

Myles Brand honored posthumously as visionary for inclusion

Former NCAA president helped members see power of college sports to inspire change

August 15, 2018 Amy Wimmer Schwarb

The athletics director at East Stroudsburg remembers the moment he realized college sports could be about more than winning games and graduating student-athletes.



Former NCAA President Myles Brand addresses representatives from member schools at the 2008 NCAA Convention in Nashville, Tennessee. Brand died Sept. 16, 2009, after battling pancreatic cancer. TREVOR BROWN JR. / NCAA PHOTOS

He was at an NCAA Convention — perhaps in 2005 or 2006 — and Myles Brand, then president of the NCAA, was delivering remarks at the opening business session. And along with academic accountability and managing the growth of college sports, Brand had a message that was new to many of the attendees: College sports can be a cultural game changer in the United States, paving the way for a society that embraces diversity and includes various voices in its leadership.

“I had never thought of sports as having that role. He definitely helped me broaden my view,” said Gary Gray, who was athletics director at Montana State Billings when he heard Brand’s address. “He tied social justice into one of our purposes, one of our goals, one of the things we want to strive for in sports. I’ve tried to put that into practice and learn from what he said.”

Brand, who led the NCAA as president from 2002 until his death from pancreatic cancer in 2009, is being recognized posthumously by the NCAA Minority Opportunities and Interests Committee as a Champion of Diversity and Inclusion. This honor recognizes those who work to support ethnic minorities and other underrepresented populations in college athletics.

The individuals honored as Champions of Diversity and Inclusion display a commitment to advocating and advancing others that goes beyond their profession.

In the program's three-year history, Brand is the first individual to be recognized posthumously. His focus while leading the Association laid the groundwork for many NCAA national office initiatives. Brand established the NCAA's first office of diversity and inclusion, and in 2005, the NCAA Executive Committee — then the Association's highest governing body — adopted championships restrictions for colleges and universities that use Native American mascots and imagery deemed hostile or abusive.

Brand also championed diversifying the head coaching ranks in college football. He supported national office programs and coaching academies working to increase the pool of qualified minority candidates.

“The NCAA is a direct reflection of what goes on in our universities, restricted of course by its purview to intercollegiate athletics, but nonetheless reflective of the values of what is important in higher education,” Brand said of athletics' role in social change. “To the extent that fairness and tolerance of all people is part of the value system of higher education, so, too, should the NCAA practice those values — and voice its position when necessary.”

Born in Brooklyn, New York, Brand earned his bachelor's degree from Rensselaer and his doctorate from Rochester (New York). He served as university president at Oregon for five years and in the same role at Indiana for eight before accepting his NCAA role in 2002.

Brand's widow, Peg Brand Weiser, associate professor emerita of philosophy and women's studies at Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis, credits her late husband's career path in leading him to think broadly about the role of college sports.

“His experience enabled him to understand the responsibility of the leadership role,” Weiser said. “What precipitated a lot of his thinking was simply the fact of realizing, as a university president, that the power lay there.”

In the 2017-18 academic year, Weiser taught as adjunct faculty at Arizona, where she designed a course called Philosophy of Sport, which included many of Brand's writings and led Weiser to think more deeply about his contributions to college sports.

“Yes, sports is entertainment,” she said. “But in the long run, it's about educating student-athletes, and the university has to take a moral leadership role.”

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