

Senate Executive Committee Meeting (10/12/2023)

Attendees: Elizabeth (Bets) McNie (Chair), Sarah Senk (Vice Chair), Ariel Setniker (Secretary), Mike Holden, guest Athletic Director Karen Yoder.

Absent: Christine Isakson, Wil Tsai, Maggie Ward, Provost Schroeder.

BM: The reason we wanted to talk to you was because we had a bunch of students - women soccer players especially - come and talk to faculty, come and talk to us, and we've had faculty come and talk to us, kind of wondering what was going on with the soccer decision and particularly the support for the mental health surrounding the students, because there are some students concerned about that feeling that...the decision made to disband the women's soccer team was made in part...because of physical and mental health concerns, and they're kind of feeling at this point that some of their mental health concerns aren't being well tended, so I was wondering if you could address that.

KY: Sure, absolutely. May I ask who all is present?

[AD Yoder greets Senate Executive members, drops off call and comes back]
[Senator Holden introduces himself]

KY: Nice to meet you. I wrote a couple notes down of the items that you shared with me... I would like to clarify the women's soccer program is not disbanded, it was only shut down for the season after 3 games, all of which we fell below the number of players in comparison to our opponent. You start a soccer game with 11 on the field, 10 on the field and 1 is in the goal, we fell down 9, 8, and *then* 7, in order of the first 3 games we competed in this year due to injuries. There is a minimum number of players required on the field before it becomes a forfeit, and we crossed that line in our last, the third game, when one of our cadets had to step out, caught her breath and the official let her come back in the first half, which isn't normally allowed - you're not able to re-enter. The decision was made to ensure we are doing everything we can to physically put them in a safe position. In regards to the mental health support, they have access to CAPS as well as an assistant athletic trainer, Christina [Brekelmans], who has been with them the entire season and has been checking in with them, and also our head athletic trainer, Jeff Ward.

The services have not discontinued in any way, shape, or form. I can assure you - that is being addressed. I actually just met with Christina last week just to check in to see what their needs are, what the status of the physical injuries are, because we still have some that are coming in for rehabilitative sports medicine training to get those injuries recovered, because if they suffered those injuries while training or competing for our program, we're responsible to make sure we supply them with the care and/or any additional off-campus care that is needed. That is part of the provided services related to being a student athlete.

BM: And I do recall that you mentioned that their scholarships don't go away?

KY: No, there will be no refund, or removal this semester or next semester. That will not occur.

SS: So I've got a bunch of things that some faculty emailed me on a Google Doc, and it looks like Bets covered - one was about the mental health supports being offered right now. Let's see, there's a few about general athletics structure, but let me focus first on the ones about the soccer team... What options did you explore for the team *before* announcing the suspension of the remainder of the 2023 season?

KY: Options were explored in having as many opportunities for the athletes. 2 individuals did rejoin the team this year to bring us to the roster number that we did have. These individuals hadn't played since their freshman year with a 3-year hiatus. Having an athlete play in a 90-minute soccer game without proper training or preparation, which is a minimum of 14 days, would've been setting up additional players up for harm. Jeff requires a minimum of 14 days of training before competing. We were in the heart of the season and can't explore adding players. There is a certain point you have to put a roster forward and get clearance through the NAIA and the Cal Pac, and we were past that date. Not giving an individual enough time to train physically would set them up to be physically harmed by having them participate in a 90-minute game would've been a lot for an individual.

SS: That makes sense. The follow-up to that one is 'what consulting steps did you take with the *current* women's soccer players ahead of decision to suspend?'

KY: Well, I've been in athletics for a long time and competing since I was 6 and I have been involved in intercollegiate athletics since 1994. As an educator, a decision of making sure that the health and safety for the athlete is the first and foremost concern is not an 18-22 year old's decision. I understand athletes want to compete, but when we drop to a certain number where you're putting them in physical harm's way, a decision had to be made. They don't have a vote in deciding if they can continue a game with less than 7 players as that is part of the rules of the game.

SS: Okay...so no consulting steps with the team *ahead* of the decision, but that was because the decision was based on the possibility of physical harm that...

KY: We had 7,(on the field in uniform), and if you have one ankle sprain or one bloody nose (that requires the player to come out of the game) in the middle of the game, it's an automatic forfeit. Those are not discussions which you can consult with athletes because that's part of the NCAA rules which we play under.

