

The Conversation



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SLAM DUNK ERNEST
and other great fantasy games



IMM and

MYLES BRAND

by Eric Furman

IMM: Do you consider yourself a big sports fan?

MB: I am definitely a big sports fan, and a big sports advocate. I monitor things closely, and that's always been true—from the time I played sports in high school through college and now. I'm not a sports nut, but I am a sports fan.

IMM: So you're not poring over box scores every day?

MB: Well, I wouldn't quite say that I'm not. I do read the box scores, and I do follow particular teams—especially college sports. And I've always been more attracted to college sports. I think there's an inherent purity of the game—despite all the business aspects—that persists, and I find that very attractive.

IMM: When you were being considered for this position, and you were going through the interview process, did anyone grill you on your sports background—or lack thereof?

MB: When the NCAA decided they wanted to change direction by hiring a new president, they looked for someone who, no doubt, had had an administrative role at a university with a major sports program. There was no question about

whether I was a star athlete or anything. But they obviously wanted to know about how much I knew about intercollegiate athletics from an administrative point of view.

IMM: So if Oregon and Ohio State are playing in the first game of the Final Four, and IU vs. Arizona is the second game, who are you rooting for?

MB: I'm rooting for all four.

IMM: Very diplomatic.

MB: No, but it's true. One of the things that has been true of the NCAA leadership is that you have to take a neutral position. And I want you to understand that, with respect to the teams and schools I know best, I am not neutral. I root for the Hoosiers. I root for Arizona. I root for the Ducks at Oregon. And when they play each other, it's the best thing, because I can root for both sides.

IMM: You've got a Ph.D., you've taught or been the head of philosophy departments at Pittsburgh, UIC and Arizona. How much do you use your philosophy background in your current work?

MB: Philosophy is really a habit of mind. It's a way of thinking critically and strategically about major issues. I can assure you, that's very helpful in my present position.

IMM: I know that one of your big issues is the disconnect between academics and athletics on a college campus. How do you view the Vanderbilt decision to incorporate the athletic department into the campus activities department?

MB: It was a progressive decision. I think it's been misinterpreted widely by the press and the public. What Gordon Gee did as president of Vanderbilt was assign the athletic director position to someone already in his administration—the vice president of student affairs. It's not that the position disappeared. The image that he did away with the entire athletic department is wrong. He reorganized it within the university, but there's still an

The bully pulpit

The just penalty

The Oregon Duck

The business of college sports

The Native American mascot issue

The emerging sport of...bowling?

athletic department, and there's still someone who has accountability for it. What he did right—and it's a great model for others—is that he integrated intercollegiate athletics better into the university as a whole. Now, he's not the first to do that, and he is certainly not unique, but I think President Gee made that shift to show that intercollegiate athletics is part—part—of the university, however you organize it. And that's something we should look very seriously at.

IMM: Would you like to see more of this in the future?

MB: That actually is a trend going on. I think athletic directors, who I've grown to know and respect very much, nationally are being more integrated into the university. For example, a good number of athletic directors in Division I now sit on the president's cabinet. Obviously, we did away with special dormitories for student-athletes a decade ago. We are moving more and more towards an integrated model. A good example would be Penn State. Another good example would be Notre Dame. These are schools that have done a superb job without a lot of fanfare over the years.

IMM: Does a school like Cincinnati—which gets a lot of bad publicity for its poor academic performance—really get under your skin?

MB: Cincinnati's president, Nancy Zympher, made a hard decision. It wasn't necessarily the most popular decision, but I'm sure that the board—which fully backs her—is cognizant of the fact that we'd better make sure that our student-athletes have every opportunity to receive an education.

IMM: Take an athlete like Maurice Clarett. Do you feel any systemic responsibility for an athlete who sort of falls through the cracks?

MB: That's an unfortunate and sad case. I think the Ohio State coaches and athletic department did all that they could for Maurice. But there is a level of personal responsibility that a student-athlete and his family have to take, and we've got to make sure that we give room to make those personal decisions—help them as much as we can. Unfortunately, some of the decisions he made were not in his own best interests.

IMM: Let's stay with Ohio State for a second. Do you look more leniently on a school

“When you trust people, and allow them to take accountability for their own actions, they do better.”

that takes disciplinary action on itself—as OSU's basketball program did by banning itself from postseason play last year?

