

STATE OF THE ASSOCIATION

MARK EMMERT: I want to begin this year a little differently than we have in the past. I want to begin by talking about one of our own. I want to start by talking about a coach who has embodied the very best of what we do in intercollegiate athletics, somebody who worked for 38 years to promote excellence and achievement and opportunity for all of her students. Pat Summitt had the most career wins of any basketball coach in NCAA history. We all know that. We all know sadly that we lost her this last year, but it isn't just her record of wins and losses that matters the most. The greater impact is what she did with and for her student-athletes. She has mentored them, she provided them with a community, she provided them with amazing opportunities to grow and develop. And yes she taught them some discipline along the way, too.

Most impressively probably is that she had a 100% graduation success rate over her career. She taught those students --

(Applause.)

That's an amazing record! She taught them all the life lessons that really matter: generosity, hard work, integrity, tenacity, how to be great leaders. She produced more than her fair share of professional athletes, but most of her students of course pursued other careers and are achieving remarkable things in every endeavor that you can imagine.

Her impact continues to be felt today and will for continuing generations. That's what we want to celebrate tonight with the very first edition of a new award, the Pat Summitt Award. This is going to be an award that will honor someone for years and years, every year we gather, who is from the Association itself, who has demonstrated a true devotion to the development of his or her student-athletes and has made a positive impact on all of their lives.

This awardee, who can come from any of our divisions, can come from any of the fields or disciplines within intercollegiate athletics, might not even be a famous person, but it will be somebody that we know for what they did. The awardee gets to donate \$10,000 to an organization of his or her choice that's battling neurological diseases of the brain. As we know, that's what took Pat's life way too early for all of us.

Pat's son Tyler and some of her closest friends and colleagues have come to join us tonight as we present this very first Pat Summitt Award. Tyler, where are you sitting? Can you please stand up and let us thank you and the Summitt family for being part of this award?

(Applause.)

So today we honor Pat's dear friend and a pillar of strength in the sports community at the University of Tennessee and indeed across the entire Association, Joan Cronan, a great friend to many of us here. Joan has lived her life dedicated to advancing opportunities for students. We celebrate Joan's contributions to college sports and honor her service as an example of true leadership.

[Joan Cronan accepts award.]

MARK EMMERT: I said, Joan, that was a really nice speech, that was perfect. And she said, Yeah, and right on time, too. Three minutes on the dot, Coach! Thank you, Joan. That was wonderful.

Joan and Pat's leadership and the impact that they have had on generations of students is it what we celebrate not just in the Pat Summitt Award but that's what we do in college sports, it's what college sports is all about, helping students shape their future while earning a college degree and making that the inflexion point that changes their lives.

As an Association of more than 1,100 member schools now, we're committed to a goal of providing a pathway of opportunity for all of our students. But that work, of course, doesn't occur in a vacuum. It's not something that just comes out of thin air. And it's interesting today to recognize that we're gathered here right now in a time of national dialogue and introspection about where institutions and even where individuals stand in our country right now. As a nation we're having very interesting and serious debates about fairness and about opportunity. It's fascinating to me those are the same issues that we talk about all the time inside college sports. How do we provide fairness? How do we provide opportunity? We need to recognize that. If we're willing to take on these issues and we want to be the leaders, we have to say, yeah, those are the things that we do, those are the things that we tackle here in the NCAA.

Like the rest of higher education, we accept that challenge and the responsibility of providing students with the tools to be successful in whatever it is they decide to do. Our mission, then, is to provide students the best possible chance to shape their future and then, by extension, we get to have an impact on the whole country, on our nation, through those student-athletes.

One of the great traditions of sport that coaches reiterate all the time is we think in terms of increments, usually increments of time -- an inning, an at-bat, a quarter, a half, a season -- and coaches teach us all the time after that one thing has happened, you stop, you leave it behind and you move on to the next one because now we've got to get ready for the next pitch, the next inning, for the next game. And that works really, really well in sport, in competitions. But when you're thinking about public policy and you're thinking about culture and you're thinking about a lot of things that we wrestle with here, it's also important that we take the longer view, that we think about what happened over a span of time behind us and where we want to go into the future because it takes a long time to get things accomplished.

This Association, all of us together have accomplished an inordinate amount of really good things over the past five, ten, and 15 years. The positive impact of your hard work, of you all working together can be seen on every one of our campuses in the country. It's a remarkable thing. One of the great pleasures I get is I get to go around the country, I get to sit on campuses and meet with students, meet with faculty and staff, and I see the changes that you've made firsthand and I hear from the students on your campuses. Without your leadership, without all the things that you've done through this organization, through your conferences and through your individual campuses, we wouldn't have made all that progress.

