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First Team All-American, 1966, 1967

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1997 NCAA Division III Defensive Player of the Year and Centennial Conference Player of the Year

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Assistant Vice Provost
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A NOTE OF THANKS

The Committee wishes to express its deep appreciation to President Ron Daniels for seeking its input on a decision that could well represent the single greatest change in Johns Hopkins men's lacrosse in more than a century. Each of us on this committee appreciates the enormous responsibility we have in executing our charge. To a person, our goal has been to offer a recommendation that would help maintain the tradition of excellence that has long distinguished the Johns Hopkins men's lacrosse program and maximize its potential for continued success. We have deliberated the complex issues involved and provide a recommendation with the future of the lacrosse program in mind—not one year or even five years from now but for decades to come. Each of us is passionate about Johns Hopkins lacrosse and, more fundamentally, The Johns Hopkins University. We also express our gratitude and respect to the Johns Hopkins Athletics Department and to the leadership of the men's lacrosse team. In particular, we thank Director of Athletics Tom Calder and Head Coach Dave Pietramala for their active involvement and assistance in this process.

CHARGE

On March 8, 2013, President Ron Daniels appointed and charged a Blue Ribbon Committee to Study Conference Alignment to recommend to him whether the Johns Hopkins University men's lacrosse team should seek conference affiliation. In a message to the Johns Hopkins community, President Daniels described aspects of the changing landscape of collegiate men's lacrosse. Conference realignments might affect the ability of traditional rival teams to continue scheduling games against Johns Hopkins. A growing number of leagues means more automatic qualifiers and fewer at-large berths for NCAA tournament play. These and other realities of intercollegiate competition, said President Daniels, compel Johns Hopkins to examine whether it should consider affiliating with a conference at this time.

The Committee was asked to include in its analysis consideration of the following questions:

- What would be the implications of conference alignment for the Johns Hopkins student-athlete experience?
- How would such a move affect competitiveness, tournament qualification and scheduling, including our ability to preserve match-ups against traditional rivals?
- How would such a decision affect our ability to recruit future student-athletes?
- What would be the impact of such a move on our relationship with ESPNU, as well as other potential broadcast arrangements?
- What would be the financial implications of membership in a conference?
- Could the decision have any implications for our women's lacrosse program?
- What would be the effect of conference affiliation on the academic mission of the university?
- Are there any other implications of this decision for our university, including our student athletes, our alumni, our fans and our athletic program?

President Daniels asked the Committee to address the question of conference alignment "with the care, deliberation and openness that is characteristic of our university and that befits a decision of such significance for our athletic programs."

METHODOLOGY

On March 8, 2013, President Ron Daniels appointed a Blue Ribbon Committee to Study Conference Alignment for the men's lacrosse team. Shortly thereafter, President Daniels sent an email to the Johns Hopkins University announcing the Committee. This message was also distributed to the Johns Hopkins alumni community. On March 19, the Committee chairs sent a follow-up message to the JHU community, including alumni, soliciting feedback on the issue of conference alignment. That email message provided a link to a dedicated website where confidential feedback, suggestions and concerns could be submitted for review and consideration by the Committee. Additional reminders about the opportunity to provide feedback to the committee were included in JHUpdate, the monthly Johns Hopkins alumni email newsletter, and on The Hub, the web-based vehicle for online university communications at Johns Hopkins.

After an initial planning meeting held by the committee chairs, the entire Committee convened four times via teleconference and once in person for a half-day meeting on the Homewood campus. The Committee invited Tom Calder, director of athletics, and Dave Pietramala, men's lacrosse head coach to participate in several of the meetings in order to provide information, convey their perspective and answer questions that might arise.

In addition to collecting feedback from the Johns Hopkins community, the Committee gathered considerable information from external sources. This information included:

- Statistics on the competitiveness of every NCAA Division I men's lacrosse team from 2005 to 2012
- The distance between each institution with a NCAA Division I men's lacrosse team from JHU to better understand the impact travel might have on student athletes
- Input from the Faculty Athletic Representative (FAR) at other institutions regarding the academic impact of conference affiliation.

In addition, in order to understand more specifically the opportunities and challenges associated with conference alignment, the Committee collected publicly available information about several conferences and, in concert with Athletics staff, contacted a number of conferences to obtain more information about the terms of conference membership. With this information and our subsequent analysis, the Committee developed multiple conference profiles. Each profile comprised information including, but not limited to: alignment with the JHU academic mission; potential impact on the student-athlete experience (e.g. scheduling requirements and travel); budget impact on Johns Hopkins; JHU recruiting and alumni impact; conference-specific policies, procedures and rules; television network affiliations; importance of lacrosse in each conference; and conference stability. In addition, a profile was created for the implications of keeping the men's lacrosse team independent.

