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11-28-2013

Intercollegiate Athletics

John M. Dunn

Western Michigan University, john.dunn@wmich.edu

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WMU ScholarWorks Citation

Dunn, John M., "Intercollegiate Athletics" (2013). *WMU President John Dunn*. 551.

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Intercollegiate Athletics
Dr. John M. Dunn
11/28/13

(Title Slide)

- **(Slide #1)** Good morning. Today in my country, people are celebrating our annual Thanksgiving holiday. It is a day to reflect on all that we are grateful for-- and eat. My personal bit of gratitude today is for your kind invitation to speak here this morning. Thank you for this opportunity. It is my honor to be asked by you to share what we do as an institution and as a nation to both encourage our students to compete athletically and keep the enterprise of sports well managed, ethical and carried out in a way that is in keeping with our academic goals.

- **(Slide #2)** I understand your institutions' and nation's goals in examining this opportunity. Let me just start by saying that there is history and support for your desire to develop intercollegiate athletics. There's more than 100 years of history in the United States that can inform you. Most of the mistakes have been made and corrected, and some wonderful models have been developed. The school I lead-- Western Michigan University--may present an interesting case for you. We were founded at about the same time as the National Collegiate Athletic Association-- the NCAA--and WMU's athletic program development closely parallels the development of our national oversight of collegiate sports.

- One of the first things I always like to do is share the basics about Western Michigan University. Many of you have reason to know a bit about the University I lead, but for those who don't, let me just give you a bit of information that will help you put my remarks today in context.

- **(Slide #3)** As an institution, Western Michigan University is best described as learner centered, discovery driven and globally engaged. You'll hear those three phrases spoken a lot because they are the three tenants of our strategic plan. Nearly all that we do falls under one of those three goals.
- **(Slide #4)** And I always like to share the basic stats:
 - We have nearly 25,000 students
 - Nearly 20,000 undergrads
 - 5,000 graduate students
- **(Slide #5)** We're one of just 207 research universities in the United States according to the Carnegie Foundation rating system, the gold standard in higher education
- **(Slide #6)** We offer more than 240 degree programs. 102 of those are at the graduate level, including 30 that lead to a doctoral degree.
- **(Slide #7)** We also have a large international enrollment. This fall on campus, we have nearly 1,700 students from 105 nations. That number includes 156 students from the Dominican Republic, which is our fourth largest group of international students.
- **(Slide #8)** Athletics at WMU has been part of the institution since fall 1904--the school's first semester. The first example was a football team organized by a student who had played in secondary school. Fifteen of the 20 male students at the school turned out for the first practice, but most quickly quit, finding the sport too

rough since it was then played without faceguards, padding or any other protective gear.

At the same time, schools across the nation were finding football too dangerous. President Theodore Roosevelt convened two national conferences to tackle the problems of football--basically a sport at that time without rules and with no safety measures and equipment. The attempts to control and safeguard football led, two years later, to the establishment in 1906 of the National College Athletic Association--the NCAA, which today remains the United States' umbrella organization for all intercollegiate athletic competition. The NCAA grew out of those two conferences convened by President Roosevelt.

During WMU's second semester, WMU shifted to basketball, playing against local church teams with little success. In 1905, Western football players persisted and completed a season but were unsuccessful against area high school teams. In 1906, true intercollegiate competition began, with competition against other college teams, including local rival Kalamazoo College. Students also developed the first baseball and women's basketball teams and fielded track and field athletes. In 1907, a coach was hired to organize all sports.

(Slide #9) By 1909, WMU had both an undefeated football team and an undefeated baseball team and also had a basketball team.

- Why did sports grow so quickly and successfully at what began as primarily a school for training teachers--Western State Normal School? One prime supporter was Founding President Dwight Waldo. The school's second building, opened in 1908, was a gymnasium. In 1913, President Waldo bought the land on which

Waldo Stadium and our athletic complex now stands. It had its drawbacks. Using it would require rerouting a creek, draining a pond and tiling swamp. But he made it work because he was convinced that having top-notch athletic facilities was the key to attracting young men to college and the teaching profession. He made choices to do what he believed best to provide opportunities for students. And his choices have proven critical to our development as an institution.

- During our 110-year history, our student athletes have enjoyed a vibrant collegiate competitive environment that has allowed them to compete successfully against students from schools around the nation ranging from Yale and Notre Dame to the University of Michigan, Cornell and the University of Hawaii. And yes, even taking on international competition.