So the first thing I want to say to all of you tonight is thank you. Thank you for being willing to take those things on. Thank you for being willing to push on those issues. If we want to continue to push forward, at this convention and in years to come, we need to do more of it. We need to keep that steady progress going forward if we're going to be successful.

So how do we do that? Well, Bud Peterson said it, we have said it many times already in the early days of this convention. We've got three overarching commitments that we need to stay focused on. First and foremost, the academic success of our student-athletes. Second of all, their health and well-being. And thirdly, making sure we do those two things in an environment that's fair for everybody

that's involved. If we fail at any one of those three things, we fail at our mission. And so we need to keep everything we do focused on that.

So let me talk about these in order, if I might.

First, academics, obviously. You know, the Association was founded more than 110, 115 years ago and one of the reasons it was founded was because it wanted to maintain a focus of our students who happened to be athletes on their schoolwork, making sure they're academics as well as athletes.

About fifteen years ago, presidents in this Association, some of you in the room tonight, also said we need to renew that commitment. We need to recognize that we're not getting everything that we could in place to help our students be successful. We're not setting the bar high enough. And they sat down and they said, look, we've got to change some policies, we've got to change some requirements, we've got to change the expectations of our athletic departments and the coaches and the student-athletes themselves.

Let's talk about what the progress has been since then, because I think it's actually remarkable. If you look at, to start with, just Division I, Division I student-athletes during that time frame have seen their graduation rates overall rise 12 percentage points, 12 percentage points! If you convert that into human beings, that 12 percentage-point increase has accounted for 19,500 new graduates, nearly 20,000 young men and women who wouldn't have graduated were it not for those changes in policies.

One of the issues people talked about then and we still talk about today is the very troubling achievement gap between majority and minority students. And there was a keen emphasis on saying what do we need to do to especially help our students of color be successful. African-American male athletes now in Division I, their graduation rate has risen 19 percentage points. The graduation success rate now is over 70 percent, which on a national scale, everybody here knows, is extraordinary.

If you look at the focal areas back then, one of them was African-American football players. Their graduation rates are up 17%. And a particular focus was placed on African-American male basketball

players. African-American male basketball players have a graduation rate that's up 31 percent now, 31 percent!

I'm a life-long educator, a lot of you in this room are. I literally can think of no other cohort in America that I can point to and say their graduation rates have risen 30 percent in that time frame. We need to be incredibly proud of those kind of achievements because you all got it done.

(Applause.)

Most importantly, we need to be incredibly proud of the students that did all that work and stepped up when we said we've got to raise the bar and we stepped up to it.

If you look at Division II, we have seen the same kind of improvements, especially over the last decade. We've seen the Academic Success Rate of Latino and Hispanic male student-athletes jump 12 percentage points, and females 16 percentage points. Across all the cohorts in Division II, we've seen really impressive same kinds of increases. And for those that don't think that academic success and athletic success can co-exist, first of all, just think about what Pat Summitt did, Joan. If anybody dispelled that myth, it was Pat, 100% GSR.

Much more recently, though, we can look back just a week ago Monday to what was, I think everyone would agree, a spectacular college playoff championship game between Clemson and Alabama. No matter who won that game, that was an instant classic. A lot of attention was focused on it, got a lot of impressive reviews. What the world didn't much focus on, though, was that when those two teams took the field, 36 of those football players had already received bachelor's degrees, 36 of them. Three of them already had master's degrees. More impressive even to me, both the offensive and defensive MVPs of that game had already finished their bachelor's degrees. That's an extraordinary accomplishment. Doesn't get noticed much, doesn't get realized, but wow we've got to feel really great about that stuff.

Now, our work in this whole realm of academic achievement is never done. We've got a lot more to do. We all get that. We've got plenty of issues to still tackle. One of the things that happened just

this past summer that I was really pleased with was the Division I Board of Directors decided to make sure that they, too, were putting their money where the mission is and they revamped the Division I revenue distribution model such that by 2024, which will be here sooner than we all care to think, by 2024, 75 percent of that distribution is going to go directly and be dedicated directly to student-athlete support and be based on academic success. That was a big, bold step by the Division I Board, and I'm incredibly pleased that you all did that.

Now, if academics is our first priority then, of course, our second one also is making sure that we're taking care of the health and well-being of our student-athletes. I think when we talk about the whole well-being issue, it's really important for us to just take a step back and remember that we are part -- first and foremost, we are part of the higher education community. That means we are in the human development business. Young men and young women come to our -- sometimes not so young men and young women come to our universities and colleges with an expectation that when they commence, they graduate and commence out into the world, they're going to be better educated, better prepared. But if they're playing sports with us, we also have a perfectly legitimate expectation that they will be healthier and stronger, mentally and physically than when they came in. That's a responsibility that we have that the rest of sport doesn't have because we do this in the context of higher education.

