

Dear NCAA Division I Council Members.

As a former Division I men's soccer player and member of the national Student-Athlete Advisory Committee I am writing to express thoughts relating to the 21st Century Model/ Proposal 2019-90.

I came to the United States from Germany to combine high level academics with my soccer pursuits and I had the privilege to play five fulfilling and successful seasons as the starting goal keeper at North Carolina State University. In December 2021 I graduated with a Bachelor's and a Master's degree and I also finished my 2-year term on national SAAC a few months early due to new professional responsibilities.

During my time at NC State my teammates and I were informed that a proposal was being developed by the Division I soccer coaches to change our season playing model. To me this proposal made a lot of sense right from the beginning, because the NCAA soccer season was entirely different from what I was accustomed to in Germany, and also very different from what my teammates from the US and other countries experienced as youth players. Our normal routines were to train during the week and play one game on the weekend with our season spread out throughout the entire year. The US college system of cramming a full season into a few months in the Fall and then having virtually no real competition for the remainder of the year was not only a difficult adjustment initially but it remained weird and challenging throughout my entire career. I did not really understand why soccer is played that way in the US, especially given that other sports like Wrestling, Basketball, and Ice Hockey, were competing seriously in both semesters, and some, like tennis, golf, and cross country runners who are also in track & field, compete from September to June .

Learning about the 21st Century Model was exciting because it was evident that it was designed to improve the student-athlete experience through a balanced schedule for academics, soccer and campus life, that would give us enough time for proper training, competition, rest and recovery. I knew this type of balance was something the fall model could never provide because we had to jam so many games into such a short amount of time, which takes a significant toll physically, mentally, emotionally and academically. Therefore, I was hopeful and confident that once the proposal was considered, changes would be made quickly because it is obviously in the best interest of the sport and the student-athletes. However, to my surprise, from when the proposal was first presented, up until now, the concept has encountered fierce and at times irrational opposition throughout different interest groups within Division I. Thanks to my positions on SAAC and within the NCAA governance structure, I was able to observe and participate in this debate firsthand. What struck me throughout this process is how far some of these opposing motives and arguments diverged from public statements by the NCAA and campus administrators that emphasize the importance of Student-Athlete health, safety and well-being, highlight the focus on an exceptional Student Athlete experience and praise the respect for and the value of the Student-Athlete voice.

From the student-athlete perspective the 21st Century Model is clearly and completely better than the current model in every way - balance, health, wellness, academics, soccer and campus life. It accomplishes all this without expanding the season but by simply redistributing the same number of days and hours over two semesters. It also includes a reduction of games from 25 to 23, but it

seems to me that these points are either not considered or not understood by people who argue that this proposal would put additional strains on student-athletes. This, misperception at best, and intentional ignorance at worst, becomes obvious in positions taken by the NCAA Division I committees that have stated opposition to Proposal 2019-90 and have influenced perceptions of the proposal for school and conference leadership.

For instance, how can the Committee on Competitive Safeguards & Medical Aspects of Sports oppose the proposal when sports science supports the 21st Century Model design?
How can the Committee On Academics oppose the proposal that eliminates almost all midweek games, plays games on weekends, and emphasizes proper rest and minimal class absence?
How can the Legislative Committee oppose the proposal when their argument is not grounded on a solid understanding of the model/proposal, but simply on the opinion of CSMAS?
Why doesn't the Student-Athlete Experience committee offer their support for the model that is in the best interest of the student-athlete experience?

One committee has stated their support for Proposal 2019-90 and that is the Student-Athlete Advisory Committee. We have voted to do so twice, in January of 2020, and again this January 2022 and the margin of support expanded as the understanding of what the proposal actually is about grew. Why did we vote to support the proposal? First, we studied it and knew what was being proposed. Second, we compared the proposed model to the current model, and it was easy to identify the differences and the vast improvements the change would make for the sport and the student-athlete experience. And finally, we knew that the Division I men's soccer players are seeking this change. We knew this based on 70% support for a two semester model from the 2016 NCAA Time Demands survey, 80% support for the specific 21st Century Model in a 2017 coach association survey, and that 86% of all current players, signing a February 2022 petition in support of Proposal 2019-90.

In conclusion and on the eve of a potential vote, I request that all Division I leadership do what the Division I men's soccer community and national SAAC have done, and that is to simply compare the current model to the proposed model and then base opinions and votes on which is better for the sport and the student-athlete experience. The answer is clear. It is understood that there are challenges associated with change, and in that the NCAA is presently in transition poised for change, now is a good time to demonstrate commitment to modernizing Division I by adopting Proposal 2019-90 for the student-athletes and the sport.

Please contact me with questions and thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

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