1986

UA1B3/3 Report - Strategic Planning Committee for Athletics

WKU Athletics Committee

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This committee feels quite strongly that athletics are an important and integral part of Western Kentucky University. The athletic program provides the university with local, regional, as well as national exposure, and makes a number of other significant contributions, not the least of which the recruitment of students.

The primary mission of any university, however, is to provide all students, athlete and non-athlete alike, with the opportunities to attain a worthwhile education, and to grow and develop to their maximum potential. It would appear, then, that the athletic program plays a secondary role in this primary mission. As a result, too often jealously arises between the academic community and those in athletics; in short, the two become polarized. This is most unfortunate and self-defeating for both. To help address this problem, the committee feels that there is an urgent need for the development of a thoughtful, well defined mission statement for athletics. What is the proper role of the athletic program in the university structure? In what ways do athletics contribute to the primary mission of the university? These are the types of questions that should be addressed in the preparation of such a statement. It is to be hoped that this, plus more open lines of communication between the academic and athletic sectors, will promote a cooperative rather than an adversarial relationship between the two. To paraphrase Ben Franklin, we must all hang together or we will surely hang separately.
Unquestionably, finance is one of the major problems facing all athletic programs today. The new plan for controlled food distribution, now in the process of being implemented, will certainly relieve part of the strain on the athletic budget, but only to a small degree. From a long range view, the committee feels that the only possible solution to the financial burden of athletics is to (1) increase revenue from gate receipts, and (2) seek more funding from outside the university. In order to accomplish both, the athletic program as a whole needs much more positive exposure than it is presently receiving. To achieve this, the university must consider the employment of a proven full time promotional director. This may seem, at a glance, as simply an added expense to an already burdened budget, but it is the feeling of this committee that such an individual would more than pay for his or her services by the inflow of additional funds that would accompany the creation of such a position. There must be a clear understanding from the outset, however, that money contributed to athletics is and must remain under the control of university officials. Any athletic program even partially controlled by outside interests is begging for trouble.

In regard to personnel in general, the committee feels that there is an immediate need to review the whole administrative structure of athletics at Western. Such a study might reveal enough overlapping responsibility that would allow the employment of a full time promotional director without the expenditure of additional monies. To accomplish this objective, someone with expertise from outside the university should be brought in to take a close look at what we are doing, how we are doing it, and,
finally, provide suggestions for improvement in the future.

Additional recommendations from the strategic planning committee include the following:

1. There must be some careful thought given to the parking problem at athletic events, especially men's basketball. We recognize the need for reserving an area for red towel members, but the way it is now being done (turning cars away from what is often a half empty parking lot) has offended many long time supporters of Western basketball. To alleviate the problem, the committee suggests three possible solutions:
   a. Reserve two floors in the parking structure for red towel contributors, thereby leaving the Diddle lot open on a first come, first serve basis.
   b. The construction of a new parking area west of the Downing University Center. This would also provide a paved practice area for the band.
   c. Provide shuttle service to and from Diddle area from more distant lots.

2. There needs to be some more organized method for tutoring all athletes. These young men and women miss a great many classes and a significant number of them are in dire need of such assistance. It is our understanding that monies are provided for this by the 100 club but not on an equal basis. In addition, there appears to be no organized method of providing such service. As an example, instructors are often asked by the student to provide a tutor; this is not a satisfactory way to handle the problem. Some professors simply do not make the
effort while others who try often find it difficult to locate a tutor and, if they do, to arrange a time for that individual to meet with the student. If we really do care about the education of our athletes, we will do something about this.

3. With regard to the academic progress of all athletes, it would be helpful to have a computer bank of information on each one—from ACT scores and high school records to academic progress toward a degree. This should also include follow-up information such as—Did this individual complete his or her degree?

4. Finally, there is a pressing need for the development of a long range planning document for athletics. Where are we now with regard to budget, number of sports, scheduling etc., and where do we hope to be in, say, the next five years? This will obviously require time and thought plus input from every individual involved in athletics at Western Kentucky University. Such a plan must include a resolve to work within the rules to achieve a solvent, competitive program at all levels of competition, and one that reflects honor and pride among the administration, faculty, students, coaches, alumni, and everyone else interested in or involved with athletics at Western. This may seem naive and overly optimistic in this present era of intercollegiate athletics, but without a sincere, well conceived plan of action, and the earnest resolve to work toward its implementation, there is indeed little hope that our athletic program will long survive.

Respectfully submitted,

Francis H. Thompson
Chairman