

Spring season canceled for NAIA schools

By Ronald Bond
The Observer

LA GRANDE — The National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics announced Monday morning that “the decision has been made to cancel the spring 2020 sports season, effective immediately,” in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, according to a press release.

The announcement brings an end to the seasons of the Eastern Oregon University softball team and the EOU track and field team.

“It’s a hard day,” EOU softball coach Nicole Christian said.

The first-year coach said that with players not on campus, she had to make several phone calls to break the news to her athletes.

“A lot of different emotions,” she said. “They thought when the NCAA did it they knew there was a chance we were next. A lot of tears. A lot of, ‘This really sucks.’”

The statement from the NAIA notes the decision was made “after convening the Council of Presidents Executive Committee this morning, and with input from the National Administrative Council and National Eligibility Committee.”

The decision was in part impacted by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention’s Sunday evening recommendation that gatherings of 50 or more people be either postponed or canceled for the next eight weeks in an effort to slow the spread of the coronavirus.

“I’m not surprised by it, nor am I surprised by the quickness of it,” Cascade Collegiate Conference commissioner Rob Cashell told The Observer Monday of the NAIA’s move.



Staff photo by Ronald Bond

This photo was taken at the track on the Eastern Oregon University campus Monday. The NAIA has canceled the remainder of the 2020 spring season amid the growing health concern caused by COVID-19.

EOU head track coach Ben Welch said the announcement by the CDC essentially left the NAIA with no other options but to cancel the season.

“It’s unfortunate, but I don’t see what kind of choice they had,” Welch said, noting that people would be upset at the decision, but the alternative of not making the move and potentially increasing the spread would also receive backlash. “Darned if you do. Darned if you don’t.”

NAIA President and CEO Jim Carr said in the release that the CDC recommendation, coupled

with the “growing state of emergency due to COVID-19...meant we could not in good conscience move forward with the spring sports season and championships.”

Cashell called the cancellation of the full spring season “really difficult. Like a lot of things, sports in our country evoke a lot of emotion.”

The commissioner added, though, that “we have to keep everything in perspective and understand that (this) really is a health crisis.”

Cashell said the task force assembled by the CCC had

planned to meet to go over its options in light of the CDC’s announcement on gathering size.

“We did have a meeting scheduled today as a conference to discuss as a conference what our decision would be,” he said. “Canceling everything was on the table.”

The NAIA statement also said, in a move similar to one planned at the NCAA level, spring sport athletes will not be “charged with a season of competition.”

Cashell said he believes the decision by the NAIA to extend

eligibility is “the correct and right thing to do. It gives those student athletes peace of mind that if they want to continue on and have another season (next year) they won’t be harmed.”

Welch said the move by the NAIA to grant an extra year was the right one, but said some seniors — especially fifth-year seniors who have pending job prospects — may not be in a position to take advantage of it.

Finances and grades also could play a part for students weighing the decision to consider taking up the NAIA on its offer.

“There’s a lot more that goes into the decision at the end of the day,” Christian said.

Welch said the coaches are, in essence, in a holding pattern as to what happens next.

“Some of that is you’re still waiting for another decision to be made. We kind of roll with the punches is the best way to put it,” he said.

Christian said her coaching staff will be in contact with athletes on the team each week.

“This is hard for everyone to take that’s involved in it,” she said.

EOU, in a release later Monday on the season cancellation, said the school will re-evaluate in a month the prospect of holding practices.

“...the long-term health of our coaches, staff, student-athletes, and community is of the utmost importance and that is ultimately why this decision has been made,” EOU athletic director Anji Weissenfluh said in the school’s statement. “I thank everyone for their support and understanding during this time of uncertainty.”

MLB delays opening day until at least mid-May

By Ronald Blum
The Associated Press

NEW YORK — Major League Baseball pushed back opening day until mid-May at the earliest on Monday because of the new coronavirus after the federal government recommended restricting events of more than 50 people for the next eight weeks.

Baseball Commissioner Rob Manfred made the announcement following a conference call with executives of the 30 teams.

“The clubs remain committed to playing as many games as possible when the season begins,” the commissioner’s office said in a statement.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommended Sunday that gatherings of 50 people or more be canceled or postponed across the country for the next eight weeks.

MLB called off the rest of the spring training schedule on Thursday and said opening day, which had been scheduled for March 26, was postponed for at least two weeks. Teams and players agree that two to four weeks of additional spring training will be needed before the regular season begins.

The Major League Baseball Players Association sent an email to agents on Monday saying that for players who went home or to their team’s regular-season city it would pay \$1,100 allowances through April 9 to players on 40-man rosters as of March 13. That amount also would go to players with minor league contracts at big league spring training who were on 40-man rosters at the end of last season.

The union also is negoti-



Photo by Sue Ogrocki/The Associated Press

A gate at the Chicago Cubs practice facility at Sloan Park in Mesa, Arizona, is closed and locked Monday. The remainder of spring training baseball games have been canceled due to the coronavirus.

ating with MLB over resetting the dates for players with opt-out clauses in their deals. The sides also are likely to agree on a roster freeze.

This year marked the earliest opening day other than for international games. As it stood, Game 7 of the World Series would have been Oct. 28, and teams and players could push the postseason into November.

Any change to the 162-game schedule would necessitate bargaining over an array of issues, including when and how much players get paid and how much major league service they are credited for. Service time determines eligibility for free agency and salary arbitration.

MLB had not had a mass postponement of openers since 1995, when the season was shortened from 162 games to 144 following a 7 1/2-month players’ strike that also wiped out the 1994 World Series. Opening day was pushed back from April 2 to April 26 and player salaries were reduced by 11.1%

because the games were lost due to a strike.

After a 32-day spring training lockout in 1990 caused opening day to be delayed a week until April 9, the season was extended by three days to allow each team a full 162-game schedule.

Baseball’s first strike lasted from April 1-13 in 1972, and the season started April 15. Teams played 153-156 games.

The 1918 season was cut short because of World War I. Provost Marshal Gen. Enoch Crowder announced a regulation on May 23 that men not involved in useful occupations appear before the draft board. The War Department initially did not rule baseball was non-essential under the “work or fight” order but Secretary of War Newton D. Baker announced on July 26 that baseball had to comply by Sept. 1. After some negotiation, the regular season ended Sept. 2 with teams playing 123-131 games, and the Boston Red Sox beat the Chicago Cubs in a World Series played from Sept. 5-11.

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