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Panther Sports News

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CHARLESTON, IL.--Although college athletic competition has ended for this academic year, the NCAA will still be in the spotlight when its special convention on cost containment is held on Monday and Tuesday, June 29-30, in Dallas, TX.

As a member of the NCAA Presidents Commission which formulated several of the proposals, Eastern Illinois University President Stan Rives will be attending the convention with keen interest.

"There are several aspects to this convention that are of particular interest. It originally started with the idea of striving for a proper balance between academics and athletics," said Rives

"That has been an ongoing issue . . .it's nothing new other than it's a major thrust with this convention.

"Cost containment is the other main aspect. The feeling is the cost of Division I athletics has gotten out of hand resulting in some unfortunate behavior on the part of some institutions . . . Southern Methodist being the worst example.

"These two fundamental themes are interrelated. For instance, there is an attempt to limit the length of playing seasons. That is not only cost containment but for a student-athlete to have time to be a student, it's important they have some down time away from the sport," Rives said.

Also, related to that is a proposal requesting a study on freshman eligibility to determine the effects of varsity participation on the academic performance of first year students.

"The intensive study is needed because right now there is no consensus, or even a majority opinion, on this subject. However the

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evidence is clear that a student who participates in any co-curricular activity, whether it's athletics, music, debate or student newspaper, is more likely to remain in school and graduate than those who don't participate," Rives said.

One of the most lively debates will address the proposed elimination or reduction of spring football practice for I-AA schools. One proposal, formulated by the Presidents Commission, calls for complete elimination of spring practice.

The Ohio Valley Conference has made proposals to limit spring practice to 20 sessions in 30 days or 15 in 25 days with further limits on amount of contact allowed. Presently a school may have 20 practices in 36 days.

"We have trouble with the elimination of spring football. My personal view is a reduction is warranted but I have reservations about elimination for two reasons.

"A fundamental reason is there may be some value for the athlete's self-preservation . . .to maintain a level of conditioning. I know the argument . . . that you can have conditioning without contact but I need to see some evidence of that.

"A second reason is that a number of I-AA teams are purposely scheduling I-A teams. I think playing a good level of competition is good for students and it also helps financially. But when I-AA schools already have fewer scholarships and then add the lack of spring practice, it makes it doubly difficult to be competitive."

Rives did say "I'm the only I-AA representative on the Presidents Commission to vote against the proposal to eliminate practice, and did it for precisely the reasons I've outlined. Plus we're really not talking about any significant cost savings."

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However, Rives is in favor of the reduction in scholarships for I-AA football and "was before the proposal was even made." Currently I-AA teams are allowed to award up to 30 scholarships annually with a total of 70 in effect. The proposal would reduce to 25 annually with nor more than 65 total.

A more difficult question that will be addressed is the reduction of scholarships in non-revenue sports. "While I'm basically in favor I'm concerned there may be a disproportionate effect on women's athletics.

"Charlotte West (SIU athletic administrator) has voiced a concern, and I have a great deal of respect for her views. We have a Gateway Conference meeting prior to the convention, and I have asked that she be allowed to make a presentation."

Rives admitted this is indeed a cost cutting measure but in the absence of across the board cuts for all sports he questioned the alternative.

"If we don't cut scholarships, do we cut out a sport or sports as has been done here previously as well as at other institutions? I wish to maintain a diverse program to offer a wide variety of activities. . . in non-athletics as well. This proposal is the type that might lead to amendment."

Limitations on playing and practice seasons won't be passed on lightly either, according to Rives. "The fundamental idea on limiting the seasons is to allow students one semester free from the sport. This obviously works well with football but not in basketball so we may have to pro-rate the time during a semester.

"The concern I hear, though, doesn't relate to academics but rather to international competition. For instance, if a fast swimmer in East Germany can train all year, why can't we in this country?

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"If you're talking about college athletes, this goes back to the fundamental belief that you are a student first and an athlete second. Unless we create conditions to allow a person time to be a student we are not living up to our mission.

"Nothing precludes an individual from swimming all year, the difference being the requirement that he or she be coached as a swimmer year around," Rives said.

Altogether there are 43 proposals to be considered in the two days. Rives is optimistic a "lot of these proposals will be approved. But there are two things I want to stress. Not all of these proposals were generated by the Presidents Commission. . .some are the views of ADs and coaches through the NCAA.

"Although there will be a lot of debate, there is no substantial difference of opinion between the ADs and Presidents. . .and that's important."