

**Minutes of the Meeting of the Faculty Board on Athletics**  
**December 11, 2025**  
**200 Main Building, 2:00-3:30 PM**

**Members Present:** Patricia Bellia (Chair), Colin Barr, Pete Bevacqua, Annie Coleman, Ann-Marie Conrado, Brian Coughlin for Rev. Gerry Olinger, C.S.C., Patrick Corrigan, Darren Davis, Bridget Deehan, Ann Firth, Umesh Garg, Cara Ocobock, Adam Sargent for Patrick Holmes, Katie Wowak

**Members Excused:** Mike Niemier

**Athletics Liaisons:** Missy Conboy (Policy/Legal), Heidi Uebelhor (Compliance), Jen Vining-Smith (GLD Center)

**Guests:** Shawn Stiffler, John P. and Catherine Murphy Head Baseball Coach

**1. Opening Prayer**

Professor Bellia called the meeting to order, shared an opening Advent prayer, and sent prayers to the Holmes family.

**2. Minutes of Meeting of November 21, 2025**

The Faculty Board on Athletics (Board) approved the minutes of the preceding meeting.

**3. Chair's Announcements**

Professor Bellia announced that she had approved captaincies for cheerleading and women's lacrosse.

Professor Bellia deferred her schedule-related announcements to a later time.

**4. Proposed Spring 2025 Softball Schedule**

Professor Bellia gave a brief primer on the schedule approval process, leading into the discussion of whether the Board should approve an exception to the class miss policy for softball. Jen Vining-Smith, softball sport administrator, addressed the early season weather challenges that do not allow home competition before mid-March, as well as the importance/difficulty of scheduling the 56 permissible contests. She shared that while there are typically a lot of shifting games during the season (primarily due to weather issues), ending the season with as close to 56 completed contests is critical for securing a postseason bid. In the current submission, there are two class misses attributable to ACC scheduling, but because there are also at least 20 games scheduled on the road prior to ACC competition, the schedule requires missing some additional Fridays early in the semester. (Note: While the coaches look to avoid

any class misses on Thursdays for games prior to the conference season, they typically cannot avoid Friday class misses.)

Fortunately, the ACC scheduled Notre Dame to travel west during spring break week to play Stanford and California, so the coaches were able to add on some non-conference California opponents to the schedule earlier in the week. Ms. Vining-Smith also shared that the team is very committed to their studies and takes advantage of unscheduled time during travel to complete their schoolwork.

Professor Coleman asked about how communication between ASSA and the professors occurs. Ms. Vining-Smith says the team members are typically proactive in communicating with their professors but cited a case in spring 2025 where this may have backfired (when a student inadvertently told a professor that she would be missing more classes than the schedule actually contemplated). There was some subsequent discussion about whether it would be helpful, when approved class misses reach a certain level, for Professor Bellia to send an explanatory letter. Ms. Deehan cited the potential benefits of this type of communication. Professor Bellia stated that while the Faculty Board website explains the class miss policy and provides several FAQs, she does look for other opportunities to share the policy.

The Board deferred a vote to consider the softball and baseball requests together (see agenda item 5).

## **5. Proposed Spring 2025 Baseball Schedule (Shawn Stiffler, John P. and Catherine Murphy Head Baseball Coach)**

Coach Stiffler thanked the Board for the opportunity to be present. He then shared some general information about the length of the baseball season, indicating that while competitions begin in February, the end of the baseball season (including all postseason competition) occurs after the end of the semester. Therefore, unlike many other teams, baseball will not miss any additional classes for ACC or NCAA tournament competition.

Coach Stiffler went on to explain that he does not believe the need to come before the full Board for schedule approval will be a trend. He feels that there were some unique difficulties he encountered with the spring schedule this year, so he hopes the situation will not repeat in future years. Finally, he understands that there is always a concern that individual players might miss additional classes beyond those which have been approved. To minimize this possibility, Professor Ocobock (the Board liaison for baseball) and Coach Stiffler have put together a plan to address the importance of student-athletes attending all classes when they are in town and able to do so.

