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JEANNINE RAINBOLT COLLEGE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP & POLICY STUDIES

September 6, 2011

Ms. Judy Rose
Director of Athletics, Charlotte 49ers Athletics and
Chair, NCAA Division I Championships and Sports Management Cabinet
University of North Carolina at Charlotte
9201 University City Blvd.
Charlotte, N.C. 28223

Dear Judy,

In preparation for the Cabinet's consideration of the continuation of the current preliminary round system for outdoor track and field, I am writing in response to the letter from Sam Seemes, dated June 14, 2011. I wish to thank Sam, Todd Patulski, and the NCAA Track and Field Committee for working with me to identify the information and analyses needed to better inform the debate. In addition I wish to thank the Cabinet staff and Tom Paskus for responding to our many requests for information throughout this process. These individuals have done much to advance our ability to make an informed decision consistent with our mission and values.

On behalf of the Big 12 Conference and the Big 12 Council of Faculty Athletics Representatives, I have requested that the Cabinet consider eliminating the preliminary round competition as of 2013. As I indicated in my April 2011 letter, we believe that the decision regarding the preliminary round should be grounded in a discussion of NCAA core values. I wish to thank Sam and the USTFCCCA for advancing the dialogue with respect to our core values. However, after considering the data provided and the arguments posed, the Big 12 Conference continues to be convinced that the preliminary round should be eliminated at the earliest possible date.

I am grateful to Sam for his thoughtful response and the many valid points he raises. I value most his passion for the sport, which I share. We have some areas of agreement, but we have significant differences which I will do my best to articulate. The prevalent issue, however, is whether or not the continuation of the current preliminary round system is in the best interest of the sport and whether it is compatible with NCAA principles and the Cabinet Mission. For the reasons stated below and in my April 2011 letter, the preliminary round advances neither the sport nor our principles.

As CEO of the USTFCCCA, Sam stated that the track and field coaches overwhelmingly support the current system including the preliminary round. Because the coaches have never been surveyed no data exists supporting this assertion. Certainly, the alleged "overwhelming" support does not extend to the Big 12 Conference as the majority of our coaches do not support the current system. Additionally, we have seen the stated views of coaches change over time from unanimous support to eliminate the system in 2010 to overwhelming support to maintain this system in 2011 (See Supplement 29 page 7).

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With nothing more than anecdotal data at this time, we must rely upon our conference representatives to solicit input from the coaches within their conferences. Considering the views of coaches on matters pertaining to their sport has always been a priority of the Cabinet. However, the Cabinet must balance a variety of interests, including being mindful that we do not take from "Peter to give to Paul" whether we are establishing funding priorities at the Cabinet level, asking the Board to shift funding priorities, or mandating funding priorities of member institutions.

While we should be good stewards of our resources, we should never allow cost containment measures to deflect us from pursuit of objectives central to our core values. If we truly believe that the current preliminary round system advances our principles, we should stand firm in our commitment to that system and support the request by our coaches to increase NCAA support to fund preliminary round. However, the data fail to convince us that the preliminary round is compatible with NCAA core values or consistent with the Championship Cabinet mission.

NCAA Principle 2.15. "The conditions under which postseason competition occurs shall be controlled to ...prevent unjustified intrusion on the time student-athletes devote to their academic programs..."

The APR data provided in the supplement shows undesirable and unsustainable eligibility rates for track and field student-athletes primarily in the spring semester. As a result the Committee on Academic Performance has asked for further study. Certainly many factors impact academic performance and I do not believe anyone would argue based upon that evidence alone that there is a causal relationship between the preliminary round and academic performance. However, currently 27 of 31 conferences hold their conference championship during the spring final examination window for institutions which are on the semester system (comprising the vast majority of our schools), certainly meeting the standard of "unjustified intrusion".

Moving conference championships back into mid-April is certainly an option that should be considered in order to mitigate academic conflicts. However, moving conference championships so far from the NCAA championship would negatively impact the viability of our conference championships and disadvantage our northern schools. The impact of the current preliminary round system upon our conference champions and ultimately upon the advancement of the sport is certainly a factor that warrants careful consideration by this body.

It is important to remember that "unjustified intrusion" as set forth in Principle 2.15 refers not only to missing class, but also to all the activities that interfere with engagement in one's studies, including the mental concentration and physical effort in-season practice and competition require. Unlike other sports, the majority of track and field student-athletes compete in outdoor, indoor, and cross country. The number of multiple sport student-athletes in other sports is very small. As a result, track and field student-athletes are "in-season" for 156 days and cross country for 144 days. This is the longest in-season obligation of any sport, particularly when one recognizes that in-season refers to both practice and competition. As a result, most of our track and field student-athletes are in season all year long, including much of the summer session.

