

1A

FACULTY ATHLETICS REPRESENTATIVES

VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL

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April 20, 2009

MEMORANDUM

TO: 1A Faculty Athletics Representatives.

FROM: Josephine (Jo) R. Potuto, chair.
University of Nebraska, Lincoln

SUBJECT: Post-season in DI FBS football.

The Division IA Faculty Athletics Representatives today released the following statement regarding the format of post-season in DI FBS football.

-Jo

DIA FARs Position Statement Regarding Post-Season in Division I FBS Football

College football student-athletes compete on Saturdays only because they are enrolled as students at the universities for which they suit up. Yet somehow this basic fact and its ramifications go largely unnoticed as reporters, bloggers, legislators, and even the President of the United States clamor for a national championship playoff system in Division I FBS football. Those few who mention academic and student-life issues suggest that men's basketball and the Final Four is a model to emulate, as if college basketball even comes close to best preserving student-athlete academic performance and well-being or to striking the appropriate campus balance between academic and athletics. Some even claim that any expressed concern for student-athlete academic performance and integration into student life is mere sham, with universities interested only in profits and football players interested only in playing games.

Let's get our priorities straight here. No doubt athletics competition is an important part of the college experience at our universities. But it must not become the tail that wags the dog (and it certainly must not be the dog). First and foremost we need to assure the primacy of the academic mission of our universities and of the academic and student interests of our student-athletes. For Division I FBS football these concerns mean that all games, including post season – whatever the championship format – need to be played in one semester. Even currently there are too many games. Even currently one's season's football ends precariously close to the second semester. Even currently the next season's football starts up again with spring practice and an intrusion on the spring semester. No more intrusion can be permitted. No more games can be tolerated. Better yet, the current system should be cut back.

The life of a student-athlete is crammed with competition, practice, classes, and study. There is little time in-season for student-athletes to attend a movie or just hang with friends. School-work and class-time can be pale substitute for the excitement, hoopla, and attention of games, especially big games, and more especially championship games. It is not easy to switch gears from the pace and even frenzy of championship competition to the every day life of a student. Football post-season games will be played at the most harried time in a semester, when students are readying for exams, completing papers and group projects, and scrambling to head home for the holidays. We need to avoid changes in the competition schedule that lessen their chances for academic success.

Student academic interests are the prime, but not exclusive, concern of the Division IA Faculty Athletics Representatives as we evaluate any configuration, or re-configuration, of post-season Division I FBS football. We are equally dedicated to minimizing the risk of injury, risk that increases the more games that are played and the longer the season. Then there is the impact an extended post season likely will have on the opportunity of our students, faculty, alumni, and fans to attend the additional games created by a playoff (limited university ticket allotment;¹ higher cost of game tickets; travel costs, including last-minute airline ticket purchase; lodging costs, including a guaranteed minimum stay, etc.). There is the potential adverse effect on the

¹ A home game at a stadium that seats 75,000 will be attended by 75,000 with a direct connection to the university. The 2008 Fiesta Bowl, played in a stadium that seats 73,400, provided 17,000 tickets to each of the competing universities for sale to their fans. The NCAA 2009 men's basketball national championship, played in a stadium that seated 72,500, provided 19,000 tickets to the teams in the Final Four for sale to their fans (4,750 tickets to each of the two universities whose teams competed in the championship game).

home game-day experience and the significance of regular season games and traditional rivalries. There is the potential adverse effect on the quality of the post-season experience for players and fans (and the impact NCAA bylaws could have on that experience by limiting travel parties; number of eligible players, etc.).

We hear about the overriding public need to have a “true” national champion (and little about how a national playoff creates one champion at the expense of all the teams that now end their season as winners under the bowl structure). We hear that the BCS cannot guarantee that the best two teams play for the national championship (although we doubt that arguments over which are the best two teams would disappear with a different format). We hear about the “haves” getting fatter at the expense of the “have nots” (and little about how these latter teams fared prior to the BCS and its precursor Bowl Alliance). We hear about the antitrust implications of the BCS. In our individual capacities as Faculty Athletics Representatives we may differ as to the merit of any or all of these – and other – arguments. But we are united in upholding the centrality of the academic mission in athletics competition, including the scheduling of games and championships.

The Division IA Faculty Representatives do not dispute that the administration of college athletics (as well as the administration of the rest of the university) depends on revenue production and includes the fostering of revenue streams and engagement in commercial activities. We understand better than any commentator or fan that not every enrolled student-athlete has academic success as his major or even a subsidiary goal and even that there are some student-athletes who enter our universities with academic profiles that put them at high risk to fail to achieve academic success. But to acknowledge these realities is not to say that the academic interests and standards of a university and the fair and responsible treatment of its student-athletes may be relegated to a second tier position. It is one thing for students to make poor choices in how they spend free time. It is quite another thing to institutionalize poor choices by the number and scheduling of games and championships.