MB: It's critically important for me not to comment on any particular case. We live in a very litigious society, and that includes dealing with major infractions cases with coaches. But we are seeing a national trend in which institutions and their presidents are taking more responsibility for problems that arise and are setting down punishments which are often accepted by our enforcement staff because they are realistic assessments of the problems.

IMM: And you're happy to see that?

MB: I think individual responsibility by institutions is the only thing that's going to make intercollegiate athletics work. No membership organization can do it without direct involvement by the members.

IMM: It used to be that, no matter what the circumstances, if you violated a rule, you got whatever penalty was predetermined. Since you've been president, however, I get the impression that the rules committee has been viewing things and handing down punishments on a more case-by-case basis.

MB: That's absolutely right, and it is a good observation. And it is a change I instituted. I've asked our staff to be much more conscious of the student-athletes involved—to give them the benefit of the doubt, particularly if they inadvertently break a rule or our rules aren't that clear—and sometimes they're not. Major infractions—primary infractions—are a whole other story. While we're going to be more friendly to the student-athlete when there's an inadvertent infraction, when there's a major violation, we're going to be tough as nails. I've increased by almost

100 percent our investigatory staff, and we're hiring superb people. For example, not long ago we hired a person who for 15 years headed internal affairs for the Indianapolis police force.

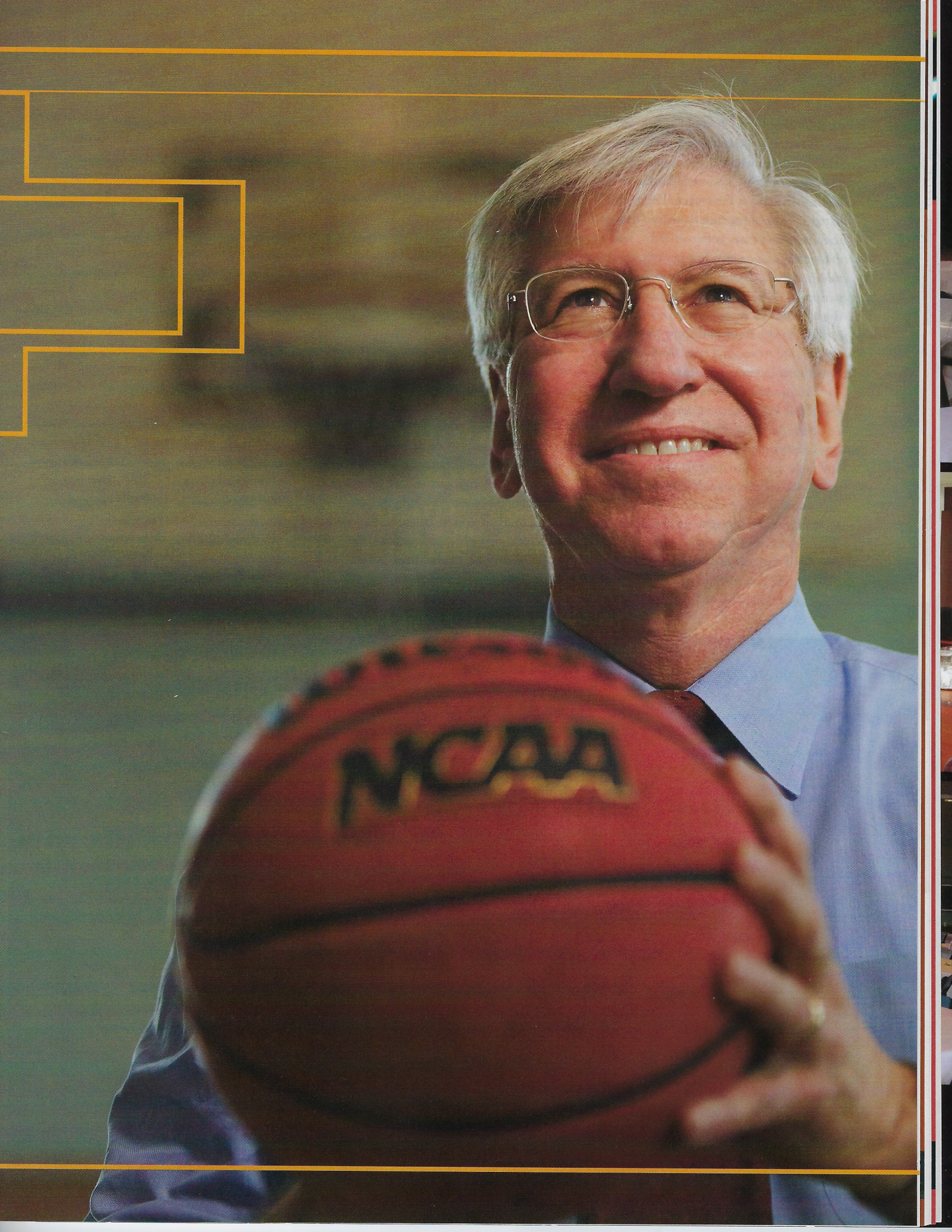
IMM: Some people would think that sort of environment—where you're not setting a rule and following it to the letter of the law—would engender a lax attitude and more undesirable behavior by the rule-benders. But that doesn't seem to be the case. It seems like the NCAA is polishing its reputation every year.

