (D.I.G.), Finance and Facilities, and External Affairs. M. Groza opened the floor to the group for volunteers to serve as liaison in the upcoming year. K. Smith participated as liaison for D.I.G. last year and agreed to sit on again this year. M. Groza noted that any interested parties could also reach out to him or the chair/co-chairs of each working group post-meeting. M. Groza also discussed the role of the Athletic Board as an oversight committee, remarking that there are a lot of different reports the Board oversees/monitors.
- IV. **Athletics Director Update** – S. Frazier provided a handout to the group via the Athletic Board Teams folder. He noted that the Athletics department has continued the tradition of academic excellence, ending with a Spring term GPA of 3.68 and a school record cumulative GPA of 3.33 for the school year. On the revenue generation side of things, S. Frazier discussed some of the difficult decisions and challenges the Athletics department is facing with budget/finance and revenue generation, largely due in part to COVID. S. Frazier touched based on one revenue generating effort, Huskies Invest, which is an online fundraiser similar to NIU's Day of Giving. With the cancellation of Big 10 game guarantees and other significant shortfalls in the ability to generate revenue, the Athletics department will be starting Huskies Invest a littler earlier and will run longer than the usual week to attempt to close some of the gaps created by COVID. T. Feuerbach added that the Athletics department is also hosting a virtual golf outing. Online registration is \$45/person, and registrants will get a tee gift and prizes based on things like "longest drive", "closest to the pin", etc. This event will make a good precursor to Huskies Invest and all monies raised will go toward unrestricted gifts and Huskies Invest. S. Frazier expanded that the virtual golf outing is just one way in which the department is working to get creative in engaging fans and supporters.

S. Frazier remarked on the August 3rd Frazier's Corner, which put a spotlight on the Athletics' departments connectivity with campus and community beyond selling tickets. He also discussed the department's current work regarding race relations and social justice, noting the shift of

focus of the D.I.G. working group toward creating and implementing a social justice action plan, which launched on Juneteenth.

Regarding Fall sports, the MAC is working through various proposals for truncated Fall seasons now happening in the Spring. A number of committees through the MAC will be working on the final plans in the next 2-3 weeks that will determine further what the season(s) will look like. There are also daily meetings to discuss financial impact, health and safety, etc. The current plan for Winter sports is to continue as usual, with a proposed tip-off date of late November. S. Frazier noted that even though the NCAA might give the go-ahead for the Winter season, that does not necessarily mean there will be a full audience.

S. Frazier wrapped up discussion with the announcement that homecoming will be virtual this year on October 10, 2020. R. Sedevie provided some additional details on the programming. While in-person activities are being discouraged, R. Sedevie remarked that they are working through logistics and potential events that can be hosted virtually. Some ideas include hosting a virtual watch-party of an old homecoming game, virtual tailgates and virtual fashion show.

M. Groza asked S. Frazier if he could expand on the integration of Rec sports with Athletics and where they are at right now with the transition. S. Frazier responded that the transition went into effect July 1, 2020, and that the integration was part of President Freeman's reorganization plan to maximize the amount of energies and synergies around Athletics and the general student population. He remarked that it has been an interesting transition, noting that both he and Anton Goff, who is now overseeing the Rec staff/day-to-day operations, both have backgrounds in Rec/Wellness.

L. Gilbert asked S. Frazier to provide a recap on the Victor E. Bash. S. Frazier responded that the event exceeded their expectations and noted that most of the programming can be found on the NIU Athletics' YouTube channel. R. Sedevie added that financially the goal was to reach \$150,000 and that they reached and exceeded this goal. The silent auction was a big success, bringing in a little over \$30,000. R. Sedevie indicated that the most surprising item was actually the virtual wine and spirits pull. There were over 60 bottles to bid on, and all were sold out within 2 ½ minutes. Based on the success, they may look into adding this type of auction to future events. R. Sedevie also remarked on the level of engagement they saw during the Victor E. Bash, noting that the YouTube channel content went from 1,200 hours of viewership during the entire year to over 2,800 just in one week.

V. **Liaison Reports:**

- a. **Diversity Integration Group (D.I.G.)** – C. Vinson indicated that the D.I.G. working group meets once a month with the goal to ensure that the department has proper programming and protocols in place to have a diverse and inclusive environment. The group has taken steps towards integrating further with campus and their diversity and inclusion initiatives as well as making partnerships that allow student-athletes/staff the ability to interact with various people on campus. The group has not met yet, but will ultimately meet the 3rd Friday of each month.
- b. **Finance and Facilities** – The Finance and Facilities working group has not met yet, and J. Cheney remarked on the difficulties in getting the group together due to the broad spectrum of participants and the logistics of meeting during COVID. The group will ideally begin

meeting in October, and the goal is to help facilitate conversations through multiple processes, with L. DeRango overseeing the finance side and J. Cheney managing the facilities side. P. Garrity volunteered to serve as liaison.

