

**Faculty Board on Athletics  
Meeting of October 30, 2020  
2:30-4:00 pm—via Zoom**

**Members Present:** Patricia Bellia (Chair), Corey Angst, Alex Blachly, Jaimie Bleck, Ann Firth, Lauren Hanna, Erin Hoffmann Harding, Patrick Holmes, Tracy Kijewski-Correa, Randy Kozel, Mary Ann McDowell, Susan Ohmer, Richard Pierce, Aaron Striegel, Jack Swarbrick, Kevin Vaughan

**Members Excused:**

**Athletics Liaisons:** Missy Conboy, Jody Sadler, Angie Torain

**Guests:** Heidi Uebelhor, Associate Athletics Director; Claire Leatherwood Slebonick, Assistant Athletics Director and Recorder

**1. Opening Prayer**

Professor Patricia Bellia called the meeting to order at 2:32 pm and offered the opening prayer.

**2. Introduction of New Members**

Professor Bellia introduced the Board's new members, Professors Alex Blachly and Tracy Kijewski-Correa, and invited the continuing Board members to introduce themselves.

**3. Minutes of Meeting of June 25, 2020**

Professor Susan Ohmer moved to approve the Minutes of the meeting on June 25, 2020 changes (Minutes). Professor Aaron Striegel seconded this motion. The Board voted to approve the Minutes.

**4. Chair's Announcements**

*Sports Schedule Approvals.* Professor Bellia reminded the Board of its sports schedule guidelines created last spring to provide additional clarity around the Board's scheduling policies and expectations in the time of COVID-19. Professor Bellia updated the Board on sports schedules she approved on the Board's behalf, including the men's and women's cross country, men's and women's soccer, volleyball and football. Notably, in part because of the shortened seasons, no team exceeded class miss limits. She previewed a forthcoming issue for men's soccer as the team is now scheduled to be away from campus for the majority of the final exam period to participate in the ACC tournament.

*Captaincy Approvals.* Professor Bellia announced that she approved captains for Hockey, Football, and Men's and Women's Soccer.

*Subcommittee and Liaison Assignments.* Professor Bellia reported that she would send out this year's Subcommittee and Liaison assignments over the next couple of weeks.

## **5. COVID-19 Updates**

Professor Bellia introduced Dr. Matt Leiszler, Team Physician, shared his background, and explained his role, especially its focus during the COVID-19 pandemic. Mr. Jack Swarbrick praised Dr. Leiszler for his work both within the campus community and as a representative of Notre Dame Athletics to various external groups working to combat COVID-19, particularly the ACC Medical Advisory Group (MAG).

Dr. Leiszler thanked Professor Bellia and Mr. Swarbrick for the introduction. He shared the evolution of the ACC and the Athletics Department's COVID-19 protocols and reiterated that the focus of these protocols is to minimize risk and exposure to the virus. Dr. Leiszler described the importance of the University's early adoption of aggressive testing and contact tracing. He discussed the development of return-to-play protocols and emphasized the robust input received from various medical specialists, such as cardiologists, and others.

Dr. Leiszler discussed the pause in football activities and what was learned from that experience. He noted the magnified challenge posed for the spring semester due to all sports, except for football, competing. In answer to a question from Professor Corey Angst, Dr. Leiszler said that the additional number of student-athletes and teams competing in the spring compared to that of the fall renders the logistics, such as surveillance testing and traveling, more difficult as resources are increasingly stretched. Mr. Swarbrick emphasized that the number of active sports in February and March will be very different than is typical.

Replying to a question from Professor Bellia about testing protocols, Dr. Leiszler described the stratification of sports into various risk profiles and the testing requirements, of both the ACC and the University, for each risk category. Dr. Leiszler discussed the differences in the types of COVID-19 tests and explained why the ACC opted for PCR tests. In response to a question from Professor Mary Ann McDowell, Dr. Leiszler explained the differences in the quarantine requirements between various athletic conferences and Notre Dame. Answering a question from Professor Bellia, Dr. Leiszler discussed the cardiac testing of student-athletes prior to return-to-play and potential cardiac impact in collegiate athletes who test positive. Replying to a question from Professor McDowell, Dr. Leiszler indicated that he is unaware of whether or not there will be vaccination requirements for student-athletes. Mr. Swarbrick indicated that any vaccination requirement would be University-wide, not specific to student-athletes.

Professor Bellia commented on the relatively small number of close contacts among student-athletes and asked Dr. Leiszler to discuss the elements of the COVID-19 protocols contributing to the low close contact rate. Dr. Leiszler pointed to multiple layers of protection built into the protocols and offered discrete examples, such as multiple locker room use to provide more space per student-athlete. Mr. Swarbrick provided insight into transmission rates through the sport activity as compared to actions that are incidental to the sport activity, such as travel. Dr. Leiszler shared his higher level of concern surrounding the COVID-19 transmission

risk during winter sport activity as compared to the fall sports. He commented that, because of this concern, the winter sports and attendant protocols have received extra attention.

In reply to questions from Professor Ohmer and Professor Striegel, Dr. Leiszler shared there has been very good collaboration among schools, particularly within the ACC, on COVID-19-related issues. Dr. Leiszler described additional collaborative opportunities outside of the ACC and their benefits.

Professor Bellia thanked Dr. Leiszler for his time. She invited Mr. Swarbrick to provide a review of the fall spots and a preview of the winter and spring sports in the COVID-19 environment.