- **(Slide #10)** Today our athletes compete in:

- Football
- Baseball
- Softball
- Men's and women's basketball
- Men's and women's soccer
- Women's gymnastics
- Men's hockey
- Women's golf
- Men's and women's tennis
- Women's track and field
- Women's cross country
- Women's volleyball

(Slide's #11 and #12)

Together, these 16 sports account for some 400 student athletes. For those individual athletes, the benefits are enormous. The benefits to the university community are tremendous as well, and those benefits extend far beyond our campus and community borders to provide real service to our nation.

(Slides#13 and #14) The venues we have developed for these athletic endeavors have become the front door to our University. While they are frequented by our current students, they also become inviting beacons of attraction and places where memories are made for our alumni, student families and community members. In many cases, primary school students get their first sense of college by attending an event in one of our athletic venues.

- So what are those specific benefits? Why decide to embark on a road that leads to organized and high-level intercollegiate athletics? Let's start with the most important part of the equation--students. One key message today has to be that this is really all about students and what will benefit them.

Student athletes

(Slide #15)

- For a student athlete the benefits of athletic competition are numerous.
 - Chance to continue one's education
 - Healthy, desirable, fun activity
 - Opportunity to travel
 - Success in the classroom – academic and support services
 - Elite training for national and Olympic teams
 - Teamwork, relationships with others
 - Opens doors to future career opportunities

- Preparation for life--lessons in winning and losing

Our student athletes are students first. Their academic achievement is at the core of their relationship with the University. Because student athletes have demands on their time that most students don't experience, we offer a network of academic support services for them to ensure they can continue to be successful. It works.

- Our Athletic Director Kathy Beauregard has seen two dozen academic All Americans during her tenure and we've had one athlete named a Rhodes Scholar finalist, and another who earned an internship with the New York Times. During 2012-13, for instance, WMU had three programs (women's soccer, men's tennis and women's tennis) ranked in the top 10 percent in the nation in academic progress toward graduation, and our women's gymnastics program boasted eight individuals to carry a 4.00 GPA during the spring semester. Student athletes have averaged a better than 3.0 GPA for 12 straight semesters.

Benefits to the university

(Slide #16)

- There are also enormous benefits to our institution. Athletics provide a focal point around which so many important University needs revolve.

- Focal point for school pride

- Valuable recruitment and retention tool

- Opportunity to keep alumni engaged and returning to campus

- Important way to raise awareness about institution among public

- Community engagement tool

Our major athletic events bring donors, alumni, prospective students current students, faculty and staff, and community members all together at a single event--

and then bring them back again just days or weeks later. Name another event that regularly makes that happen on your campus.

School pride and the recruitment prospects of success in sports cannot be overstated. A 2010 survey published in University Business Magazine offered these interesting figures that reflect an increase in admissions that result from success in athletics. Looking at the NCAA annual basketball tournament, what we call "March Madness," the figures show that an appearance in the tournament resulted in a 1 percent increase in admissions. Making it to the "Sweet 16" final teams resulted in a 3 percent increase. Winning the basketball championship led to a 7-8 percent increase. These are not insignificant benefits.

National benefits

There are also a distinct set of national benefits that come with having a have strong intercollegiate athletics tradition. **(Slide #17)**. Those benefits include:

- Developing a feeder system for Olympic competition
 - Economic development revolving around sport attendance
 - Keeps athletes enrolled in their home nation
 - Tool to build interest in education
 - National pride in sport success
 - Encourages healthy activities
-
- When I began this talk, I mentioned the fact that the U.S. has a better-than 100-year history of strong and carefully managed college athletics. That history is showcased every four years when the Olympics is held.

- In the 2012 summer games, for instance, there were over 10,000 athletes participating. More than 1,000--10 percent--of those athletes were involved in athletics at U.S. colleges and university. They represented the United States and their home nations around the world.

- Without opportunities at home, some DR students might travel abroad to enroll in college in order to find a competitive sports environment. At WMU we're fortunate to have someone who left the DR for that reason. Juan Tavares left to compete at the collegiate level, and today, he's an integral part of the WMU staff. There are many, many more such young people who love their sports and leave their nations to find opportunity. And many never return. They meet and marry other students, begin families and decide to stay in their host country.

- Additional benefits involve the sheer appeal of high-level competitive athletics. In the U.S., college sports are estimated to be an \$8 billion dollar industry.

Organization of intercollegiate sports at WMU

I'd like to tell you a bit about how we have our athletic programs organized at Western Michigan University. There are a variety of models that institutions use, but I recommend one critical element--and that is having the Director of Athletics report directly to the president. In fact direct presidential involvement is, I believe, an important way to communicate both the important role athletics plays and the accountability in place for running a program that meets institutional standards and expectations--as well as the rules established by a national oversight entity.