But with that somewhat unique responsibility also comes fortunately for us, a really unique opportunity as well. Because the universities and colleges represented in this room right now are also the places that hold the brightest minds, the best researchers, the best laboratories. We are the place that the world comes to tackle the toughest problems on all issues. We're the seat of all the research and technology or at least a huge swath of it that comes out of the United States and even the world.

Our greatest opportunity is to get all of our universities and colleges to collaborate, and to collaborate with outside experts and those that are beyond the walls of our schools, to address the

issues of the day, especially around the biomedical sciences and those things that we can do collaboratively to make our sports safer for our students.

The best example of all this, most of you know about -- at least I sure hope you do -- and that's what's being done right now in the NCAA-Department of Defense concussion study in this great collaboration across all of medicine. It's now the largest study of concussion not by a little bit, by an extraordinary amount. We now have 28,000 participants and growing, both men and women who are participants in this study, and it's already laying down a baseline of understanding for how brains work and what concussions really mean for our student-athletes in a way that's never before been possible. It's our convening power of bringing together all of those folks that's now benefitting our student-athletes and of course the broader society as well. And that's an incredible thing for us to do. We need to make sure we do that every time we have one of those challenges.

Our priority then has to be: how do we take what we learn in our research and in our findings and then convert it into policies and practices to make sports safer for all of our young men and women? We released several updated guidelines just this week on health and safety issues, some of which you've already seen and that you're well aware of, they've already been written about in the past day or two. For example, there are new football guidelines that reduce the contact for days after scrimmages, that reduce contact practices throughout the week, that move to only one day -- making sure everybody has one day a week during preseason periods without practices, and that aims at eliminating two-a-days. Those guidelines and policies have been developed because of these collaborations using the best medical minds and the best evidence that we can find.

We also, through that same kind of work, created the independent medical care guidelines, guidelines that last year Division I converted into legislation and Divisions II and III are going to be voting on right at this convention. Those kinds of efforts to bring together the best knowledge that we have to address the issues of our student-athletes is a critical thing we can do to keep advancing their health and well-being.

The other interesting area, though, when I meet and talk with our students, and I'm sure all of you have the same experience, when I sit down with students across all three divisions that comes up consistently is a concern about mental health. Mental health issues in America are obviously increasingly important and we know that from everything that's happening in society. We know it's an issue on our campuses. As a university president, I watched those issues and concerns grow and we struggle to deal with and to help our students. And now in this position I see in our student-athletes that there is a unique challenge in all of this. One of the things that we have to do -- and we're starting on this work now, but we need to work more on it together -- we've got to focus on creating cultures in our athletic departments and on our teams where coming forward to talk about issues of mental health is encouraged, not stigmatized. Our student-athletes are serious competitors. They have spent a whole lifetime not talking about weakness, but talking about strength. They don't want to talk about issues like depression or anxiety or issues that might be perceived as a weakness, but we've got to get them to understand that the mind and body come together, that this is one entity, this great, wonderful thing of mind and body. And it's not only okay, it's essential to say, look, I've got these issues, we've got to deal with this. And we've got to get all of our athletic departments ready and able to address those questions. It's not just an athletic issue; it's a societal issue but we've got a role to play.

The Sport Science Institute has made it a priority. We've published guidelines to help all of our athletics departments on mental health issues. It's been distributed out there. If you haven't seen, it's not in your athletic departments, we need to make sure it is. Please let us know and we'll engage on it. We've just started to address those issues. We've got a lot of work to do to make sure that we're answering the needs of our students around mental health issues.

Another societal issue that Bud Peterson mentioned that I was appreciative of that, Bud, is really just a scourge on our land and that's the issues around sexual assault. Bud mentioned the work of the Commission to prevent sexual assault that the Board empowered this past summer. We just had a session that many of you were at, a standing-room-only session where some members of that

Commission talked about what they were trying to accomplish and got great input and feedback from all of you.

The NCAA Sexual Assault Task Force has published a toolkit now over this past year that is being distributed widely around our athletics departments. In fact, it's a toolkit that's been endorsed by a lot of higher education associations and experts throughout the field. We're really pleased and proud of that. It's being socialized pretty widely now, and the membership has a sexual violence prevention strategy.

At the same time, this is another issue where our students are also providing great leadership. The student-athlete advisory committees at each of the three divisions, at the conference level and indeed on the campus levels, have been leading the charge to raise awareness to help to get people to understand what should and shouldn't be going on around behaviors on our campuses and to make sure that we're focused on it, and we need to thank them for that.

We have made great progress on sexual violence, but we've still got a lot to do. That's what the role of the Commission to Combat Campus Sexual Violence is all about and I'm really delighted with the work that they're getting launched.