Coach Stiffler then shared some general information about baseball scheduling for the Board's edification. In short, ACC baseball series are typically scheduled on Friday/Saturday/Sunday, so Friday class misses cannot be avoided for ACC road series. In addition, due to weather issues, Notre Dame always needs to travel to southern locales during the first three weekends of the season to make sure they will be able to play games. This season, they plan to open the season at Florida Atlantic University, followed by two national tournaments to

be held in large major league venues. This schedule will give the team an opportunity to play against some of the top baseball programs in the country. Each of these early season tournaments will necessitate a Thursday miss to accommodate (1) appropriate team preparation prior to the first tournament of the season, (2) commercial travel out of Chicago for the second tournament, and (3) travel to Tennessee by bus for the third trip. (Coach Stiffler will attempt a later departure for the third tournament to save morning class misses that day). The fourth proposed Thursday miss results from the Notre Dame-NC State series scheduled for Easter weekend. Ideally, he would like to give the team Easter Sunday off, but that necessitates a Thursday/Friday/Saturday series.

Coach Stiffler shared that he has tried to avoid midweek road games, and this year's schedule includes a single midweek road game (Michigan State). He is hoping for a 7 pm start to avoid any absences. He noted that it is unusual to have class misses for a typical midweek game. This year, the team is scheduled to play 53 of a possible 56 game schedule. Coach Stiffler also shared that while we have ten student-athletes with a Friday class conflict, Chad Grotegut (ASSA) does an excellent job advising the team. On the road, they always reserve a team room, which also serves as a study hall lounge, and they impose mandatory quiet hours. This year, because he has a younger team, they will also look to mandate study time.

Professor Conrado asked why the team could not fly out of South Bend, and Coach Stiffler explained that this is not possible due to limited plane capacity and the weight of the baseball equipment. While they have split the team between two flights in the past, that arrangement is not ideal. They have also had weather issues flying through Charlotte, which is the route they typically take when flying south out of South Bend. Professor Corrigan asked why this request would not be a recurring one. Coach Stiffler shared that the bus trip (for budget reasons) and the request to compete on Thursday/Saturday during Easter weekend will not be annual requests. In the past, Professor Bellia has been able to approve his schedule without bringing it before the full Board. Mr. Coughlin asked about playing on Easter Sunday, and Professor Bellia clarified that while competition can occur on Easter Sunday (after noon) at away sites, competition cannot occur at home.

Mr. Sargent reported on the academic impact of baseball and softball scheduling. Since the university is adding additional Tuesday-Thursday classes, those absences will now be felt more. Other important baseball/softball dynamics to consider include: (1) the potential for weather issues, (2) illness-related absences that could be added to travel-related absences, (3) late returns to campus following competition, (4) the impact of midweek games at home, (5) the difficulty attending office hours and participating in group projects, and (6) the impact of ACC network selections. Mr. Sargent encouraged ongoing communication on how we can improve the situation and suggested that Coach Stiffler encourage student-athletes to attend office hours. Professor Conrado suggested the student-athletes should let professors know of any challenges that hinder their ability to make it to office hours. Mr. Sargent indicated that so much of what can be done to improve the situation can be done proactively, and ASSA wants to partner on this. Professor Ocobock confirmed that she plans to work specifically with first-year baseball student-athletes to devise a plan to address concerns. Coach Stiffler thanked everyone for their support and noted how lucky they were to have the Faculty Board and ASSA working to support their

student-athletes. He also told Professor Bellia that they would continue to work toward further minimizing class misses even if this schedule is approved.

Both the softball schedule and the baseball schedule were unanimously approved, with Professor Ocobock abstaining from the softball vote (as she had joined the meeting after the softball discussion). Professor Bellia confirmed that she would send an email to affected instructors about the softball and baseball schedules, and there would be further follow-up from ASSA counselors related to Mr. Sargent's comments.