At the request of the Committee, Johns Hopkins Athletics staff contacted several men's lacrosse teams who have been traditional rivals of JHU to determine each team's willingness to schedule future games against Johns Hopkins regardless of whether the University decides to align with a conference or possible realignment for other teams. The Athletic Department also contacted an NCAA Division I representative to gather insights about potential playoff bracket expansion.

INFORMATION GATHERED

Feedback from the JHU Community. The Committee first acknowledges the outpouring of support and constructive feedback from the Johns Hopkins community in response to the emails from President Daniels and the committee chairs and through the dedicated Blue Ribbon Committee website. The Committee received more than 330 messages. Of the responses that expressed an explicit opinion concerning conference alignment, 65.4 percent were in support of joining a conference while 34.6 percent indicated a preference for maintaining Johns Hopkins's status as an independent. Many comments were received that, without explicitly endorsing conference alignment, suggested specific conferences to consider, engage, avoid at all costs or immediately join.

Most notable, however, were the numerous thoughtful suggestions from alumni, students, faculty, parents, staff and friends for issues to consider in weighing such a critically important decision for Johns Hopkins and its storied lacrosse program. We include below a few examples of these comments:

"JHU has always placed academics ahead of sports. That emphasis differentiates JHU and should not change. If conference membership will leave JHU's mission intact, then consider it. Otherwise uphold academic achievement."

"If affiliating with a conference will assist in recruiting while maintaining Hopkins' high academic standards, I am supportive of such an affiliation. Hopkins' excellence and commitment to tradition would be an asset to any conference."

"Whatever decision the committee [makes] it must protect the integrity of the lacrosse program and the academics and prestige of the University."

"Seek out where the toughest competition is or where they will be in the future and position ourselves in their company. To be the best, we must beat the best..."

"...Given the academic rigor at Hopkins, travel and competition that takes players away from campus for extended periods could be detrimental to their academic performance. Travel should be less than a day's bus ride...so students have time on the weekend to prepare for the coming week..."

"I have always liked JHU being an Independent in LAX, as the Notre Dame of football. I understand the issues now being faced. I would think joining a conference would make sense if Hopkins can get favorable terms as an Associate..."

"As a former lax player at JHU, I must admit that it is simply about winning... with character and impeccable ethics..."

"It seems inevitable that joining a league will be necessary with the increase in numbers of teams and numbers of automatic qualifiers from league championships....It seems to me that the key issues are how to maintain strength of schedule, television income, and still increase the likelihood of having a good shot at either an automatic qualification or at large bid to the playoffs....Please make it a smart choice that offers both strong competition within the league and the option for quality opponents outside the league. We want the team to continue its quality legacy...."

"A Division 3 school playing on a Division 1 stage is unique. The independence of the program to select who it plays is unique. Why not stay unique?"

"The key question is revenue and scheduling....So, I vote yes if it makes sense financially and we have sufficient schedule flexibility to play our long-time rivals."

"Regardless of whatever affiliation Hopkins decides on...Hopkins must continue to play the best Lacrosse teams in America (e.g. Navy, Maryland, Syracuse, Virginia, etc.)"

"...I'm very proud of Hopkins' tradition of independence. That said, I feel we must change with the times. If we don't affiliate with a conference, we could lose the traditional rivals that strengthen our schedule—a key ingredient in Hopkins' success over the years—and seriously weaken our recruiting prospects."

"Don't let money drive the process"

"Seek competitive balance and maintain cultural cohesion as much as possible..."

"...I would hope that all the Division 3 sports will be protected for we have excellent men and women's teams in many sports..."

"Do whatever is in the best interest of both the team and the university..."

Feedback from Faculty Athletics Representatives. The Committee received insightful and very helpful information from three Faculty Athletics Representatives (FARs) at other institutions. The Committee received feedback from one FAR and consulted FARs at two other institutions, both of which have recently experienced changes in conference alignment. The FARs were asked if alignment with a conference had posed any challenges or threats to their students' academic experience and whether the conferences had imposed any detrimental or intrusive rules or policies that interfered with the academic mission of their institutions. The answer to these questions was, emphatically, no. "Conference membership has never jeopardized the academics in any way," said one FAR. The faculty representative also indicated that academic standards at the FAR's institution and at fellow conference member schools are higher than NCAA academic standards.