SS: The next question... 'Faculty are currently at a loss of how to comfort students or make them feel like they have other niches to fit on campus' - so they're wondering what, to make sure we have consistent messaging, like the reasons for the closure - sounds like that makes a lot of sense and is the one we should be telling students..?

KY: They were all given the opportunity to continue practicing, once their injuries were subsided, and attend the men's practices, which about 6 of them did, and 2 joined (were approved to be added) the men's team. I requested an appeal to the NAIA, which is the national governing body of which they compete in, to allow women to join our men's team, which 2 of them decided to pursue that. One I believe is fully cleared and on the road with them right now. - The other one (athlete) has played in 2 games and has gotten minutes. They were all given that opportunity to practice and/or appeal to the NAIA and Cal Pac to be added to the men's team. There are opportunities to be with a full team which was granted to them by the NAIA and 2 of them did move forward with that.

SS: That's great to hear. I bet that appeal process was a pain, too.

KY: We all would like to provide opportunities and not take them away, but we also want to provide a safe environment for those who can play.

BM: I have a question that is not something that was sent to us, but my question right this second: What can we do as faculty to support these athletes, the women's soccer players especially, because they seem a little troubled, they seem a little upset, and maybe more than a little in some cases, and so how can we best support them as a faculty body and as the faculty senate?

KY: Well, I think, no matter if you're a parent or not seeing an individual be put in a situation where they are at a disadvantage - is where that comfort and empathy is needed when talking with them. The decision was made, to make sure that they were not sustaining a disadvantaged opportunity and being set up for physical harm. When you are trying to defend 2 players during a game, it's very difficult, and that's where injuries, fatigue occurs, and some can be life-altering injuries can happen. Luckily, we didn't have any of those. We were borderline with one athlete having 2 severely pulled hamstrings, and one turn or pivot away from tearing 1 ACL and a 9-month recovery. It is important to help them understand that this was a decision made and they will rebound with this setback. It is a part of learning and growing. Sometimes hard decisions have to be made so we can get stronger and get better for the future. We almost had to do this with women's basketball last year as well. We were down to 5 players, you can play with 4, and one game we did play with 4. We now have a coach that's brought in 9 and has 4 more committed (for next year) and possibly 1 mid-year transfer so we can have a full bench to make sure those types of injuries and environment does not occur. I think just being empathetic and realizing it's not the administration against the athletes or women's soccer. I played soccer, I help start the College of Marin women's soccer program. I was the first-ever keeper at 30 years old, and I want to create opportunities, I'm not about taking away opportunities. You have to think about the health and safety of a young person and it was really sad to watch these women be carried off the field, these athletes were having to do more than they should have.

SS: Those are great points we can bring back to faculty, super helpful...maybe I missed this, but when...what are the steps for getting the program reinstated for next year? Like recruitment steps, how is that being communicated to students?

KY: I communicated when I met with them, that this was just for this season, and we will be relaunching that. I'm talking with some local club coaches and other coaches in the department who have some wonderful connections with multi-sport athletes. We may be recruiting multi-sport athletes, which is very common in the NAIA Division III world, where athletes play more than one sport, and that will only strengthen our student athlete experience on our campus, as long as they can handle it with their academic course load of course. I will make some final decisions after the fall sports end in 2 weeks.

SS: There are a couple questions just about the general structure of athletics; I think faculty are curious.

BM: I think people just don't have a good understanding of how it's structured and how it works so that might help...an understanding for faculty.

SS: They were wondering like ‘sports directors’, ‘coaches’, there’s all these terms that they see, so what’s the role, if you could give us a quick definition...this isn’t just your office, this is for everyone in admin we’re putting together to help people understand: “what are these roles?”

KY: Well if you go the CSUM website, then go to the cabinet link, it has the org charts, and that’s where my org chart for the department is listed there. We have various part-time individuals, they’re faculty but they’re 0.25 or 0.33 so they’re in a part-time role, and they do amazing work for being part-time individuals for coaching anywhere from 6-36 athletes. They travel a lot, and, some head coaches coach 2 teams, men’s/women’s cross-country, men’s/women’s water polo is the same team, so we have some individuals that coach both the men’s and the women’s version of the sport.