MB: When you trust people, and allow them to take accountability for their own actions, they do better. And student-athletes, particularly, are people of values who play with rules, and the vast, vast majority want to do the right thing. And sometimes our rules got in the way of that. So, we want to make sure that the student-athlete is not unnecessarily punished by the complex of rules that our members make. And let me add something here that's very important: The rules and the rulebook come from our members—not from myself or the staff in Indianapolis. People sometimes complain—and I, myself, too—about the size of the rulebook. But the members pass these rules in order to make sure that there's a level playing field. They put that burden on themselves.

IMM: Who actually writes the rules?

MB: There are committees, and we have a legislative process with some similarity to the federal and state process. And it becomes a rule insofar as people vote on it. We are the staff, as opposed to the rule-makers.

IMM: Can we talk BCS? Do you like the current system? Do you wish there was a playoff? **>>>**



MB: My personal point of view—and I'm not speaking for the NCAA right now—is that things are working very well. This past year was one of the most exciting in college football that I can remember. The BCS got it right. Now, some luck was involved, and they haven't always gotten it right. But we did have a One-versus-Two playoff, which is rare, and it was a great game, and there were so many great games. You know, frankly, I like the bowl system, including the secondary and tertiary bowls. As a university president in Oregon, for example, I went to the Poulan/Weed Eater Independence Bowl—twice. And that was great fun. And if there was a playoff, that bowl would become less important or, probably, wouldn't even exist. This system gives more opportunity for more students and more schools to participate in postseason games. If we move towards a playoff—and we won't until the FOX contract ends—it'll be a small playoff. There's great feeling among the university presidents of most of these institutions that they do not want to emulate the NFL playoff; they want to make sure that the

regular season remains primary.

IMM: If you could watch any NCAA sport for the next three hours, which would it be?

MB: I'm a big basketball fan, actually. I like all sports—lacrosse, women's volleyball, football—but I'm particularly attracted to basketball. Always have been.

IMM: How about bowling? It's a recent NCAA-sanctioned championship sport. How does that happen?

MB: We had great interest in it—mostly among urban schools, which tend to have very diverse student populations. There aren't very many women's sports that are attractive to the urban women's population. Bowling is one of them. And it's growing by leaps and bounds. So we started with a club sport, and we got so many schools who said they want to participate. We then call it an emerging sport, which is an experimental period. Then we have championships, which we do now for bowling.

IMM: Are there any other growth sports out there?

MB: Badminton, equestrian—which has really sprung from schools out West. Principally, they are sports for women, and by our labeling them “emerging sports,” it helps them develop and provides room for growth.

IMM: Let's talk NBA age restriction. I know that's not part of your purview, but I'm sure you have an opinion on it.

MB: Well, the NCAA—and I personally—were not involved in any way in the discussions between the NBA and the players union in setting those age restrictions—which is as it should be. My own personal view is that I would like to see students remain in school as long as possible. The NFL has a rule in which you have to be out of high school for three years before entering their draft. And by then, the few who will be able to go to the NFL have been identified, and the vast majority of others who don't have that opportunity have gained enough classroom experience to remain eligible and likely to graduate.