One FAR consulted by the Committee is at an institution with an athletics profile analogous to Johns Hopkins. The institution participates mostly at the Division III level, but has some teams that compete in Division I sports. The FAR was asked specifically about the institution's experience with joining a Division I conference and reported the conference experience has been "very good for [its] DI athletes." The FAR explained, "The consistency with the conference schedule helps to ensure that our students are not away during final or mid term exams, and also helps to control missed class in general (no mid-week games or extensive travel especially when the schools are having exams)." The FAR explained that prior to one of the Division I teams joining a conference, it regularly experienced a "scheduling nightmare." A FAR at a different institution corroborated this assertion, saying "Scheduling is a big deal and a big benefit of membership."

The faculty representative at the institution with a multidivisional athletics program made the following observation about one of its Division I teams, which recently aligned with a new conference:

"...although academically and divisionally...the [conference member] schools are not similar the goals are the same (all the schools have _____ as their number 1 sport, all are committed to providing the student athletes with the best academic as well as athletic experience, and all understand the importance of the academics and support reduced missed class time, etc.)."

Overall, the FAR feels the school's Division I conferences "work much better academically" than its Division III conferences.

Moreover, both FARs said being in a conference has been valuable to their institutions, citing cooperation within the conference as being a major benefit of membership. Faculty athletics representatives "feel very free to communicate" among each other, not just for issues at the conference level but also in dealing with the NCAA. "There is a network and an ability to learn a great deal on the conference level and within the NCAA overall," shared one FAR.

The faculty athletics representatives provided multiple examples of conferences that appear to be well managed with their priorities intact. These conferences were described as having good-to-outstanding member institutions and allowing faculty athletic representatives to participate in decision making regarding conference rules and regulations. Both FARs consulted by the Committee indicated conference membership has been a strongly positive experience for their institutions and their teams.

Conference Profiles. The Committee recognizes, as have many members of the Johns Hopkins community from whom we have heard, that deciding whether to align with a conference depends largely on the conference and what terms that would involve. To better inform such a decision, the Committee developed profiles for multiple conferences as well as for staying independent. These profiles helped to clarify several critical issues. Here we provide a summary of the key information gathered or inferred:

- Each of the conferences provides additional opportunities not available to an independent for recognition of student accomplishments on the field.
- The philosophy of most if not all conferences is to allow schedules that reflect the best interest of the conference and its individual teams. There seems to be legitimate opportunities for JHU to maintain its traditional rivals should it align with a conference that does not include such teams.
- Depending on the conference and schedule of play, there could be additional travel for the team, including one or two games annually that require air travel. However, the net impact on students would be minor in that games requiring air travel would likely replace current away games requiring lengthy commutes by bus.
- Additional air travel would likely require increasing the men's lacrosse budget by \$20,000 to \$30,000 annually.
- Alignment with the considered conferences would be unlikely to result in any revenue sharing with JHU in the near term.
- Alignment with the considered conferences would not require dues or any direct financial commitment from JHU.
- There are no indications that joining a conference would alter JHU's television contract with ESPN, which was recently renewed. ESPN is fully aware of the JHU's deliberations concerning conference alignment.
- Aside from NCAA policies and regulations that already govern JHU on-field conduct, JHU would not be subject to general off-field, non-competition policies.
- In most if not all of the considered conferences, JHU would have some say in conference business. This could range from participating in conference competition meetings and having input on game management rules to participating in modifications to conference by-laws specific to men's lacrosse.
- Certain of the conferences expressed an interest in the JHU women's lacrosse program joining their conference as well. However, the Committee understands the women's lacrosse team is proceeding with its scheduled transition from a conference affiliation to independent status. The program will see how the landscape in women's lacrosse evolves and leave all options open for the future.

ANALYSIS

With all of the information gathered, the Committee deliberated the advantages and disadvantages of conference alignment in order to inform a recommendation. The Committee went to great lengths to consider the impact its final recommendation might have on the University and the broader Johns Hopkins community. While each of us is a loyal supporter of Johns Hopkins lacrosse, never did we place the interests of the men's lacrosse program before that of the University. First and foremost, the Committee sought to maintain the academic integrity of the Johns Hopkins University and to protect the well-being of our student-athletes. The Committee never considered potential gains in revenue or profit from conference alignment as a deciding factor in its deliberations. The Committee did, however, wish to ensure the men's lacrosse team could participate annually in the most competitive and rewarding atmosphere and contend for the NCAA National Championship. The Committee worked hard to arrive at a recommendation that would optimize the long-term outlook for the Johns Hopkins University, the entire Athletic Department, and the men's lacrosse program.