We have one athletics administrative coordinator, Cat Guidry. We have an athletics recreation coordinator that’s Taylor Henry. Then we have Monica Heuer and she’s the associate athletic director of recreation/intramurals over CCA and she’s the sports supervisor for 5 of the sports (teams). I’m a sports supervisor for 10 of the sports (teams). We have 15 total. I am not sure what other specifics you would like to know? we don’t have a large support, we only have the 2 coordinators, Taylor and Cat, in our department. We are vacant in some positions and we are not re-filling them to be budget conscious for our campus.

AS: So could you tell us the differences between ‘coordinators’ and ‘supervisors’, that way we can tell faculty who to refer student athletes to for various things?

KY: Sure, well, they do different roles...the ones that have director in their title are MPPs and coordinators are not MPPs, so they’re staff, they’re CSUEU, so if we’re talking about union-wise, it depends what the subject matter is, if it’s recreation, if they want to start a new recreation program and it involves money, they would go to Monica. Let’s say they want to start flag football or start ultimate frisbee or cheer team, they would go to Monica because she handles all recreation and intramurals and works in alliance with Josie [Alexander] for club sports. If it’s regarding student athlete travel, it would be Cat Guidry, she handles all the travel arrangements for all 15 teams. If you name the topic and I can direct who that is. We also have a cadet athlete handbook as well which is on the gokeelhaulers website that talks about the procedures in which a student athlete aligns with in regard to full-time status, GPA requirements, how we travel, everything from Title IX to hazing to CCA. We cover it all in the student athlete handbook...I know they get a lot of information, but it’s all included and uploaded online as well.

SS: You mentioned someone, Christina, who...what is her role with soccer? You mentioned she was a mental health support...

KY: She is the assistant athletic trainer, she is designated for women’s soccer, Evelyn is for men’s soccer. We have a head athletic trainer, Jeff Ward, and then we have 2 assistant trainers. So based on our number of student athletes, we have currently 3. We are getting close as we increase our numbers, because this year we have 209 cadet athletes and as we rise in our numbers this ratio comes from the National Athletic Trainers’ Association of which you have to have full-time individuals for care with so many athletes competing. She has a nutritional background, she also works with Dr. Wallace, as well as Jeff, and I’d like to mention we all got trained in QPR - the Question, Persuade, and Refer program. QPR which is a really important component in training we all received last year and we will be redoing that for our new staff this spring.

SS: I was going to ask if Christina, if she's mental health support, if she's had mental health training, or if that's a norm for trainers, but it sounds like working with Ian to coordinate with CAPS.

KY: Right, and we became as a department sanctioned where Jeff and Christina lead our QPR, which is a mental health suicide prevention. Both her and Jeff are training certified and then they ran all of our coaches and staff through that training last year.

SS: That's great, we should really be advertising this.

KY: We work a lot with Dr. Wallace and different groups such as the Commandant's Office, and CLD, but if faculty would like to put together a faculty session and get that type of certification and training?...I think that would be wonderful and it aligns a lot with the Mental Health First Aid training that Dr. Wallace conducts.

BM: We have about 5 minutes left, Karen, and I was wondering if you have any questions for us?

KY: No, I just appreciate this so much and the opportunity to respond, Bets, to the question that you asked earlier. I think the passionate, committed faculty we have on our campus for our student athletes is commendable, it's not like that on other campuses I've worked on where they're just a number, I think that's wonderful. I think just the more that we can connect and realign and build relationships, it's wonderful. I know how much they respond when they see faculty in the stands, I know we're working on faculty appreciation dates for sports, and I think just that wonderful collaboration of us all being teammates and really working on creating the best experience for both ends - we want to support the academic house and we would hope the faculty want to support the athletic house so we can be good teammates and colleagues.

BM: Athletics is so important to young people and their development and so it's definitely something we support, and if you're looking to commend a faculty member who supports the athletic program I think you'll find no one better than Ariel Setniker who attends game after game after game, so, I'm just calling you out Ariel, because you're a champ in that regard, so way to go.

SS: I'll just share, I'm in the same hallway as Ariel and there's always like half a dozen student athletes in her office, like every day...endless support with math and mental health - we appreciate that.

BM: Thank you, Karen, we appreciate your time...do you mind if we share the results with the faculty who reached out to us?

KY: Yes, absolutely, and if there's any follow-up or information, I'd be happy to come back - sorry I wasn't available last week for the full [senate] exec. I think the more that we communicate the more it 'disposes' second-hand, third-hand information. It's about compassion and empathy and providing the best possible experience for all cadets, and that's what it should be about, all of our decisions should be centered around them and their experience.

[All thank each other for time.]