- c. **External Affairs** – G. Roby volunteered to serve as liaison to the External Affairs working group and indicated that their meetings will begin on October 8th. R. Sedevie added that the current focus of the group is on student engagement and the engagement of the community/corporate partnerships and things that help the external facing units of all of campus to maximize revenue and engagement. G. Roby suggested reaching out to Malcom Roebuck from the Student Government Association, and the head of Red Riot, Jacob Hinkle (or designee) to join the group.

VI. **Athletic Department Reports:** M. Groza noted that part of the charter of this group is to monitor the activities of the Athletics department through Athletic department reports.

- a. **Social Justice & Mental Health** – C. Vinson went over the document provided in the Athletic Board Teams folder. Based on everything happening around the country the Athletics department recognized the need to address the topic of social justice. Some initiatives included: mandatory attendance of all black student-athletes to therapy sessions hosted by the Center for Black Studies, all student-athlete participation in conversations with Dr. James Cohen and Dr. Joseph Flynn to discuss the history of race relations in this country, and more. From a staff standpoint, among other initiatives, the department hosted a Town Hall on Race Relations, facilitated by S. Frazier and Monique Bernoudy from ADEI. Topics discussed included treatment of one another, micro-aggressions, ally vs. accomplices, etc.

Moving into fall, C. Vinson talked to Dr. Hart from the NIU Community Counseling Center, on providing mental health sessions and talking to teams in small groups of 8-10 to discuss feelings about everything that is going (COVID, race relations, etc.). C. Vinson also recently met with the newly formed Student-Athlete Diversity and Inclusion Committee. They are currently working on developing an action plan and discussing items they want to see changed in the Athletic department, at the University, and in DeKalb community. M. Groza added that the MAC is also creating Conference-wide programming for diversity, equity and inclusion with the intent for all coaches and administrators to have the ability to participate.

- b. **SAASS Academic Report (prior year)** – A. Goff provided the SAASS Academic report to the group via the Athletic Board Teams folder. He remarked on how impressed he was by the adaptability of the student-athletes, staff in SAASS, coaches, and Sr. Staff in moving to a virtual environment. The SAASS staff continue to deliver service in a hybrid style with in-person study halls and virtual tutoring. They have also been rotating their staff, half meeting in-person for 2 weeks while the other half remain virtual, then flipping. The intent with staggering the schedules in this manner is to always have staff available even if there is a positive outbreak.

A. Goff continued to provide an overview of the Academic report. He noted that when the University went virtual in the Spring, they decided to allow all students to choose S/U (satisfactory/unsatisfactory) as a grading option. Once grades were issued, the student had a certain amount of time to choose to keep the grade or take a S or U. With guidance from the SAASS staff, student-athletes were able to navigate through this process and were able to

come away with higher term GPA's. From the women's teams, Gymnastics earned the highest Spring GPA with a 3.88 (3.9 with the application of S/U). On the men's side, Men's Tennis had the highest team GPA with a 3.651 (3.8 with the application of S/U). In looking at the NCAA metrics on the handout, NIU is doing well when it comes to graduation success rates (GSR) and academic progress rates (APR). Three (3) teams had perfect 1000 APR scores (Volleyball, Gymnastics and Men's Tennis) and all teams were well over the 930 threshold. Other highlights from the report included an overview of The Victors (an Espy-type awards ceremony), student-athlete community service, diversity and inclusion programming and mental health awareness.

- c. **FY21 Budget Update** – L. DeRango provided a handout in the Athletic Boards Team folder and gave the group a high altitude overview of the FY21 budget update. Back in June, the Board of Trustees approved a preliminary internal budget for campus that assumed a shortfall of approximately \$39 million. There are four primary areas that would significantly affect that budget: enrollment, the state's financial position, availability of federal relief funds, and the state's reopening plan. Tomorrow's BOT meeting will look at a revised budget with the 1% enrollment increase on top of what they've already received from the state and federal assistance and any anticipated auxiliary revenue from housing/dining, sales and conferences.