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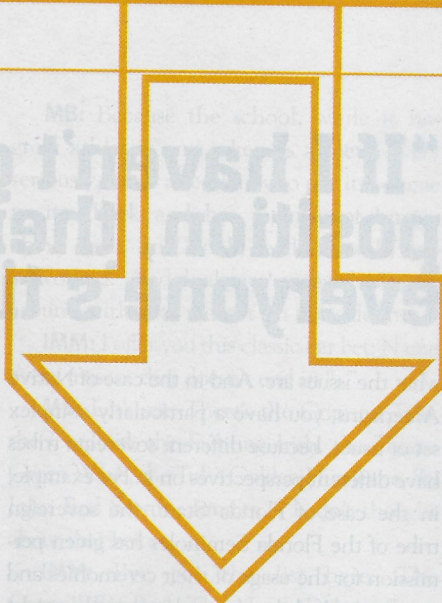
And the graduation rate in college football is very good. Men's basketball and, unfortunately, women's basketball, isn't as high because for some reason some of the students believe that they're going to go early to the NBA. Frankly, very, very few do—less than 1 percent of those playing actually get the chance to go to the NBA. So many think that they will that they're not prepared to stay in school the length of time necessary to make good progress toward a degree.

IMM: Do you think it's the NCAA's responsibility to let those athletes know that, hey, the chance of you making the NBA is slim to none?

MB: We need to get the facts out to student-athletes, most especially to those in high school and to their parents. Sometimes a student-athlete who's in the ninth or 10th grade believes that he has that wherewithal to become a professional. And a handful do. But the vast majority don't. The numbers are telling: There are 500,000 young men playing high school basketball right now. One percent of those—5,000—play Division I basketball. One percent of those will ever get a tryout for the NBA—that's 50. Of those 50, maybe a dozen or 18 will actually make it. So you've got less than 1 percent of 1 percent of 500,000. The chance of getting hit by lightning is much larger than that. Now, what does that say? Don't give up your dream. If you think you can be a professional basketball player, you should pursue it. But have a great Plan B. And that Plan B should be to, in high school, prepare to get a great college education, and in college, prepare for getting a degree. Because, almost certainly, everyone will do better with a degree, and have a set of opportunities they wouldn't without a degree.

IMM: Do you think the NBA's age restriction is counterproductive to your mission? Because for an athlete to go to school for a year seems to put the emphasis on the "college experience" but not the "college degree."

MB: I don't know what's going to happen with this new rule—you have to be 19, or one year out of high school, before entering the draft. My intuition tells me it's not going to change things very much. We'll still have the problem of very talented young athletes not preparing to get



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an education.

IMM: Can you give me your definition of *amateurism*?

MB: "No pay for play."

IMM: It's that simple?

MB: That's the line in the sand. We don't pay student-athletes to play. The word "student" there is the critical word. I didn't say athlete-student; I said student-athlete. Because they are embedded in the university, and critically so. It is part of their educational experience to participate in collegiate athletics. Some—very few—are doing it for vocational reasons, but the vast majority are not. There are 360,000 student-athletes who play at any one time in intercollegiate athletics, and almost all of them are going pro in something other than sports.

IMM: Right out of the commercial, huh?

MB: You may have heard that before.

IMM: Is your definition of *amateurism* different than, say, the Olympic definition? I know those athletes are able to make money from sponsorships and what-not.

MB: I don't like to use the words "amateurism" because it's both a buzzword and it's confusing. It's important to note that the word "amateur" is a carryover from the English usage in the 19th century—a time in which the leisure class had opportunities to play sports, and did so without compensation, and separated themselves from the working class who did play sports for money. So it is a class distinction that's inherited from England, and it's inappropriately applied to what goes on here. Because it's a buzzword, and because it has multiple definitions depending on who's using it, I don't use it. But there is a line in the sand, and that line in the sand is: Those who participate in intercollegiate athletics do so as students, and as students, we don't pay them for their participation any more than we pay students to take English classes or physics classes.

IMM: Do you believe it's your job to use your position as sort of a bully pulpit?

MB: I think that's the strength of the position—not that I'm the czar of college sports and I can unilaterally make decisions. I can't make the same decisions with the same kind of authority that the commissioner of a professional league does—a la David Stern or Paul Tagliabue. I don't have that kind of authority. Rather, my authority exists in helping to bring about consensus in membership doing the right thing. And the best tool I have is the bully pulpit—the persuasion of argument. And maybe that's where philosophy helps. I try to persuade people to what's right and how to get there. The opportunity to speak out on campus—and I visit a lot of campuses—or in larger venues, I take advantage of, because that's how we change college sports. It's a very different set of arrangements than you'll find in professional sports. Pro sports is a business. There's a commissioner that runs the business and attempts to make a profit for the owners. Here, intercollegiate athletics is embedded in the universities, and each university runs it as an educational program and comes together with common rules and common purposes. And it's my job—while using the bully pulpit—to help reinforce those purposes.

