

**Keynote Comments  
CIAA Basketball Tournament  
Tuesday, February 26, 2008**

- As president of the NCAA and as a college basketball fan, I am honored to be here today to help tip off the 63rd annual CIAA men's basketball tournament.
  
- Let me be clear. I'm a basketball fan. And the NCAA has a tournament starting next month that draws some attention.

- But if there is one thing I've come to understand about college basketball, it's this:
- If you don't know about the CIAA basketball tournament, you don't know the first thing about college basketball!
- This is one of the great athletics events in the country each year. Over the next few days, more than 110,000 fans will attend the games and millions more will watch on ESPN.

- And it's all about you student-athletes!
- When I became president of the NCAA five years ago, I told the membership and the public that I am an advocate for intercollegiate athletics. I am an advocate because I believe there is educational value in college sports.
- This isn't the entertainment arm of higher education. This isn't about keeping the alumni happy. It isn't about creating a platform for fund raising.

- It is about you, the student-athletes. It's about why you came to college. And for those of you participating in this tournament, it is about why you came to the 10 campuses that make up the Central Intercollegiate Athletic Association.
- You came here to get an education, to prepare yourselves for becoming good family members, productive citizens and strong leaders. And I believe that college sports contributes immeasurably to your meeting these goals.

- Who here doesn't believe that you learn something important about teamwork from playing basketball. Who here didn't learn about goal-setting and working hard to meet your goals? Who here hasn't learned about self-sacrifice for the team, self-discipline and self-awareness? Who of you are not committed to a pursuit of excellence? Not one.
- Those are all learned skills that we expect in productive citizens, strong leaders and good family members. Those are the skills you learn beyond the lecture hall, or the library or the laboratory. And

participating in college sports is one of the best ways to learn them.

- So I'm an advocate for intercollegiate athletics.
- I also believe in the primacy of academics in the lives of student-athletes. Job One for each of you is getting a sound education, and intercollegiate athletics must be an enhancement to that education – not a hindrance.

- For the last several years, the NCAA has been leading an academic movement that has put a new emphasis on educational performance and achievement. And Division II has been right at the center of that initiative.
- Indeed, the CIAA was in a leadership role in academic reform through one of your – Dr. Bernard (Burr-NARD) Franklin, former president of Virginia Union University, as well as St. Augustine’s and Livingstone Colleges, was chair of the Division II Presidents Council before joining the NCAA staff as

senior vice-president. Dr. Franklin is here today and I want to recognize him.

- Over the last two decades, Division II has steadily increased the academic requirements for student-athletes to be eligible to compete in intercollegiate athletics. And student-athletes have met the new standards.
- Division II has also developed new measurements to determine how well student-athletes are performing in the classroom. This new metric, like its



counterpart in Division I, tracks the success of transfer students. In addition, it also tracks all recruited student-athletes and not just those on financial aid. Both of these are improvements over the way the federal government counts graduation.

- Today, student-athletes in Division II, when measured by the new metric – the Academic Success Rate – are graduating at a rate of 69 percent – eight percentage points higher than the general student body in Division II. This is a significant and positive difference.

- Even when you look at the less accurate federal rate, student-athletes are doing better. The simple fact is that participation in athletics helps focus student-athletes on their academic performance.
- The student-athletes sitting before me today are the beneficiaries of these academic enhancement efforts. Every year, you are getting better and better.
- [Theme change]

- You also have the benefit of participating in the one of the premier conference sporting events in the country.
- The CIAA event is among the top three of all conference tournaments in the country. And there is nothing bigger in Division II.
- And frankly, what Commissioner Leon Kerry has done in terms of developing television coverage of this tournament is the envy of many other

conferences in the nation. Congratulations to you Commissioner Kerry, your leadership has been extraordinary.

- You all have the good fortune to be a part of this great conference. The CIAA is nearing its centennial, and it is the oldest conference of Historically Black Colleges and Universities in the nation.
- There is no question that sports has helped open the doors of higher education in America to people of

color and to women. Since Jackie Robinson broke the color barrier in professional baseball and Billie Jean King showed the world that women were interested and talented athletes, sports has played an important role in the lives of minorities and women. Intercollegiate athletics are more integrated and more gender sensitive than most other parts of the campus. That is something of which to be proud.

- But HBCUs were creating opportunity for people of color of both genders long before the civil rights

initiatives of the last 60 years took hold. The 10 colleges and universities that make up the CIAA have rich histories of providing opportunity, of opening doors, of helping secure futures for individuals that when this conference was founded in 1912 were still being left behind.

- Most of the CIAA member institutions date back to the 1860s and 70s. They were founded at a time when people of color were emerging from more than two centuries of slavery and were hungry for an education. Thank goodness there were courageous

and far-sighted leaders who understood the importance of an education and helped create what has become a group of institutions that are mission-driven and value-guided.

- The student-athletes here tonight are the beneficiaries of a heritage that must not be lost in the challenges facing higher education in America. The HBCUs in America are not the vestiges of a time past when no one else was looking to the educational needs of young men and women of color. True, they have that place in history, and

nothing can detract from that. But that is not their only role today.

- Today, HBCUs in America continue to be the hope for all those who prize education and desire a multi-cultural experience as part of that education. And the institutions in the CIAA are in the forefront of that important initiative. Despite this important mission, HBCUs are significantly under-resourced. These are higher education institutions that struggle for every dollar in an environment where dollars for education – especially public dollars – are diminishing. Athletic



departments are in the middle of this money squeeze. The answer rest with government, especially state government. These are institutions that because of their relationships with the communities where they reside and the contributions they make to those communities should rightly expect enhanced public support.

- All this – the sense of self-value, the sense of community – makes the CIAA and its member schools the perfect conference for Division II. Division II has made enormous strides in the last two

to three years recognizing the role played by the 291 colleges and universities that have a home in the division.

- And, of course, this initiative is all about you, the student-athletes, as well, because you chose Division II. The “I Chose Division II” is a direct result of the pride that student-athletes in the Division have in their campus. And to help take that theme home, Division II has been engaged in a community outreach effort that will reinforce the connection through intercollegiate athletics between the

colleges and universities and the communities in which they reside.

- Frankly, there has never been a better time to be in Division II, to be in the CIAA, or to be on your campuses. This will be a memorable weekend for every one of you.
- For the seniors, it will be the last CIAA tournament, so make it special. For the freshmen, it is your first – and what a great experience it's going to be. For all of you, it is a wonderful opportunity to showcase

your skills, your team, and your school. You are part of an experience that is unique to America. No other country links athletics with higher education the way we do here, and it's all because of you.

- Enjoy the week. Play hard. Play with integrity. And good luck to each and every one of you.