

W E S T M O N T C O L L E G E

A PERSPECTIVE ON THE QUESTION OF NATIONAL
AFFILIATION FOR ATHLETICS:

The National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics versus the National
Collegiate Athletic Association



Introduction

Preamble

The mission of Westmont College is to provide a high quality undergraduate liberal arts program in a residential campus community that assists college men and women toward a balance of rigorous intellectual competence, healthy personal development, and strong Christian commitments. We believe that competitive athletics is a critical part of this overall mission and essential to creating a strong learning environment.

Former Harvard Dean, Harry R. Lewis says in his 2006 book Excellence without a Soul, Does Liberal Education Have a Future?, “Athletic competitions differ from academic competitions in an important way: In athletics, there is no doubt who is the winner. The certainty and undeniability of loss help explain why athletes tend to be mentally healthy and to help the mental health of those around them. They are used to sharing blame, not shifting it. They can lose but they are not victims. They are also used to thinking that teams, not individuals, accomplish great things.”

Background and Recent History

Over the last two years, several institutions in the Golden State Athletic Conference (GSAC) have expressed concern over the future of the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA). Initially these concerns were focused on whether the NAIA would remain in existence over the long term. Those concerns have become less of an issue, for although a few schools have left (see below) the NAIA, several others have joined or are in the process of joining. The NAIA offers many advantages over the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA). In the past, these advantages have not been well articulated. The purpose of this paper is to highlight the advantages of the NAIA over the NCAA for institutions such as Westmont College (Westmont).

Recently, some schools have left the NAIA in favor of the NCAA Division II. The loss of what have been considered strong programs, in terms of both financial and athletic performance, has led to some concern that the NAIA will not be able to maintain its history of excellence. Some recent departures include the following: Simon Fraser University, Lindenwood University, Malone University, McKendree University, California State

University (CSU) Monterey Bay, CSU East Bay and the University of Sioux Falls. By contrast, the schools that have recently joined the NAIA are smaller and/or relatively new. They include Marymount College of Palos Verdes, California, La Sierra University of Riverside, CA, Soka University of Orange County, CA and Southwestern University in Arizona.

In response to the concern of the ability of the NAIA to function in a way in which the current GSAC conference can continue to thrive, the Presidents and Athletic Directors of the GSAC decided to consider the possibility of moving as a conference to the NCAA Division II.

The consideration of this possibility was supported by all the members of the GSAC and their respective institutional Presidents as they voted to fund the engagement of a private consultant to advise the conference on the possibility of moving to the NCAA. The consultant met with each school individually and prepared a lengthy report. The major findings and advice from that report are as follows:

1. The NCAA does not allow the move of an entire conference into the NCAA and will only consider membership of institutions on an individual basis. They will not make an exception to this rule under any circumstance.
2. None of the members of the GSAC are in compliance with NCAA standards and would need to make changes in current protocols in order to be accepted by the NCAA.
3. Some GSAC institutions were much closer than others to meeting the requirements.
4. The consultant clearly stated that given the recent increased requirements placed on applicants to the NCAA at least half of the GSAC would not be considered good candidates for membership in the NCAA.

Despite the originally stated intention to move only as a conference, several institutions within the GSAC have voiced their intention or applied to join the NCAA Division II. Azusa Pacific University has informed the NAIA they will be leaving to join the NCAA. In June 2011 they will apply to join the Great Northwest Athletic Conference for football and the PacificWest Conference for all other sports. In June 2010, California Baptist University made application to the NCAA and was accepted into their process for membership. Fresno Pacific University has stated they plan to leave the NAIA with the June 2011 application window and have not finalized which conference to which they will apply. Point Loma Nazarene University has expressed interest in moving to the NCAA Division II as well, but is has not yet made a decision either way.

Biola University has considered a move and recently issued a public announcement of their intention to stay in the NAIA and the GSAC.

Executive Summary

After considerable research and institutional consideration, Westmont College has affirmed its commitment to participate in both the NAIA and, in particular, the Golden State Athletic Conference. Westmont believes maintaining these affiliations are consistent with the College's overall mission and that these organizations remain a strong environment for quality competition between similar institutions and their student-athletes. While we recognize that the NCAA as a brand reflects a large, professionally organized, stable, and more nationally known organization, Westmont believes that the benefits inherent in the NCAA brand are significantly outweighed by the benefits of maintaining its current affiliation with the NAIA and the GSAC. Below we have listed our considerations in summary form. This document serves two general purposes. First, it is a forum to express Westmont's own reflections and considerations about national organization and conference affiliation. Second, it is also a communication to our current GSAC members who are considering a change to NCAA Division II in hopes that they will consider the benefits and remain part of the best small college athletic conference in America.