In the process of putting together the FY21 budget for Athletics, there are three main buckets that saw cuts totaling approximately \$2.7 million: O2 funds, NCAA funding, and student fees. \$1.1 million was cut from student-athlete support, through the removal of Cost of Attendance scholarships in FY21 and the reduction of summer school and summer access for FY21. Any unallocated scholarships in FY21 were also taken back and added to savings. Approximately \$400,000 was cut from staff with voluntary reductions of performance incentives, pay cuts, and suspension of cell and vehicle stipends. There was also a reduction in Graduate Assistant contract length and suspensions of several positions. Operationally, the department cut an additional \$1 million through a reduction in all administrative cost centers across the board, cancellation of conference/professional development travel, review of operation costs, etc. L. DeRango noted that there could be an additional \$2 million shortfall with the postponement of Fall sports. P. Garrity asked how NIU compares to other MAC schools. S. Frazier responded that other MAC schools are seeing 20-30% cuts, and while NIU is suffering huge deficits, he felt they were better prepared for this process since they've been going through it for several years now. M. Groza noted that in looking at the EADA Federal Reporting of Budget in Athletics, NIU is definitely toward the bottom.

- d. **Facilities Improvements (prior year) and FY plan** – J. Cheney provided an overview of the handout in the Athletic Board Teams folder. Facilities improvement projects were not as plentiful but there was quite a few projects that were addressed this past year including: Soccer/Track facility pressbox replacement, expansion of Yordon Center laundry, Chessick LED lighting upgrade, cosmetic upgrades (painting hallways outside of locker rooms, training rooms, and the stadium pressbox and west facade), new graphics/signage in Skybox, tennis courts professionally cleaned, addition of a second hitting bay to the golf practice room, and addition of Endzone containers for football home games. J. Cheney also noted some of the projects that are on hold for FY21 pending budget and funding: installation of new camera system at the Soccer pressbox, batting cage/bullpen reconstruction (in the queue due to damage from last year), ADA curb reconfiguration outside of the Convocation Center

Entrance 2, Rec Center locker room renovations and addition of a climbing wall, upgrades to LED lighting in the Convocation Center arena and Victor E. Court, softball dugout, and baseball field replacement. G. Roby asked where things were at with the naming of the Baseball field. J. Cheney responded that the field is already named (Ralph McKinzie), but that they are working toward renaming the ballpark to honor Walt Owens. P. Garrity asked if there are any potential grants for the lighting projects that the Athletics department might be able to pursue. J. Cheney answered that there are challenges with that on campus, but that they are looking at potential energy saving investors.

- e. **M/WBB and Football Ticket Pricing Update** – J. Cheney provided a document in the Athletic Board Teams folder that shows updated ticket prices, which have been revamped due to COVID. They anticipate four (4) home games in Spring 2021 and six (6) in Fall 2021. The 1st chart's rates are based on a per game price percentage (66% of Fall rates). The 3rd and 4th charts show the prices for men and women's basketball. There are two alternate packages depending on what the season looks like. J. Cheney remarked that the Huskie Fan Advisory Board (HFAB) advised getting this information out as soon as possible so people can start making plans.
- f. **2018-2021 Strategic Plan Update** – D. Boughton added a copy of her PowerPoint presentation to the Athletic Board Teams folder. There are four (4) pillars to the 2018-2021 Athletics' Strategic Plan. For the purposes of this presentation, D. Boughton focused on goals within each pillar that they hope to achieve in 2021. She did note that some of these goals might change or be extended to 2022 due to COVID.

Pillar one is the Student-Athlete Experience. D. Boughton indicated that the Athletics department is well on its way to establishing student-athlete mentoring programs to engage student-athletes with alumni. Additional goals under student-athlete experience include looking into solutions for the new Athletic Training staff guidelines coming out and enhancing student-athlete lounge spaces (this one may take a back burner due to the current state of things with COVID). Pillar two is Communication in the NIU Family. D. Boughton discussed brainstorming ways to memorialize a historical timeline in the facilities. She also discussed ways in which the department can better communicate, remarking on the use of an internal events calendar. D. Boughton observed that many of the remaining goals for FY21 rely on the department's ability to have events, so these may be postponed. Pillar three is Community Connection. The department has made great strides with stewarding donors through phone calls, hand written letters, etc. D. Boughton also noted the efforts to continue to emphasize community service goals for student-athletes and staff. The final pillar of the Athletics' Strategic Plan is Financial Stability. D. Boughton briefly went over the following goals: licensing revenue, updating the coach/staff evaluation template, and creating standardized staff recognition.

- VII. **Announcements/Adjournment** – M. Groza asked if there were any additional questions. L. Gilbert asked if there were any updates to NIL. M. Groza responded that they met late last week, and hopes to be able to bring more information back to the Board in November. As of now, nothing has changed, and no changes would go in effect until at least Fall 2021. In closing, M. Groza noted the date of the next Athletic Board meeting as November 18th.

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

Minutes Approved by Board: November 18, 2020