The Goals data suggest that track and field student student-athletes would like to spend more time on their sport and desire more time with their coaches. A limitation of this data is the fact that many student-athletes in this sport do not compete at the highest level. When interpreting these data, it is important to note that the respondents are not necessarily representative of those who qualify for national championship competition. Since our rosters are so large, many may feel they do not have adequate time with their coaches.

NCAA Bylaw 18.01.1 Purpose of NCAA Championships. "NCAA championships are intended to provide national-level competition among the best eligible student-athletes and teams of member institutions...."

The national DOL identifies the "best eligible student-athletes"with a high rate of reliability. For 2011, the national DOL rank of 24+ identified 90 percent of the national scorers and the national DOL rank of 36+ identified 95 percent. For final site participants, the national DOL rank of 24+ identified 68 percent and the national DOL rank of 36+ identified 81 percent.

Cabinet Principle 4. "Insure that long-term sustainability of the championship is reflected in sound fiscal management and the development of strategies that can diversify and enhance revenue streams."

While the impact of the preliminary round in identifying the "best" is small, the cost is large. The 2011 preliminary round showed 3,677 participants and an estimated cost of $5.1 million. Ten percent (368 participants) with a national DOL rank of 24+ scored and five percent (184 participants) with a national DOL rank of 36+ scored. The cost of the error (identifying national scorers who would not have qualified at the DOL 1-24 level) is $13,859 per participant. The cost of the error (identifying national scorers who would hot have qualified at the DOL 1-36 level was $27,717 per participant.

Cabinet Principle 3. "Provide championship access reflective of the quality of nationwide competitive excellence and membership sponsorship of the sport..."

The championship ideal is "head to head" competition among the best competitors. At the preliminary round, athletes who rank in the top ten of the national DOL compete with athletes ranking in the top 100 plus. For the 2011 competition, the average highest national DOL accepted was 129 for the men and 131 for the women; for 2010 the average highest national DOL accepted was 137.9 for the men and 140.7 for the women. The national DOL range in 2011 for the men was 103 for the steeple chase and 159 for the 200 meter; for the women the DOL range was 106 for the discus and 185 for the 1500 meter. This translates into a series of noncompetitive heats.

During the first three years of the preliminary round system, the number of bidding institutions remains small, albeit increasing. The analysis provided also shows a net loss to the hosting sites (see Supplement 29-B, p.6). These data lend some credibility to the argument that uncertainty regarding the future of the preliminary round has deterred potential hosts from bidding. However, the financial burden of hosting will continue to be an issue for our schools. The best hope for improving the incentive to host, beyond increasing the NCAA stipend is to provide a contest that is both exciting and marketable to the

track fan base. To date, the preliminary round achieves neither objective, an argument advanced in the July 2011 issue of *Track and Field News* (attached).

In regard to assuring that we provide access "reflective of the ...membership sponsorship of the sport," the data provided for the 2011 finals show that all but one of our 31 conferences were represented in the men's final event and all but three were represented in the women's final event. Of the entries who would not have otherwise advanced to the finals based upon a 25+ regional ranking, 50 were from FBS conferences, 11 from FCS conferences and 5 from DI non-football conferences. Of the entries who would not have otherwise advanced to the finals based upon a 33+ regional ranking, 14 were from FBS conferences, 3 from FCS conferences, and one was from a DI non-football conference. Using presence as evidence, certainly, the championship is reflective of the membership and in fact, at the 25+ and 33+ regional ranking level, the FBS conferences disproportionately advance from the preliminary round.

NCAA Bylaw 2.15. "The conditions under which postseason competition occurs shall be controlled to assure that the benefits inherent in such competition flow fairly to all participants..."

Admittedly, the most significant benefit of the preliminary round system is that it provides more of our student-athletes with access to a "championship" experience. At issue, however, is the meaning of "fair" access. One interpretation is that "fair" access means to control postseason competition so that the most talented win fairly without undue advantage and ensuring that the competition meets the highest standards of integrity. It would be ideal to standardize facilities, environmental conditions, measurement, and timing instrumentation. While some argue that the preliminary round serves this purpose, the data presented instead support the validity of the national DOL as the vast majority of those reaching the top DOL during the season are national scorers. Another interpretation of "fair" access is that the system allows for talents to be developed and promotes the cultivation of future talent. This would include the development of systems such as the Automatic Qualifying and revenue distribution systems currently in place in most sports so that conferences and institutions can develop interest and talent in a sport. The data provided by the NCAA Track and Field Committee suggest that the 24-8 plan is in fact superior to the preliminary round in this regard. Finally, "fair" access may also be interpreted as providing an equal championship access ratio equal among sports. Certainly, when using participation rates (rather than unduplicated headcount), the preliminary round system is superior in providing increased access to a championship experience. This Cabinet vote will establish a precedent for the interpretation of the concept of "fair" access.