The student-athlete experience, academic impact and alignment with the mission of Johns Hopkins

Feedback from the Johns Hopkins community helps to frame the most important issue embedded in the Committee's charge: the impact conference alignment would have on the JHU student-athlete experience. The Committee heard loudly and clearly that any recommendation and decision should not be made at the expense of the University's academic mission, and it takes seriously its responsibility to ensure that any recommendation puts the needs of the student-athlete first. After considering all the information gathered, we do not believe that conference alignment would have any negative impact on the academic experience of men's lacrosse team members.

While each conference comprises a diverse group of member institutions of varying size and mission, each appears committed to the academic enterprise of its members and to the success of its student-athletes. Conferences help to regularize scheduling, which minimizes disruption to student-athletes. We heard consistently that conferences understand academic issues and athletics issues are inter-related; no conference we know of sacrifices the need of the student to maximize the success of the athlete. The FARs we spoke with underscored the commitment of their institutions and fellow conference member schools to high academic standards and the commitment of the faculty representatives themselves to safeguarding academic integrity at their institutions. The feedback we received from FARs at other institutions assuage any concerns we may have had about the impact of conferences and their policies on a member institution and its students.

On the contrary, we note that as an independent, team members' opportunities for recognition currently are limited, and conference alignment could create additional opportunities to promote and recognize members of the men's lacrosse team nationally. Furthermore, the Committee believes the chance for the men's lacrosse team to win a conference championship could provide student-athletes a significant sense of pride and accomplishment at the end of the regular season regardless of participation in the NCAA tournament. Joining a conference, we believe, would also create additional excitement and enhance both team and school spirit on campus at Johns Hopkins. As a member of a conference, there could well be an opportunity to host a conference tournament at Homewood Field, which would be an exciting prospect for the University, its student-athletes and fans of Johns Hopkins lacrosse.

Economic and brand impact

As summarized earlier, the Committee was pleased to learn that there would not be any significant economic impact on Johns Hopkins if it were to pursue conference alignment; membership would not entail any kind of membership fee. At the same time, at least in the near term, there would be no revenue sharing of any kind. JHU would likely need to increase the men's lacrosse team operating budget slightly to accommodate the cost of additional travel.

The Committee also understands the importance of JHU's exclusive television contract with ESPNU. Each spring, ESPNU beams Johns Hopkins Lacrosse into homes across the country and Canada weekly—an invaluable asset in maintaining the Hopkins Lacrosse brand and exposing it to an ever growing community of lacrosse enthusiasts. ESPNU has been a wonderful partner to JHU, and the Committee was pleased to learn that conference affiliation is unlikely to affect the JHU-ESPNU contract. Moreover, conference alignment would further expand the reach of Johns Hopkins lacrosse to new regions, many of which are home to Johns Hopkins alumni and friends who are anxious to support their team.

Preserving a tradition of rivalries

The Committee echoes the sentiments of many alumni and longstanding fans of Johns Hopkins lacrosse who made impassioned pleas not to make any decision that might prevent JHU from continuing to play traditional rivals. Our research indicates that conferences, too, appreciate the significance of such longstanding rivalries and would support Johns Hopkins's ability to preserve these playing opportunities. We also note that conference realignment in Division I men's lacrosse may well impact traditional Johns Hopkins rivalries regardless of the University's decision regarding conference alignment. Increasingly, other teams currently on JHU's playing schedule (not only those considered traditional rivals) are being affected by their respective conference affiliations. As a result, Johns Hopkins, as it is unaffiliated with a conference, is being asked more frequently to reschedule games with these teams. This can upend a season schedule and impact other regularly scheduled games. Furthermore, conferences for some rivals have become sufficiently competitive that those teams may be less motivated to play Johns Hopkins in the future as there will be alternative options to bolster their strength of schedule.

Nevertheless, the Athletics Department has confirmed to the Committee it has every desire to maintain traditional rivalries with institutions such as Maryland, Syracuse, Virginia, Navy, North Carolina and Loyola. These are not only meaningful rivalries, they are excellent lacrosse programs. Continuing to play against them is not only important to JHU lacrosse fans, it would help Johns Hopkins maximize its own strength of schedule.

Furthermore, the Athletics Department has been in communication with the leadership of many of these rival lacrosse programs, and the Committee understands that these institutions, too, clearly wish to maintain a competitive relationship with Johns Hopkins for as long as possible. It is conceivable, however, that if the University elects to join a conference for its men's lacrosse team, eventually it may have to drop a traditional rival or two from its schedule in a given year to accommodate other competitive conference opponents.

The Committee also believes the door should not be closed to developing new traditions. Conference alignment could forge exciting new rivalries with teams against which Johns Hopkins has rarely competed in the past.