IMM: On an issue like American Indian mascots, where the board of directors voted to not hold NCAA championships on the grounds of institutions with controversial mascots, how much did >>>



“If I haven’t grown in this position, then I’ve wasted everyone’s time.”

you get your hands dirty in the process of that ruling?

MB: That issue is still on the table, and the membership has not dealt with all the appeals that have come through. But the presidents passed the rule—of which I am certainly in agreement—that basically says we need to treat everyone with respect. For whatever reason, there’s one group in our country—Native Americans—that we’ve not treated in the same way we’ve treated other ethnic minorities. Some of the things we would do—in terms of featuring Native Americans or those who imitate Native Americans in costume and symbols—we would never think of doing, say, with African-Americans, or our Catholic population, or our Jewish population. We would never think of having a rabbi run out on a court, or a priest. But yet it’s okay to have a spiritual leader run out and dance around. We have not yet learned how to appreciate Native American spiritual and cultural artifacts and ceremonies. Having said that, I don’t think the NCAA has the power to change that. We have a very limited authority, namely the games we run, which are postseason games. We have no authority over images and symbols on campuses—including nicknames. But when we’re in charge of running the game, I want to do it in a respectful way.

IMM: When you’re forming your opinion on an issue like that, how much time do you spend with, say, Native Americans and their leaders—trying to understand their viewpoint and their culture? Do you sit down with them to meetings, and then sit down with Florida State or University of Illinois reps?

MB: I spend a lot of time in meetings, and I spend more time reading. Before you take a position like that, you have to understand

what the issues are. And in the case of Native Americans, you have a particularly complex set of issues, because different sovereign tribes have different perspectives on it. For example, in the case of Florida State, the sovereign tribe of the Florida Seminoles has given permission for the usage of their ceremonies and names. And while we, as white people, might find it disrespectful, the fact of the matter is, the ownership that that tribe has of symbols and names is up to them, as far as how they want to use it. Native American culture, nationally, is itself a diverse thing, and one has to look at the details of that when trying to form an overall view.

IMM: So it’s sort of like the way you’d prefer to look at punishment for minor rules violations—you have to look at each situation and form each opinion separately?

MB: That’s a fair assessment. We have to be cautious about overgeneralizing. We have to pay particular attention to the details and the context. I think the media and the general fan public—and remember: I said I’m a fan—we pass over the context and the depth of details looking for a quick and easy answer. You know, for every complex problem, there is a simple answer...and it is: Wrong.

IMM: Title IX: Anything left to argue?

MB: I hope not. But we’re not there yet. There’s a mistaken belief that Title IX has unnecessarily contained the growth of men’s sports. I don’t believe that for a moment. Title IX has given half—well, more than half—of our student population the opportunity to participate in sports that weren’t there before 1972. You know, I have two great sports heroes in my life: One is Jackie Robinson—I grew up in Brooklyn watching him play; the second is Birch Bayh. Birch Bayh is the father of Title IX—our own senator. Look, I have two granddaughters. I believe strongly that participation in sports adds to the educational experience and the opportunity for success and accomplishment in life. Why would I want that opportunity

denied my granddaughters when young boys have every opportunity for those advantages? Title IX is one of the most important pieces of civil rights legislation passed in the second half of the 20th century. Is there work to be done yet? Yes, there is. Still, 60 percent of those who participate in sports in this country are men, not women. We haven’t provided the full range of opportunities for women. I say that at the same time I also want to increase and enhance the opportunities for men. We should never put them in conflict; we should be advocates for both.

IMM: When you first took over as president, you said, “My views are not cut in limestone”—

MB: Indiana limestone, I believe it was.

IMM: Yes. Excellent memory. And you further said you’d keep your mind open to revision and change. Are there any issues that you’ve flip-flopped your views on?