Mr. Swarbrick shared that he is in the process of meeting with each team to provide a forum for direct dialogue between him and student-athletes. He begins each of those conversations by reassuring student-athletes that their health and safety is Notre Dame's first priority, that they can opt-out of competing this year, and that they can bring any concerns they may have regarding the Notre Dame and ACC COVID-19 protocols directly to either himself or Dr. Leiszler. Mr. Swarbrick recounted common themes from these meetings, including: (1) students are under extraordinary stress and struggling with mental health; (2) there are challenges and uncertainties surrounding sport schedules; (3) there are challenges with the creation of team camaraderie and chemistry in a COVID-19 environment; and (4) student-athletes are concerned about Notre Dame's commitment to their sport. He provided additional context for each of these themes and discussed the Athletics Department's efforts to identify resources to support student-athlete mental health as well as to help coaches and sport administrators to be attuned to signs of someone in crisis.

In response to a question from Professor Bellia, Mr. Swarbrick provided insight into the challenges attendant to winter sports, including an inordinately long winter break, spectators at indoor venues, and the risks associated with individual team competition dynamics.

Answering a question about recruiting from Ms. Lauren Hanna, Mr. Swarbrick referenced that the NCAA issued a dead period for all sports early in the pandemic and that those restrictions are still in effect. He shared his concern about the impact not having official visits could have on the efficacy of a student-athlete's decision to attend a particular school.

In reply to a question from Professor Angst, Mr. Swarbrick shared concerns regarding the financial footing of the Athletic Department, highlighting increased costs due to COVID-19 testing and compliance with other protocols as well as the retention of major expenses, such as grant-in-aid and salary costs.

Professor Bellia thanked Mr. Swarbrick for his report.

## **6. Recent Athletic Department Diversity and Inclusion Initiatives**

Professor Bellia introduced Ms. Angie Torain, Senior Associate Athletics Director, Culture, Diversity and Engagement, and her topic, the recent diversity and inclusion initiatives

within the Athletic Department. Ms. Torain thanked Professor Bellia for the opportunity to present to the Board.

Ms. Torain noted that the last seven to eight months has been a particularly active time in this space both across the country and locally within the University community, including Athletics. She shared how the Athletics Department launched its on-going diversity and inclusion efforts and its guiding principles. She discussed the need to be held accountable for making tangible progress. Ms. Torain provided examples of how the Athletics Department is accomplishing its goals in this space, such as a student-athlete voter registration drive and the formation of unity councils within teams, among a number of other initiatives. She described the ACC Unity Week and the programs offered by the Athletics Department in support thereof, highlighting the SAAC Town Hall.

Mr. Swarbrick encouraged the Board to spend some time on [und.com/standtogether](http://und.com/standtogether), the site housing the Athletic Department's diversity and inclusion content, including a new podcast by Indi Jackson, called *Braver Voices*.

Ms. Torain ended by thanking Professor Richard Pierce for his participation in a popular program on Black Lives Matter offered to members of the Athletics community.

## **7. NCAA Legislative and Governance Items**

*Eligibility Restoration.* Professor Bellia explained that the NCAA essentially granted fall and winter sport student-athletes an extra year of eligibility, as it did for spring student-athletes after the spring 2020 season, due to the COVID-19 induced uncertainty of their playing seasons. She noted that this restoration will likely have a trailing impact as it raises the possibility that more students will pursue a fifth year of athletics eligibility at Notre Dame. Anticipating this impact, Professor Bellia reported on several productive conversations with representatives from the Mendoza College of Business about this expectation and possible impact on their graduate programs.

In response to a question from Professor Pierce, Mr. Swarbrick stated that whether or not there are roster caps differs by sport. He and Professor Bellia explained the difficulty of managing team dynamics with an overfull roster, explaining that a roster can become overfull under the stress of attempting to accommodate both incoming freshmen and an increased number of upperclassmen with a year of eligibility restored. Answering a question from Professor Ohmer, Mr. Swarbrick confirmed that this is an issue across schools and that some sports are more impacted by this than others.

*Transfers.* Professor Bellia forecast the likely expansion of transfer rules by the NCAA in January 2021 and explained the anticipated rule changes. She reported that there is a Notre Dame Transfer Working Group focused on understanding the potential impact of these changes. Professor Bellia shared that besides her participation, this working group benefits from representatives from Academic Services for Student-Athletes, Compliance, and Admissions.

*Recent DI Committee on Academics changes.* Professor Bellia reported on the granting of a blanket waiver by the DI Committee on Academics lowering to six the number of credits required for a graduate student-athlete to maintain eligibility. She reminded the Board that its rules typically require graduate student-athletes enroll in more than six credits. Professor Bellia flagged this issue for the Academic Integrity Subcommittee to review and make a recommendation to the Board about whether or not to align its rules with this waiver.

*Alston v. NCAA.* Mr. Swarbrick offered an update on the state of *Alston v. NCAA*. He provided insight into possible implications for the University. Professor Bellia clarified that the decision only applied to educational benefits offered to men's and women's basketball and football student-athletes.

*Name, Image and Likeness Legislation.* Professor Bellia forecast that NCAA is poised to adopt sweeping changes in January to its rules governing a student-athlete's use of his or her name, image and likeness. Mr. Swarbrick explained the likely contours of the rule change, his belief in their impact, and probable implications for Notre Dame.

## **8. Adjournment**

With reminders about the upcoming November meeting, Professor Bellia adjourned the meeting at 4:01 pm.