The vast majority of our DI institutions depend in a significant way upon student fees and academic funds to support our athletic programs. This is not inconsequential considering the fact that intercollegiate athletics is not central to our institutional missions of teaching, research and service. The USTFCCCA proposes to ease the institutional burden by directing NCAA funding for the preliminary round adding millions of dollars to Cabinet obligations. This would require reallocating funds from other Cabinet priorities, redirecting funding to the Cabinet from other NCAA sources, or finding new sources of revenue.

We submit that targeting $5.1 million for increasing scholarships, coaching staff, or supporting the development of a fan base would do far more to advance the sport than maintaining the current preliminary round system – particularly when recognizing the significant conflicts with final exams that have resulted from the system. If we consider the fact that our student-athletes are first students, we must recognize that further dilution of our academic programs to advance athletics without clear justification is contrary to our values and as such further threatens the credibility of our Association.

In summary, the preliminary round system needs to be eliminated for the following reasons:

1) No evidence has been provided that the coaches are in agreement regarding support for the preliminary round;
2) The current preliminary round system is contrary to NCAA principles and the Cabinet's mission; and
3) Continuing to advocate for such a system demonstrates callousness with regard to the financial difficulties of our member institutions and the academic success of our student-athletes.

Thank you for your consideration and I look forward to a robust and meaningful debate.

Sincerely,

Connie Dillon
Faculty Athletics Representative
University of Oklahoma

Cc: President Guy Bailey, Division I Board of Directors
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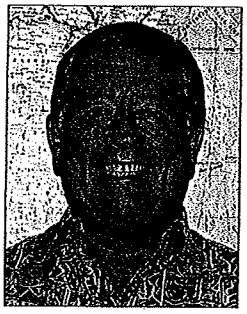

from the editor

E. Garry Hill

I KNOW, I KNOW! If it ain't broke, don't fix it! And in the eyes of many I—what with my passion for tinkering with meet presentation and all—frequently try to fix things that ain't broke. Is there possibly any fan on the planet, however, who would disagree with me that the NCAA Regionals need fixing? Words fail me in trying to describe what a mess that setup is.

Words fail me in trying to describe the NCAA Regionals

I was an early lobbier for Regionals, reasoning that actual competition was a far better way to get into the Nationals than competition-killing mark-chasing during the regular season.

I thought the 4-part Regionals worked fairly well, making for four solid meets as a lead-in to the big dance, even if the hoped-for increase in competition during the regular season never eventuated. Then came the switch last year to the 2-part Regional (or as the NCAA, in another of its delightful euphemisms, likes to call the "Preliminary Round" of the Nationals). I recognized it for the dog it was—bloated, unhostable by all but a few institutions, unwatchable by anyone with a pulse.

Circumstances were such in '10 that I didn't actually go to a Regional, and as I watched it unfold electronically, I became a bit of a convert. There were some exciting races, and some surprising people—albeit virtually no stars—being knocked out. So it was a thanks-I-need-that slap in the face when I went to the West Regional this year. Words cannot describe how totally execrable I found it. Like watching the Indianapolis 500 time trials, but without the excitement of the crashes.

As a field fan, I can't even begin to describe to you what the jumps and throws were like. For the non-verticals, 48 athletes in 3 or 4 flights with 3 attempts by each, then another 3 attempts for the top 16 overall. That's 192 jumps/throws, spread over countless hours. This is entertainment? This teaches athletes how to prepare for a real big meet? I think not.

I'm also troubled that there are those who say that even if the Regionals have (kaff-kaff) deficiencies it's more than made up for by leading to a better product at the Nationals, to which I say horsefeathers. We're back to being stuck with interminable by-flight field events (instead of a proper qualifying round), but hey, many/most people don't care about the field events.

But everybody cares about the running events and even though the IAAF does it for the 400 and 800, a 3-semis system qualifying 2+2 to the final is just inherently unfair. Particularly when you're seeding the meet based on results from two disparate locations.

At this level of competition, advancement should be based on place, not time. Especially when you're in venues where the vicissitudes of the weather (i.e., the wind conditions changing markedly from flight to flight) come so much into play.

I haven't worked out all the details in my head yet, but given how exciting the Saturday session was in Des Moines (two hours tailored to fit a TV window), I'm starting to think that the best system is the 2-weekend/1-site model, with a crowded meet one weekend leading to an all-finals one the next.

So be it WD-40 or duct tape that's needed, trot it out, and we'll get this baby fixed.

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