Summary of Major Considerations

1. As evidenced by the Director's Cup standings over the last several years, the Golden State Athletic Conference is known as the strongest small college athletic conference in America. This strength is not just limited to a comparison with the NAIA, but also in a comparison of conferences in both NCAA Divisions II and III. Westmont believes that a move to NCAA Division II is at best a lateral move in terms of quality of athletic competition. We also believe the value of the NCAA "brand" is diminished at the Division II level. Some have advocated that the NCAA is more prestigious than the NAIA. While this may be true for NCAA Division I schools, who enjoy the benefits of nationally televised games, this is not the case for the NCAA Division II. Most of the NCAA Division II schools do not have access to such national exposure. The NCAA Division II simply does not have the cachet of Division I, and certainly does not denote academic excellence or exclusivity.

2. The GSAC is uniquely a strong collection of faith based institutions. The kindred spirit of the GSAC institutions enhances a competition environment that is both healthy and balanced by a mutual commitment to Jesus Christ. This brotherhood and the related benefits cannot be matched by any other conference affiliation.
3. A move to NCAA Division II generally requires an institution to affiliate with an NCAA Division II conference. The two viable conference options in the region are the California Collegiate Athletic Association (CCAA) and the Pacific West Conference (Pac West). In recent weeks the CCAA, which is a collection of State Universities, has expressed a lack of openness to the inclusion of faith-based institutions without certain untenable requirements attached. Thus, the Pac West is the only available option for schools leaving the GSAC/NAIA for the NCAA Division II.
4. In comparison to the GSAC, the Pac West is comprised of institutions that are not only currently inferior athletically to the GSAC, but also a collection of institutions that are recognizably different in size and overall mission. As examples, the Pac West includes Dixie State from Utah, which was a Junior College until just recently becoming a four year institution. The Pac West also includes “for profit” institutions like Grand Canyon (enrollment 25,000) and California Academy for the Arts (enrollment 16,000). The Pac West includes four Catholic institutions, one Mormon institution, one Christian institution and three schools unaffiliated with a religion/ church/ denomination.
5. Westmont considered other meaningful differences between the GSAC and the PacWest:
 - a. The Pac West Conference’s nine schools are spread across four states: Hawaii, California, Utah, and Arizona. Travel costs incurred by Pac West Conference Members are considerably higher than those currently incurred in the GSAC.

- b. The GSAC members close proximity to each other not only saves travel cost but more importantly preserves class time for student-athletes. We estimate that the average student-athlete will miss an unacceptable amount of class time with the travel requirements of the Pac West.
 - c. The Pac West does not offer Track and Field. Track and Field comprises the largest number of student-athletes at both Westmont and the average GSAC institution.
 - d. The Pac West can accommodate the sports (other than Track and Field) that Westmont offers, but they do not offer many of the sports that other GSAC institutions have. For example, Azusa Pacific University has a football team but the Pac West does not offer football.
6. The requirements for acceptance into the NCAA and subsequent compliance are considerable and burdensome. They are costly and would create significant institutional pressure by virtue of requiring changes to faculty committee assignments. Acceptance into the NCAA Division II, and success therein, would require Westmont (and other GSAC institutions) to do the following, all of which are either prohibitively costly or antithetical to the mission, vision, and values of Westmont:
- e. Hire and pay for a full time athletic director. *(Required by rule)*
 - f. Hire and pay for a senior women's administrator. *(Required by rule)*
 - g. Hire and pay for a full time NCAA compliance officer. *(Required by rule)*
 - h. Reduction in responsibilities outside of coaching (i.e. teaching, other administrative duties) for head coaches so that they have time to travel for recruiting and time to meet rule compliance obligations.
 - i. Coaches must be full time on campus. (i.e. no part time coaches) *(Required by rule)*
 - j. Additional costs associated with the payment of assistant coaches who will be required to spend more time with each program to fulfill recruiting requirements and other rule compliance.

