

# NAIA-ADA



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NAIA institutions participated in the annual NAIA National Convention on May 24-27 – originally scheduled for Kansas City, Mo., but, for the second-straight year, the event was held virtually due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

During the Convention, the Association welcomed three new members – Arkansas Baptist College, Johnson University and Ohio Valley University, while three current members – Florida National, Texas A&M-San Antonio and University of North Texas-Dallas, were moved from associate to active members.

This year, the NAIA moved its basketball teams to a one-division model after competing in two divisions from 1992-2020. Though the size of both tournaments were limited due to the pandemic, the central NAIA National Championship in basketball brought the Association back to its longstanding roots,

dating back to 1937.

"The NAIA completed 28 championships and invitationals during a global pandemic," said President & CEO, Jim Carr, in a statement to the Association. "When I think back to the conversations we were having a year ago, I wasn't sure that would be the reality. We ended 2020-21 with a total of nearly 29,000 onsite COVID tests being administered and fewer than 20 presumptive positives, all of which were confirmed with PCR tests. In the overall scheme of things, that is amazing. Our membership was in this effort every step of the way."

The NAIA approved a new Strategic Plan which will focus on five key pillars – Membership, Return on Athletics, Non-Dues Revenue, Student-Athlete Experience & Development and Diversity, Equity and Inclusion.

The final pillar (DEI) was a key discussion point throughout the four-day event – as many of the legislative items focused on diversifying committees and councils throughout the Association.

At the forefront is the creation of the Senior Woman Leader position – which each NAIA institution will have in place for the 2021-22

academic year. The new role will be designated to a female administrator or coach within an athletics department who will be involved in various departmental leadership functions and create a corresponding professional development association.

In addition, the NAIA passed legislation to increase diverse representation on governing councils and committees, along with adding female and minority representation on all standing committees and executive committees.

"As an organization that was the first to integrate college basketball and the first to offer championships for men and women together, our members decided that we need to be more intentional in ensuring diversity among our leadership groups," Carr said. "Varied perspectives will only help our continuing efforts to provide quality experiences for our 77,000 student-athletes."

"The legislation related to Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) that was overwhelmingly passed at the NAIA National Convention is significant," stated Cascade Collegiate Conference Commissioner, Robert Cashell. "As an organization it is critical that we ensure opportunities are present and meaningful for everyone and that we are intentional about DEI."

@NAIAADA

# NATYCAA



## Brian Henderson

Patrick Henry

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### Bigger than Ball

Anxiety, apprehension, concern, doubt; these are all emotions amongst others that many of our student-athletes have struggled with as they returned to the courts and fields. Some student-athletes, were unable to compete, triggering other emotions of depression, sadness and unhappiness. This pandemic has changed our way of life. People have had to find ways to adjust in order to take care of their families and themselves. For student-athletes, overcoming adversity is a vital part of their journey in reaching their athletic and academic goals. However, they've never faced the obstacles and adversity thrown at them while "Ballin' in a Pandemic!"

The feelings and emotions our student-athletes have dealt with as seasons were canceled, teammates were quarantined, games postponed, classes moved online, and many

other changes have been extreme. I felt as if I had seen it all as an athletics director. Personally and professionally, I've overcome the deaths of student-athletes, coaches and other crises while in this role. While I knew there would be many other twists and turns along my journey, I truly thought this would be the toughest to overcome. However, I stand corrected, as I had never experienced being an AD in a pandemic, which hopefully we can now say we've seen the worst of. Throughout this year, our families, coaches, and administrators have all had to work together to ensure the stability of the mental and emotional health of our student-athletes. However, just as sports taught many of us at a young age, we came together to overcome the obstacles this pandemic put in our path.

As my administration gave me the green light to return to play this year, I knew that our student-athletes would be eager to play their games. My biggest fear was that the challenges would cause them to lose focus on their academics. But as this year came to an end, I was extremely pleased with the work our student-athletes did in the classroom. They were winners both on and off the field of play.

There is no question that athletics play an important role in education. Sports provide

many young people with an outlet for unspent energy while helping them develop an understanding of teamwork. In many cases, academics and athletics for young adults work together to help some students achieve goals they may never have been able to without participation in sports. There are many positives that come from combining athletics with academics. Unfortunately, there are also negatives that paint an unflattering image of student-athletes.

When you combine those negatives with a pandemic, it can be detrimental to a young man or woman's future. Every student-athlete has a story. They were either recruited or referred. They may have been born a leader or are currently a comeback story. Sometimes the ball can be a hindrance to an athlete, but oftentimes it can also help save a student. I'd like to think that for the student-athletes who have been 'Ballin' in a Pandemic, things would be a lot different for them right now if a ball wasn't in their lives.

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