## **6. Introduction of Brock Sheahan, Catalino Family Head Hockey Coach**

Professor Bellia introduced Coach Brock Sheahan, who is in his first year as the head men's hockey coach. Coach Sheahan originally joined the staff two years ago as an associate head coach and then took over for Coach Jeff Jackson when he retired. Coach Sheahan was a former Notre Dame student-athlete (a defenseman) who went on to play/coach before Notre Dame lured him back to campus.

Coach Sheahan shared that coaching at Notre Dame is a dream come true for him and his family. He said he began his studies in Science Business before switching to Finance and recalled Mr. Sargent challenging him to take a robust schedule. While he originally came to college to play hockey, he grew to love Notre Dame, and every significant door in life opened for him because he went to school here. On a personal level, he also met his wife while in school here. Before returning to Notre Dame, he spent time coaching at Holy Cross, the Chicago Steel (junior hockey), and the Chicago Wolves (the AHL affiliate of the Carolina Hurricanes). In short, he loves everything that Notre Dame does to allow him to be successful and wants to move the program back to its past level of success, and beyond.

Coach Sheahan shared his thoughts about the current college landscape. Under today's rules, every youth hockey player and junior hockey player can now play college hockey, and he noted that there are five or six actual pros playing in the Big Ten. In addition, many schools are providing NIL and revenue share money to hockey student-athletes. Regarding transfers, the new portal window being proposed is much shorter, which is bad for Notre Dame. While we do not bring in many transfers, we typically need one or two to fill our roster. In general, transfer decisions happen very quickly, and at Notre Dame, it can take a long time to get answers regarding admission. He also noted that the new roster limit, per the *House* settlement, is 26, and Notre Dame Hockey only has 18 scholarships. Despite these stated challenges, there are players who value what Notre Dame is in the hockey world.

Coach Sheahan shared that high-end hockey talent is selected in the draft, and only 30% of drafted players currently go to college. Regarding NIL, he indicated that there are players making hundreds of thousands of dollars in the Big Ten and believes the NIL piece is a huge part of our future success. Notre Dame has only enrolled three draft picks in our entire history. He believes that we can win in this landscape, but we need to stay competitive with NIL and revenue share expenditures.

Coach Sheahan noted that the team is very enthusiastic about service and identifies and schedules their own community engagement opportunities. He observed that the Summer Bridge Program is especially important to hockey, as it assists the student-athletes in rejoining the classroom after some time away. He stated that dorm life and the assignment of random roommates can be a challenge for students who have had a gap before starting college, as well as for transfers. Mr. Sargent noted that the maturity of the hockey student-athletes often helps with their transition to college life.

## **7. Athletics Updates (Pete Bevacqua)**

Mr. Bevacqua spoke about a variety of topics, including the SCORE Act, which recently was shelved and delayed, and noted that the pushback came from the Democratic side. The two issues cited were that legislators (1) did not want to cap student-athletes' ability to earn revenue, and (2) were hesitant to vote on a bill that would define individuals (permanently) as student-athletes instead of employees.

Professor Coleman asked about Title IX and the potential reluctance to vote on legislation that minimizes Title IX's impact. Mr. Bevacqua shared that there is no real guidance on Title IX, as the Trump administration nullified the prior administration's Title IX letter pertaining to *House*. In addition, the *House* settlement did not speak to Title IX. Because of the way the back pay portion of the settlement has been allocated, institutions have treated future revenue share payments in a similar fashion. That said, Notre Dame is making some *House*-related decisions (scholarship increases) that are Title IX friendly.

Mr. Bevacqua reiterated our frustration with the CFP selection process. Following the news that Notre Dame was not selected, the players unanimously agreed to not participate in a bowl game, and as a result, are able to go home for the holidays.

Mr. Bevacqua also commented briefly on the CSC Participation Agreement recently sent for review and signature.

## **8. Adjournment**

Professor Bellia deferred the remaining agenda items (including the Compliance Annual Report and a report concerning the Working Group on Student-Athlete Integration). She wished everyone happy holidays, and adjourned the meeting at 3:30 pm.