

Suburban Journals

Lindenwood accepted into NCAA

Lindenwood starts on four-year path toward active membership

By Kalen Ponche

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Lindenwood University President James D. Evans and John Creer, dean of intercollegiate athletics, waited in Evans' office Monday afternoon for a phone call that marks a major step for the university: acceptance as a candidate for Division II of the National Collegiate Athletic Association.

"It's a great day for Lindenwood University," Evans said. "It'll never be the same. It'll only be better and bigger and greater step for the university."

Creer said he felt cautiously optimistic before the call and afterwards glad to move to the next step.

"It's sort of a combination of euphoria, relief, exhaustion because we did put a lot of work into it," he said.

The school had considered a move from the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics to the NCAA for several years. After Brad Soderberg was hired as basketball coach, Evans appointed a committee to draft a proposal to make the move. In February, Lindenwood's board approved the school's application, which was accepted by the NCAA.

"Lindenwood had become very strong in NAIA to the point where we were a better fit for NCAA," Evans said. "We think that brings our sports program up to the same place as our academic achievements and quality."

Evans said he thinks the change will raise the profile of the university.

"The public sees the NCAA as the standard for intercollegiate athletics," he said. "They don't see the NAIA challenging and as glamorous."



roy sykes photo - Lindenwood University President James D. Evans learns Monday evening that the school was accepted into the NCAA.

The school's acceptance as a candidate for the NCAA marks the beginning of a four-year path toward active membership and many changes for Lindenwood faculty, coaches and athletes.

Lindenwood will remain a part of the NAIA and the Heart of America Athletic Conference for two years as the school begins to implement rules associated with the NCAA. The university will be evaluated on how well it complies with Division II standards in June after school officials submit an annual report.

Lindenwood would then be a provisional member of NCAA in the 2012-13 school year and could be accepted as an active member during the 2013-14 school year.

The school has begun making changes to bring the athletic program into compliance with NCAA rules. Lindenwood hired a compliance director and assistant compliance director who will start training coaches on the NCAA's rules for recruitment.

"We're going to have to educate ourselves," Creer said. "They want to make sure by the time you've got full membership you're doing things the right way."

Several coaches who once worked for Lindenwood's admissions office have had to find other positions within the school. Under NCAA rules, coaches are unable to work for admissions offices under the theory they might influence financial awards for students, Evans said.

Assistant baseball coach Tim Canavan took a new job as director of student life sports, which includes the 20 sports that will not move to the NCAA. Creer will remain athletic director of the 26 sports that will move to the NCAA.

The rule also caused Joe Parisi, dean of day admissions, to resign as head wrestling coach.

"I strongly encouraged him to remain dean of day admissions," Evans said. "He agreed that admissions was probably his primary responsibility at Lindenwood because he's done such a great job."

Another major change will be the elimination of many junior varsity sports after the 2010-11 school year. NCAA rules mandate that universities award athletic scholarships - something Lindenwood University has not traditionally done. Creer said there would be no way to fill a varsity and a JV team in one sport with excellent players with a limited amount of scholarship money. All NCAA JV sports programs likely will be eliminated, said Chandra Jackson, associate athletics director.

"It's going to be a significant number of students," Creer said. "What we're hoping is we'll increase the number of students recruited to student life sports."

For example, the school is considering adding women's gymnastics and men and women's rugby to the line up of 46 varsity sports programs.

As soon as the call came in from the NCAA, Lindenwood sent off an application to join the Mid-America Intercollegiate Athletics Association conference.

Creer said he feels as if it's the strongest Division II conference in the country. He said he expects to learn whether Lindenwood has been accepted in the next two to three months. Creer said the school hasn't considered other options yet.

"With the level our football program is at, that's the conference where we need to be," he said.