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## Brand: 'A friend in the justice world'

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By Richard Lapchick  
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America lost a champion for student-athletes, for Title IX and for civil rights in sports with the passing of Dr. Myles Brand on Wednesday. No one did more to make college sport live up to its ideals. We knew he'd been fighting deadly pancreatic cancer since January, but no one was ready when the announcement of his passing came.

Like many others, I lost a hero and a friend.

Brand was a philosopher who will be remembered for his eloquence and for his fight for justice in sport, especially regarding graduation rates, gender equity, and diversity and inclusion.

I had been involved in efforts to improve graduation rates for student-athletes beginning in the late 1980s, but there was little movement until Brand, who became NCAA president in 2002, marshaled the adoption of the Academic Progress Rate, which created penalties in the form of lost scholarships for poor academic performance as well as positive incentives for good results. Until it became a reality, a school could go for decades without graduating a single student-athlete and not be subject to NCAA penalties.

Brand made it happen. As a former university president at Oregon and Indiana, he could appeal to the increasingly influential college presidents. By reaching out to them, he earned the trust of many athletic directors.

He needed both.

While graduation rates began to improve, I continued to point out the huge differences between the rates of African-American and white students. That gap troubled Brand a great deal. A few years ago, he urged me to do a new study on the graduation rates of African-American student-athletes. We found that they were improving significantly.

When Brand took the NCAA reins, I was on the board of the Black Coaches Association (now the Black Coaches and Administrators). A few months into his term, he came to the BCA executive board meeting. Prior to his arrival, the board had prepared responses to what it assumed would be NCAA resistance to the BCA's agenda. But by the time he left that meeting, we knew we had an ally. Brand had spoken in accord with the entire agenda.

He created the Office of Diversity and Inclusion and put Charlotte Westerhaus in charge of it. He got the NCAA to invest resources in programs to promote opportunities for people of color and for women as coaches and administrators.

I believe he was as frustrated as all BCA members were by the lack of progress for African-Americans as head coaches, especially in -- but hardly limited to -- football. BCA executive director Floyd Keith, Brand and I all testified before Congress in 2008 about the issue. Keith and I urged the adoption of what we call the "Eddie Robinson Rule," which is similar to the NFL's Rooney Rule in its intent to get minorities into the interview process for major head-coaching jobs. The legendary Robinson, the winningest coach of all time when he retired from Grambling State, was never asked even to interview for a Division I job during his 57 years in the game.



Myles Brand's integrity and background brought the NCAA into closer alignment with university presidents.

Brand thought the NCAA membership would not go along with the Eddie Robinson Rule. It was our only area of real disagreement, but I never doubted that he wanted the same results. I had that much faith in his integrity.

Last year, he said, "I am frustrated that in the midst of progress in so many other areas, higher education and intercollegiate athletics continue to exercise a hiring practice in college football that is embarrassing and simply would not be tolerated elsewhere on campus."

I met with Brand and Bernard Franklin (the NCAA executive vice president for membership and student-athlete affairs) in 2004 while the NCAA debated what to do about the persistently controversial issue of the use of Native American names and mascots for sports teams. I shared my view that they should be banned outright as long as they were offensive to some Native Americans. In February 2005, the NCAA banned the use of American Indian mascots by sports teams during its postseason tournaments only, but it is a big start. Brand and Franklin never backed down in the face of stiff resistance from members who fought the change. It was a critically important public stand for the head of the NCAA to make.

When conservative public forces outside of sport began to join resisters on the inside to try to weaken the effects of Title IX in 2005, Brand jumped right into the fray. This time, he even took on the president of the United States. The Department of Education in the Bush administration wanted to use an online survey of female students' interest to determine whether certain sports should be adopted, kept or dropped. Brand stood up for justice again and told the schools not to use the surveys.

He beat Bush, and Title IX stayed strong.

Beyond the public figure was the adoring husband of Peg Brand, an Indiana University professor of philosophy and gender studies. In the summer of 2008, when I asked him if he was going to

get much vacation time, he said, "Probably not, but I will really enjoy co-teaching a course with Peg. I can't imagine anything more enjoyable."

I am the president of the National Consortium for Academics and Sport (NCAS). In 2006, we gave our Giant Steps Award to Brand because we felt he had taken on the hard issues facing the NCAA: poor graduation rates, the gap in those rates between African-American and white student-athletes, the failure of some institutions of higher education to comply with Title IX issues, and the fact that our college programs were not giving adequate opportunities for people of color to gain key decision-making positions in college sport.

I was not surprised when Brand accepted the award by acknowledging two of his heroes: Jackie Robinson and Birch Bayh. Robinson, of course, broke the color barrier in Major League Baseball, and Bayh was a champion of Title IX of the Education Amendments Act of 1972, which gave women equal opportunities in sports and academics in public education. Allyce Najimy, a friend and former colleague of mine, e-mailed me last night that "I know you lost a friend in the justice world today."

I was honored to be included in that thought with Dr. Myles Brand. There is no doubt that he was one of my heroes. He fought and won the good fights to right injustices.

I was blessed to call him a friend.

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