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CHARLESTON, IL (July 7, 1987)--As a member of the NCAA Presidents Commission, Eastern Illinois University President Stan Rives came away from last week's NCAA special convention in Dallas, TX with mixed emotions.

Perhaps the biggest news which occurred during the two-day convention was the restoration of 15 basketball scholarships at the Division I level after that had been cut to 13 five months ago.

"First of all, I think the action in January was precipitous action," said Rives. "I don't think it should have been taken at all. All of that should have been decided in the course of a single decision about the number of scholarships in all sports. It was a mistake to have done that in January.

"What I think we had was a bunch of people who were trying to get ahead of the pack, and I'm sure they regretted that as a result. In Dallas, it made a good deal of sense after the decision not to reduce scholarships in other sports and to go back to status quo before January.

"Otherwise, you would have cut scholarships only in basketball," Rives continued. "I think the real mistake was in trying to get ahead of the Presidents Commission in San Diego in January by taking that action.

I think the Presidents Commission is going to have to re-group and re-think about what is the best approach to some of these issues. In the early stages, there was a significant high level of consensus among university presidents, athletic directors and coaches on the need to establish stricter academic standards, like Proposition 48.

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Now, there's not a high level of agreement," Rives said. "One thing I was very encouraged to see was, in separate surveys of the athletic directors and presidents, strong agreement between the two. Now, we're talking about issues that were 60 percent-40 percent, not 90 percent-10 percent. That probably does require more time. It may have been that this convention was a little premature on the issue."

The best news, according to Rives, to come from the convention was the defeat of a proposal to eliminate spring football practice for Division I-AA schools.

"Most of the arguments I heard on that were premised on the fact that we needed to keep practice to be competitive with I-A schools," said Rives. "That's a reasonable argument. But my feeling about it all along is that we need to be very sure before we abolish spring football practice that it is not a good conditioning element for fall play. I was more concerned with that aspect of it."

Michael Heyman, chancellor of the University of California at Berkeley and chairman of the Presidents Commission, asked the delegates if getting rid of post-season basketball tournaments and football bowl games was the answer in de-emphasizing athletics.

"I've gotten to know Michael fairly well over the past year," Rives said, "and he tends to be provocative. I think what he was attempting to do was be provocative. I don't think he at all believes the post-season basketball tournament or the bowl games will be eliminated.

"But he was saying we need to begin to think about what we have -- a major impact on the structure of intercollegiate athletics in this country. Certainly that worked. I think he was using it as an example for the kinds of things that need to be thought about.

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"I thought his more serious concern, which really did not capture the attention of the press, was need-based financial aid," Rives said. "I think, in that area, he may be quite serious. That's a topic that has a good deal of support. I think it's something that might well occur. I don't think we'd do away with the post-season tournaments and bowl games, even if the multi-bucks were not involved."

The question of freshman eligibility also arose during the convention.

"The study that is going to be done is going to compare students who participate in athletics and students in general along with students who participate in other extra-curricular activities," Rives said. "The reason is to find out what the impact of that participation is. I think I can tell you what that impact of participation is."

"A student who gets involved in an activity -- whether it be in athletics, debate, music or student newspaper -- is more likely to persist to graduation. That remains to be seen because the study has to be conducted, but I'm pretty sure that's what it will be."

"I'm a former debate coach, and I know students who get involved tended to do better than students who weren't involved. I think the study will be terribly worthwhile in providing definite answers whether freshman eligibility should be banned."

"I happen to think freshmen should be eligible for two reasons," Rives continued. "First, as I have said, is involvement. The second reason I'm concerned is because I don't think it would necessarily result in non-participation by those students. I think what you might see is freshman-level competition. If you do that, then I'm convinced you'd increase the cost of the total program because then you've got to have freshman coaches, etc."

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"The number of assistant football coaches at the I-AA level, which Eastern has been a member since 1981, was trimmed from seven to six. "We voted in favor of that, knowing full well it wouldn't have an impact on us," Rives said. "That's a decision (head coach) Bob Spoo made when he came here. It was a good decision, and I certainly supported it."

Rives has also enjoyed being a member of the Presidents Commission for the past year. "It's provided me an opportunity to learn a great deal more on athletics on the national scene," he said. "I think I understand our athletic program because our athletic director (R.C. Johnson) reports directly to me. I certainly have learned a lot more about the rest of the athletic world."