
From: Doyle, Sheila [BOARD] [sdoyle@iastate.edu]
Sent: Wednesday, April 08, 2009 3:21 PM
To: Smith, Dianne [BOARD]
Subject: FW: Statement by Doug Gross - re: UNI Baseball
Importance: High

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From: Doyle, Sheila [BOARD]
Sent: Wednesday, April 08, 2009 3:18 PM
To: Bonnie Campbell; Craig Lang; David Miles; Downer, Robert; Gartner, Michael; Harkin, Ruth; Jack Evans; Johnson, Greta A; Rose Vasquez
Cc: Donley, Robert [BOARD]
Subject: FW: Statement by Doug Gross - re: UNI Baseball
Importance: High

[Regents,](#)

[FYI - See the statement below which was just released by Doug Gross regarding the UNI baseball program. Please let us know if you have any questions. Thank you.](#)

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From: Parker, Alice M. [mailto:AMP@brownwinick.com]
Sent: Wednesday, April 08, 2009 2:54 PM
To: bdonley@iastate.edu
Subject: from Doug Gross

The following is from Doug Gross, for your information.

Thank you.

Alice

To: Media outlets in Iowa and throughout the United States

Re: Committee Criticizes UNI's Decision to Drop Baseball

April 8, 2009

The campaign to save the University of Northern Iowa baseball program has ended in anger and frustration. That anger is aimed directly at UNI President Ben Allen and Athletics Director Troy Dannen, the officials who are determined to eliminate varsity baseball from their school.

A committee of UNI alumni, friends and financial supporters promised to raise at least \$250,000 on an annual basis to help self-fund the baseball program. In return, the committee proposed that UNI contribute \$100,000 in scholarship money on an annual basis for a total budget of at least \$350,000. The committee felt it was important for the school to make a financial commitment to the program and felt \$100,000 was a small price to pay for a successful team that's been in existence since 1906.

The proposal, presented on Tuesday, was flatly rejected by Athletics Director Troy Dannen, the same man who vowed last summer that he'd never cut a varsity sport during his tenure as the school's director of athletics. Dannen wanted the committee to raise the entire \$350,000 itself and completely self-fund the program, with no help from the school.

"The decision to not accept our offer is extremely disappointing," said UNI baseball coach Rick Heller. "It was more than fair and one that wouldn't have put a burden on the athletic department. To think that they couldn't find \$100,000 in scholarship money to save a program that has been around for 103 years is sad. I feel sick for our players, alumni and boosters."

Given enough time, the committee felt it could pay for the entire program and make it a showcase for the entire country. But when Dannen announced on Feb. 23 that the program would be cut after the 2009 season, he imposed an April 5 deadline for raising \$1.2 million to save the program for three years. That gave the committee less than six weeks to raise \$1.2 million in pledges, which was an unreasonable mountain to climb.

Dannen has claimed publicly that it was his decision to drop baseball, but he clearly has worked closely with UNI President Benjamin Allen during the entire process. The Committee to Save UNI Baseball, represented by attorney Doug Gross, conducted several conversations with Dannen and Allen in recent weeks, trying to resolve the situation, but all of the committee's efforts fell on deaf ears. During the period given to save the program, UNI officials did nothing to help raise any of the money.

Gross, Heller, committee chairman Gary Sharp and Perfect Game USA president Jerry Ford met with Dannen in Dannen's office on Tuesday.

"At one point in the meeting, Dannen was asked if he really wanted to save the UNI baseball program. He responded with positive enthusiasm," said Ford, who pledged his company's financial support for the campaign. "The group offered to guarantee all but \$100,000 of the funding for the program to stay alive. The reason for that was the group wanted some small commitment from UNI, seeing it was their program. This offer was rejected.

"Dannen insisted on every dime coming from outside interests," said Ford. "This speaks volumes of where UNI's administration is coming from. They fully intend on cutting a sport that is 103 years old, meaning it survived the Great Depression. It's a Division I sport that was under-funded to begin with. UNI has to compete against baseball schools like Wichita State with the smallest budget in the Missouri Valley Conference."

A fundraising effort on a special web site -- www.SupportUNIBaseball.com -- raised \$258,000 in pledges from more than 600 individuals, companies and organizations. In addition, Iowa Gov. Chet Culver, the state Board of Regents, Allen and Dannen were bombarded with hundreds of e-mails, letters and phone calls from people across the state and across the country who care about the program and wanted to see it saved.

"We fought as hard as we could and I'm proud of the effort our group showed until the very end," said Heller. "We couldn't have done any more. I think it was apparent to everyone in Mr. Dannen's office yesterday that this decision came from the top and isn't about money. To think we are losing one of only two Division I baseball programs in Iowa for political reasons is criminal. I couldn't be more disappointed."

Allen was a top official at Iowa State University in 2001 when the Cyclones dropped their varsity baseball program. Now he'll be remembered as the president who agreed to drop baseball at the University of Northern Iowa. If baseball disappears at UNI, the University of Iowa will have the only Division I baseball program in the state.

"I would like to thank the thousands who wrote letters, sent e-mails, made calls, pledged money and were involved in any way," said Heller. "The support from not only across the state but across the country has been overwhelming. It means so much to our players, staff and myself."

The committee wanted to raise even more than \$250,000 on an annual basis to help the program. Given time, Ford is confident it could have been done.