- k. Significant increase in travel costs and time away from campus by coaching staff. NAIA institutions are allowed to have prospective athletes on campus to play or try out. NAIA also allows for recruiting visits at times convenient to both player and coach. NCAA limits time periods and activities on visits which require coaches to travel to more games and locations to see recruits play.
 - l. A significant increase in scholarship dollars would be necessary to remain competitive.
7. Westmont has placed a higher value on conference affiliation rather than national affiliation in its decision making process. Conference play comprises between 60 and 80 percent of the majority of teams' schedules. Pre-season and post-season play usually comprise the remainder. On the surface it may appear the NCAA Division II offers a wider competition base nationally, but in reality this is not the case, as national championship tournaments are played in regions. A team must progress to the quarterfinal levels or "Final Eight" before they compete against schools from different regions. Some have also suggested that changing from NAIA to NCAA Division II would allow for schools who had previously not been able to schedule games with nearby NCAA Division II schools the ability to do so. This is unlikely, as out of conference NCAA Division II schools have stated they would rather travel a further distance to play opponents they believe are weaker, to improve their win-loss record. This is viewed as advantageous by some schools as it can improve their national rankings which can help in getting at-large berths to national championship tournaments.
8. Westmont believes that the NAIA provides an environment that is conducive to how our institutions relate to student-athletes in ways that the NCAA does not. The NCAA is rife with rules that limit the types of activities and restrict the amount of time coaches can spend with student-athletes. Activities prevalent in

our institutions, such as dinners at coaches homes, mentoring relationships between athletes and alumni, and team Bible studies must be ready for intense scrutiny under the NCAA. The Council for Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCU) has 110 members. Of those 110 members, 3 are NCAA D1 members, 16 are NCAA D2 and 27 are NCAA D3. By contrast, the remaining 59 of the 110 CCCU members are affiliated with the NAIA. These 59 institutions create a strong coalition within the NAIA to ensure that legislation remains consistent with our respective faith-based interests.

9. The financial costs that would be required to change from the NAIA to the NCAA Division II are significant and potentially prohibitive. The requirements mentioned above in point number 6 would lead to large increases in the athletic budget to pay for additional staffing, travel, scholarships and operating costs. An estimation of the cost to Westmont alone, is approximately an additional \$1.2 million per year. This does not take into account the cost the institution bears due to the requirement for faculty participation in committees required by the NCAA, nor does it account for the intangible costs of missed academic and class time secondary to the increased amount of travel. This is potentially offset somewhat by reimbursement from the NCAA for post-season travel and that in the NCAA most post-season travel is within the same region. That said, the overall costs to change from the NAIA to the NCAA would be a significant long term financial commitment that does not appear to be justifiable for an institution such as Westmont, given other strategic considerations at this point in time.
10. The NAIA is in the process of implementing major changes to address their weaknesses.
 - a. The NAIA has implemented a “Clearing House” to ensure that eligibility requirements are met and that there are consistent eligibility determinations and implementation for all members.
 - b. The NAIA is considering a proposal to provide reimbursement for post-season travel. This would be funded by an increase in member dues. The ma-

major benefit of this proposal would be for the participant schools, as they would not be financially penalized for being successful. Currently, schools must set their budgets with significant “wobble-room” as they do not know at the time of budgeting whether funds will be required for post-season play.

11. Westmont and other GSAC institutions have drawn pride from their strong athletic heritage. There are many historical rivalries within the GSAC that raise attendance and community involvement in athletic events. Soccer, volleyball, baseball, and basketball games, as well as tennis matches and track and field meets are a few examples of some of the sporting events which provide an opportunity for the entire college community to come together. Current students, as well as alumni from many years ago, are able to relate to ongoing rivalries, for example, between Westmont and Biola. This type of connection keeps alumni close to Westmont and other alma maters. It is doubtful there would be a similar sense of community spirit with the Pacific West Conference of the NCAA Division II, as the schools are spread much further apart geographically and historically have not enjoyed the same fan attendance as does the GSAC. It is much easier to entice fans to attend road games when it is only a two to three hour drive, rather than a plane ride away.
12. Moving from the NAIA to the NCAA would require a four year transition process. In the first two years, a school is not allowed to participate in post-season play. This unfairly penalizes student-athletes who would have chosen another school had they known of the lack of chance for post-season play. It also makes it difficult to recruit for several years after such a change.

Conclusion

In summary, Westmont believes that the NAIA offers significant advantages over the NCAA. While there may be challenges in the near future, due to changing membership within the GSAC, the long-term benefit of the NAIA for institutions such as ours is compelling. The significant costs, from a budget, academic, and cultural perspective associated with moving from the NAIA to the NCAA are not acceptable, especially

given what we perceive are limited benefits. Moving forward, Westmont believes that the biggest benefit can be obtained by actively participating in the leadership of the GSAC and NAIA. Our efforts will be focused on strengthening these entities and maintain our history of excellence.