In addition to the athletic director, there are associate and assistant athletic directors in charge of facilities, marketing, business operations, medical support,

academic support and communications. In addition, there are coaches, sports medicine specialists, equipment managers, trainers, office personnel and development officers. All told, that's more than 120 full- and part-time staff members in our athletic department.

If this all sounds daunting, remember, it took us more than 100 years to get to this point.

Where do you begin?

(Slide # 18) So where do you begin the process of developing intercollegiate sport in the Dominican Republic? The very first thing to do is to make a commitment-- an institutional and presidential commitment. It is imperative that the leaders of each and every college and university involved be deeply engaged and committed to the concept and the logistics of intercollegiate athletics.

That presidential commitment needs to carry through not just to an individual institution's athletic endeavors. It needs also to be the point of authority in the national association and in the athletic conferences that make up that association. Presidential oversight is really what makes the NCAA work and what makes our conferences work. At the top of the NCAA structure is a panel of college and university presidents advising the director. At the top of each conference is a similar panel. I am privileged to lead the Presidents Council of the Mid-American Conference, my University's home organization. Our mission is always to keep the "student" at the forefront of the "student athlete" equation.

Organizational structure to be considered:

Rules and Regulations – NCAA

Conference Affiliations

Competition and Championships

Finances/Fiduciary Oversight

Gender considerations

As I said at the outset, there are good models to emulate, most of the mistakes have been made along the way and corrected. You have a wonderful resource to turn to in the NCAA, the National College Athletic Association.

Conference, league or federation affiliations are an important part of the decisions you'll need to make. They're critical to the success of your national organization. You can organize like-sized institutions, schools of similar size and mission, or schools that are in close proximity. Once a conference structure is settled, you'll want to think ahead to the end of each sport's season and how you'll handle championships. Will championships only be achieved at the conference level, for instance, or will conference champions battle for a national title? Those are all questions that can be decided by sport or as an enterprise-wide commitment.

The conferences with the NCAA run the gamut in terms of how they are organized. Western Michigan University is in the Mid-American Conference for all sports except hockey. Among the strengths of that conference is the fact that most of its members are in close proximity to other members. An even more important characteristic is the fact that all of its members are in a position to financially support their athletic departments at the same level. The range of budgets within a conference--what I like to call the conference bandwidth--can be wide. In some conferences, the range of school budgets is enormous, with some schools

outspending others by a multiplier of 3. Schools' resources become, thus another factor that could be used in organizing an athletic conference.

There is one item in this list of next steps that I would urge you to get correct from the start. That is the piece about gender considerations. In the development of the NCAA and sport in general, the United States was slow to recognize and support women athletes. I would urge you not to make the same mistake. It was well into the 1980s before women's sports were part of the NCAA, and the transition came with real difficulty for many schools. You can learn from the NCAA experience and do things right from the outset.

Next steps

There are a number of practical concerns (**Slide #19**) that will guide your next steps.

- Identify your sports – start small
- Appoint or elect a commissioner
- Organize into leagues/conferences
- Establish rules and regulations e.g. eligibility to compete, scholarships?
- Establish a schedule of competition
- Experiment with a season and modify as needed

These steps will take work, research and time. But as I said at the outset, there are good models to follow. I know tomorrow's workshops will be devoted to sharing some of those models and answering questions about the details.

As you move forward, there will be missteps. You will win and you will lose. But in the end, you will have made enormous strides for your higher educational system and for your young people. In the United States, we have an old saying. "It doesn't matter whether you win or lose. It's how you play the game."

I'm not sure about the first half of that saying, I'm pretty competitive and I think it matters for many reasons whether you win or lose. But I do think athletics—like most good things in life-- require a certain amount of balance and perspective. They're an important part--but just a part--of higher education.

I urge you to remember the words of longtime North Carolina basketball coach Dean Smith who once said: "If you make every game a life-and-death proposition, you're going to have problems. For one thing, you'll be dead a lot."

As you go down this road, you will find people who have not taken Coach Smith's words to heart. But you will be the ethical checkpoint that allows your students and your nation to reap all the benefits that come with intercollegiate sports. I personally cannot wait to visit and watch your students in action.

I'd like to leave you on a high note and give you just a taste of the energy that intercollegiate athletics can bring to your schools. This is a very short video that shows one NCAA and Mid-American Conference team in action.

And now, because I want to be respectful of your time, I'd like to open the discussion up to your questions. Thank you again for your interest in this topic and allowing me to share my experiences with you.