"The group's goal was to get UNI to a fully funded state where they could compete on a national level," he said. "They have been more than competitive in the past and they have an outstanding baseball coach. The administration declined that offer that would have eventually accounted for as much as 90 percent of the baseball budget.

"Unfortunately, it seems that money was never the object in this decision," said Ford. "Last year, Dannen worked for the Iowa Girls High School Athletic Union. This year, he has eliminated a lot of future opportunities for Iowa high school athletes. Also falling by the wayside are opportunities for young coaches and others on the baseball staff. Former UNI coach Dave Schrage would be the first to admit how important UNI baseball was in his career. Schrage is now the head coach at Notre Dame."

The University of Northern Iowa has fielded a varsity baseball program since 1906 and has been highly competitive over the years. Heller is in his 10th year at UNI with an overall record of 259-268-1 record, a mark that includes a 10-6-1 record against the University of Iowa and a 10-7 record against the University of Minnesota, two Big Ten schools that border the University of Northern Iowa and have much bigger budgets than the Panthers. Heller won the Missouri Valley Conference title in 2001, thus earning a spot in the NCAA tournament, and has sent at least 18 players to professional baseball, many of them players from Iowa. In addition, he's produced three Missouri Valley Conference MVPs and one Missouri Valley Conference Pitcher of the Year.

Dannen's refusal to accept the committee's offer has bewildered friends of the program, because his decision undoubtedly will cost the school more than it will save. It's not known how many players on the 37-man roster will transfer to another school or quit school completely, but even a modest exodus would cost UNI hundreds of thousands of dollars in lost revenues from tuition, room, board and other fees.

Heller has been operating the program with the equivalent of eight in-state scholarships and 1.7 diversity scholarships, well short of the 11.7 full in-state or out-of-state scholarships that are allowed by the NCAA. That means the equivalent of 27.3 players have been paying their own way to attend school at roughly \$13,500 per year at the in-state rate. If 10 of those players leave school, it would strip the university of \$135,000. If 20 of those players leave, it would cost the school \$270,000. And if all 27 leave school, it would mean \$364,500 in lost revenues that could help pay for faculty salaries and help fill the dorms, which are not filled to capacity. Those figures rise when the out-of-state fees of approximately \$22,000 per year are figured into the equation.

That's what the committee does not understand: Faced with those numbers, why isn't Dannen willing to contribute \$100,000 to save the program?

"We had all the right intentions and we formed a very strong group in hopes of persuading UNI officials," said Ford. "In the end, we found out it really wasn't about the money. In fact, the college will end up losing money overall. They did listen, only because they had to, but it became obvious that they simply want to get rid of baseball."

Dannen estimates that the baseball program costs the athletic department approximately \$400,000 per year. Faced with a cut of at least \$500,000 for next year from the school's general fund, he said he needed a way to balance the books. His decision was to cut baseball.

Dannen's decision left friends of the program with another question: Why baseball? There are 18 varsity sports at the University of Northern Iowa, but the men's basketball team is the only program that doesn't lose money. Football, for instance, loses approximately \$1 million per year, and Dannen is in the process of trying to raise approximately \$1.5 million to pay for a new football surface in the UNI-Dome.

Dannen said it's not possible to cut a women's varsity sport, due to Title IX issues. Females comprise about 58 percent of the student body at UNI, but account for only 38 percent of all participants in varsity sports. When Dannen was hired last June, he promised to mount a significant fundraising campaign to help solve the athletic department's budget problems and to help create more opportunities for female athletes, possibly with the addition of a new varsity sport like rugby or bowling. Now, faced with a slumping economy, Dannen's decision is to drop a 103-year-old program with a proud tradition.

"The state of Iowa just lost a lot of opportunities for young kids," said Ford. "Ben Allen is someone I don't know. He wasn't even at the meeting, but he appears to be the enemy of college baseball. He appears to be the enemy to all those young aspiring baseball players in the state. It just doesn't seem that the 103-year-old program could survive this excuse to get rid of it, by someone just lurking around waiting for the right opportunity.

"People are lined up ready to help, but that help is not something that Allen and Dannen seem to have any interest in," said Ford. "That would mean they have to keep the program. They don't seem to want to eliminate the economic excuse.

"We all understand the economic situation," Ford continued. "Florida, California, Arizona, etc., have been greatly affected. Iowa has not seen anywhere near the problems other states are experiencing. This whole thing is a big embarrassment to our state, yet those making the decisions just don't seem to really care.

"All those who care about baseball should keep a close eye on Ben Allen," said Ford. "If he ever is in the running for the president's position at another college, do everything possible to nip it in the bud. This guy has established a track record, and that track record is not in the best interest of young student-athletes. To think, just down the road from the campus is the Field of Dreams. Baseball in Iowa has turned into the 'Field of Nightmares.' Tradition? I guess it doesn't mean much at UNI."

Several parents of current UNI baseball players are exploring the possibility of filing a lawsuit against the University of Northern Iowa, claiming they were not given enough time to help their sons find a new team and secure scholarships for next year. The final signing period for national letters-of-intent began today (April 8), which means players from around the country will begin signing with colleges that have already earmarked their scholarship money.

The committee also feels that UNI could be vulnerable to lawsuits related to Title IX, feeling the university did not comply with all federal regulations when it decided to drop baseball.

This story will not end here. We'll keep talking to people and digging for information.

For more information, please feel free to contact the following individuals:

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