A tradition of independence and commitment to excellence

The Committee members unanimously agree that Johns Hopkins's tradition of independence, which has lasted more than a century, is to be celebrated. Based on feedback from the JHU community, many feel strongly that the longstanding distinction of Johns Hopkins's independence is worth preserving at any cost. The Committee also notes that if Johns Hopkins were to remain independent after the 2013 season, it would stand as the only institution left in NCAA Division I men's lacrosse not aligned with a conference. In any situation, being such an outlier warrants further exploration.

The Committee heard, anecdotally, that the mystique and uniqueness of being independent is one of the reasons student-athletes are attracted to the men's lacrosse program at JHU. An even bigger reason for their attraction, we believe, is their desire to win championships. Johns Hopkins's rich legacy in lacrosse is not simply about visits to the NCAA tournament or NCAA titles won. Nevertheless, such statistics are compelling for the nation's most outstanding high school lacrosse players—prospective student-athletes who want to be part of a legendary program known for its commitment to the sport, to its athletes, to leadership on and off the field and, indeed, to winning. The outpouring of comments the Committee received confirm that a significant portion of the JHU community, and the alumni community in particular, are just as interested in seeing Johns Hopkins's men's lacrosse team maintain and build upon its record of success.

Preserving the legacy of Johns Hopkins lacrosse and ensuring future success

It is timely then that this report is issued on the heels of the announcement of the 2013 NCAA Division I men's lacrosse tournament bracket, which does not include Johns Hopkins for the first time since 1971. Although the Committee's recommendation was decided prior to and thus not influenced by this outcome, the 2013 tournament bracket reflects the reality of NCAA Division I men's lacrosse—a reality that will require Johns Hopkins to make changes if it wishes to continue to compete against the nation's best teams in championship play and demonstrate it is not done winning NCAA championships.

In any lacrosse conference with six or more members, the winner of a conference championship is an automatic qualifier for NCAA tournament play. In the 2013 NCAA tournament field of 16 teams, there are, in fact, only eight at-large berths. The remaining slots are afforded to automatic qualifiers. Johns Hopkins was ranked as high as 14th according to certain polls prior to the tournament selection. In the current state of play, that is not good enough to qualify for the tournament.

The Committee believes joining a conference would afford the Johns Hopkins men's lacrosse team an additional pathway to the NCAA tournament. Many teams in recent years have utilized precisely this pathway to secure a spot in the tournament despite regular season records that otherwise would have precluded such an appearance in the post-season.

Division I men's lacrosse has never been more competitive. More young men are playing lacrosse at the high school level than even before, and, with so few teams in Division I, teams are quickly growing stronger. Ironically, the game of lacrosse is rapidly growing at every level *but* men's NCAA Division I. Given the shrinking number of at-large slots in NCAA tournament play due to automatic qualifiers, a winning regular season record and quality ranking in national polls are no longer sufficient to guarantee a team an at-large berth in the NCAA tournament.

Given the "second chance" at NCAA tournament play that all of JHU's top competitors have as a result of their conference affiliations, the Committee believes Johns Hopkins is and will continue to be

disadvantaged if it elects to preserve its status as an independent. With sincere and all due respect to tradition, we believe maintaining the status quo would unnecessarily diminish future opportunities to compete in the NCAA tournament and win championship titles.

RECOMMENDATION

In light of the preceding discussion and considerations, it is the unanimous recommendation of this Committee that the University pursue a conference membership for the Johns Hopkins men's lacrosse program.

In addition, the Committee highly recommends that if the University decides to proceed with conference alignment, it should take measures to ensure the stability of the program during this period of transition. Specifically, the Committee identifies four criteria it believes would be important in any agreement to join a conference:

- 1) An initial membership term of five years
- 2) An opportunity to evaluate Johns Hopkins' position in the conference after three years, at which point the option would exist to either extend the initial agreement or to part ways at the conclusion of the initial agreement
- 3) A guarantee that a decision by an existing full member of the conference to sponsor the sport of men's lacrosse or the addition to the conference of a full member that sponsors men's lacrosse will not jeopardize Johns Hopkins' affiliation with the league
- 4) The ability for Johns Hopkins to maintain its existing television broadcasting relationship with ESPNU

The Committee recognizes the significant changes occurring in intercollegiate athletics, and we see those changes impacting the sport of men's lacrosse. We believe joining a conference at this time will ensure that the Johns Hopkins men's lacrosse program will remain at the forefront of the sport for years if not decades to come. This move will help to preserve Johns Hopkins's legacy in college lacrosse and to maintain the tradition of excellence that distinguishes the men's lacrosse program and The Johns Hopkins University.

The Committee stands ready to further assist the University and the men's lacrosse program in any way it can.

Respectfully submitted May 10, 2013.

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