So our first priority has to be academics. Our second is going to be around the well-being of our student-athletes. We've got to recognize we have made great progress in those two areas but we've just begun. We've also got to remember, while we're dealing with all those issues, we are in the human development business. We have a responsibility to take care of our students.

The underpinning of that commitment to academics and well-being is our commitment to fairness, what's fair, what's right for our student-athletes. In recent years, we've made a number of really impressive improvements and Bud even mentioned some of them. In Division I, we've, of course, seen the creation of the full cost of attendance. We've created multi-year scholarships, providing greater certainty to students. Divisions I and II both have eliminated rules around meals so that students can get as much nutrition as they need. We've added some opportunities in our marquee

sports in Division I for families to travel to championships. As Bud mentioned, we've increased the student-athlete's voice and even vote in our governance system. And I was delighted to have the Board of Governors yesterday approve the Student-Athlete Engagement Committee so that we've got them involved in every aspect of our business.

I'm also really pleased that we're working in this session, in both Division I and II, around time management. We all hear from our students that one of the major challenges is dividing up their time among athletics, academics, student life. It's something we have talked about this past year. The student-athletes themselves have been incredibly engaged in gathering data from each other and learning what works and doesn't work for their fellow students and helping to shape these proposals, and now we're in a place in Division I and II -- Division II has already worked hard over the past years. Division I now is, I believe, going to make some great steps in that direction. We're going to take significant steps and I'm really pleased and proud of you for doing that.

In Division II, there are also a number of legislative pieces that are going to be heard this year around revamping some of the financial aid rules in order to deregulate financial aid policies to benefit students and make sure they're getting the full opportunities that they can within their division. But, you know, a lot of those things that we've done, we're really, really proud of and they're great and they're focused on individuals, but it's also not just about individual fairness but about fairness for all.

President Peterson mentioned that some of our core values of higher education are occasionally tough. It's hard to look at making commitments to our values and then making sure that we make decisions around all those values. I was really, really pleased and proud of the Board when they made the decision to relocate championships from North Carolina. Nobody wants to leave North Carolina, but it was the right decision to make. I was proud of the Board for holding their ground and saying this is what we stand for.

I'm proud of the focus that we're seeing right now around diversity. It's not just an important issue for us, it's one of the things that's core to what we're all about. It's what higher education is all about, making sure we provide opportunities for all Americans.

When we look at the numbers, as we've talked about for a good while now, when we look at numbers of coaches and administrators who are women and people of color, then we look at our students, there is a huge, huge gap here. We need to make sure that all the students that are here and all their colleagues back home can look at their coaches and their ADs and presidents and head of the NCAA and they can say, yeah, I can do that, that's something I can achieve and they know that's going to work.

The Board, of course, as Bud mentioned, has put forward the Presidential Pledge and that's a great thing. I urge you all to look at it and consider signing on to it. It's an important statement to say we care about this and we're going to do what we can to have an impact on it.

We also recognize, of course, as an Association none of us, except at our own institutions, make hiring decisions. We don't have that kind of impact and of course never should. But that commitment says, look, we want to make sure that we're doing this. It's an expression of collective commitment that we can and need to make. The majority of schools have signed it. We hope the rest of you will take a good, hard, long look at it.

Our commitment has to be to fairness for our students, fairness to everyone and fairness to the collective good. We've accomplished a lot, but we've got a long way to go on that front.

Now, sitting here tonight, compared to where we were five or six years ago, there is no question that student-athletes have better physical and mental health resources, they're more likely to get their degree and graduate, they've got a clear, louder voice in the Association as they study in class and play in their games, but there is still much to do. Still much to do. All too often, another one of our traits as athletic fans and leaders, all too often we focus on what makes our schools, our sports, our divisions, our conferences different from one another, what differentiates us, and that's good. But it's only good

up to a point, because no matter where you are geographically, no matter what division you're in, no matter what kind of school you're at, our mission is what we have in common. We come together -- excuse me, when we come together, five years from now, let's say, we want to be able to look back at this moment and be sure that we kept our actions aligned with our values, and that we made student lives better for having played college sports. I hope that we can do that five years from now. That's the beauty of college sports. We charge our exceptional students to excel in everything they do, on and off the court.

Last night we saw classic examples of that. We as an Association have to keep evolving, making progress to provide students even greater opportunities. This is not a time where we can say great, we're done with this. In fact, in just a few minutes we're going to get a chance to hear from student-athletes, hear from them directly on stage about what they want, what they need, what their aspirations are, what's working for them and what's not. That's why we're here. That's what we do.

We are one Association, 1,100 members, 19,000 teams, half a million students, one mission. One mission. It's the hard work that you do every day that makes that possible. And for that, I want to end the way I started by saying thank you. Thank you for everything you do for our student-athletes and our universities. Thank you so much.
(Applause.)