MB: No, I’m not a flip-flopper by a long shot. But I have gained more depth and knowledge in certain areas. If I haven’t grown in this position, then I’ve wasted everyone’s time. One of the areas I think I better understand now than when I came into the position is the financing of intercollegiate athletics—and how one assures, if possible, that financing is done within the context of higher education.

IMM: Have you had a revisionist’s role in the financing of college athletics?

MB: I think I better understand where we’re going right now. One question that always comes up is: Aren’t college sports a business? And the answer to that is: Yes and no. On the revenue-generating side, you try to increase the revenues—which mostly come from ticket sales and media rights contracts—as much as you can. You need a pool of money in order to accomplish your goals. But unlike professional sports, or unlike a corporation, the expenditure side is a not-for-profit activity. If college sports was just like pro sports, we’d only have one or two sports.

And we'd pay owners—either shareholders or private owners—profits. Instead, what we do is take all those revenues and redistribute them to help provide athletic participation opportunities for the maximum number of students, just like the university takes all its revenue and supports part of the institution—say, the philosophy department—which doesn't make its own way, but is an essential part of a comprehensive education.

IMM: That sounds like an issue that's near and dear to your heart.

MB: The rate of expenditure in intercollegiate athletics—Division I—has been approximately three times the rate of increase of expenditure in the general university. We do not have a sustainable business model. Our expenditure rate is increasing so much higher than the university as a whole that we're going to have to start—in many institutions—moving funds from the academic side to the athletic side. Or increase tuition. Both of those options are unpalatable. So, while I'm not talking about cost containment, nor am I trying to halt growth in collegiate athletics, we have to moderate the rate of growth.

IMM: If the NCAA was still headquartered in Kansas City, do you think you'd still be in this post?

MB: Sure. My being at Indiana had no role whatsoever. It was a national search.

IMM: How much of your day do you devote to Division III schools?

MB: It's hard to say, because Division III has just undergone serious academic reform over the last two years, and while it doesn't reach the media as much as Division I, the change in posture and the role of the presidents in controlling academic reform in Division III is exemplary. It has taken a lot of my time, and I've been pleased to be able to devote it to them. They have, like, 450 member schools.

IMM: What's your favorite mascot?

MB: I like Donald at Oregon. You know, it isn't just the Fighting Ducks—it's actually Donald. I remember when my wife and I came to the University of Oregon and drove in to take the presidency, there was a big billboard. And there was Donald, welcoming me and everybody else to campus. It took me a while to appreciate, but Donald was a good image for that school.

IMM: Why?

MB: Because the school, while it has great athletics and takes its athletics very seriously, it has a tendency to put its tongue in its cheek and has a sense of humor about itself. So Donald really fit well, and it worked. And I always enjoyed playing around with that mascot on the sidelines.

IMM: I offer you this classic bar bet: Name every mascot that doesn't end in "s."

MB: Let's see. There's the Crimson Tide, the Cardinal, the Fighting Irish, the Tulane Green Wave, the Tulsa Golden Hurricane, St. John Red Storm...hmmm. I hadn't thought about that before.

IMM: I've got the list here. The Cornell Big Red. The North Dakota State Bison. The Harvard Crimson. The Navy Midshipmen. The UMass Minutemen. The Wolfpack—N.C. State and Nevada—

MB: Is it Banana Slug or Banana Slugs?

IMM: I think it's Banana Slugs.

MB: Oh, okay.

IMM: Tell me what you miss about Bloomington?

MB: Probably what I miss the most is having the students right there on campus, all around me. The president's house, as you might know, is right in the middle of campus. That was a treat. When the classes would change, you'd have literally tens of thousands of students walking across the president's area. My dog, which was a golden retriever, would run out of the house with a Frisbee in his mouth, and the students would throw it for him...I mean, it was just...living in the middle of a student environment is incredibly special. I now live downtown here, and Indianapolis—which I enjoy very much and now think is one of the great American cities—is not the same as living in the middle of a college campus.

IMM: I think that one of the best things you've done while here in Indy is put up that "One Shining Moment" kiosk in the Hall of Champions.

MB: I love that, too. I didn't have anything to do with it, but...I think that this Final Four that we're going to host here is going to be really, really special. I know that the city is really rallying around it—tickets were sold out so long ago. The business community is erecting giant shoes and hanging huge backboards on buildings to support the event. I just think the atmosphere in Indianapolis in March is going to be...well, previously unmet. **I**