

New NCAA president has Colorado connections

Emmert spent seven years in Boulder at CU

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Not that anyone will be expecting any special favors, but Colorado should at least have a sympathetic ear in the NCAA upper echelon very soon.

In fact, about as high as one could go. New NCAA president Mark Emmert, named earlier this week to the job, has some fairly strong ties to Colorado.

Emmert, currently the president of the University of Washington, worked as the associate vice chancellor for academic affairs at CU from 1985-92. He's kept in touch with a number of CU officials over the years, and his affinity for Boulder didn't leave when he did, as his daughter attended CU, graduating three years ago.

After leaving CU in 1992, Emmert served as provost and vice president of academic affairs at Montana State. He then moved on to Connecticut, where he was the chief operating officer and academic officer, and from there, went to Louisiana State as the chancellor before taking the job as Washington's president in 2004.

His appointment by the NCAA to replace the late Myles Brand came as a mild surprise, as his name rarely surfaced as one of the favorites during the search.

"We are gratified to hire an individual of Mark Emmert's stature and experience to head the NCAA," said Oregon State president Ed Ray, the chairman of the NCAA Executive Committee. "President Emmert emerged from a field of exceptional candidates."

The Seattle Times called Emmert a "rainmaker" earlier this week because of his fundraising skills. The paper said one of his biggest achievements was leading a fundraising effort that brought in \$2.68 billion, and he was also credited with "recruiting top faculty, overseeing the continued success of the UW's medical school and, most important to many alumni, helping turn around a beleaguered football program."

Emmert was also the second-highest paid college president in the country, trailing only Ohio State's Gordon Gee (a former University of Colorado president).

CU chancellor Phil DiStefano knew Emmert when he worked at CU, and the two have remained in touch over the years.

"It's a good choice for the NCAA," DiStefano said. "He's been at some high-profile institutions and had administrative positions in those places where athletics play a major role."

Indeed, with stops at Colorado, Connecticut, LSU and Washington, Emmert is quite familiar with the role of athletics and how programs interact with the NCAA.

DiStefano said Emmert had little direct contact with athletics during his time at CU, where his duties were more focused on tenure, assessment and other faculty issues.

But he certainly became more involved at his future stops.

"With a daughter going to school here and graduating, he's still had Colorado on his radar," DiStefano said.

While he won't officially take the reins until November, Emmert has already had the opportunity to voice his opinion on a variety of subjects. Among those:

He is in favor of the NCAA basketball tournament expansion from 65 to 68 teams.

He reiterated that a Div. I football playoff is "not a topic that the NCAA is going to be driving. ... At the end of the day, it's not for me to decide. It's going to be up to the presidents."

He is well-aware that one of the biggest issues facing athletic departments around the nation is money -- but in the end, it will be up to the individual schools to solve their issues because the NCAA can't mandate spending limits. "The role of the NCAA in overseeing or constraining budgets is a highly limited role and we'll have to use the bully pulpit and our ability to discuss these issues and provide leadership with the presidents," Emmert said.

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