

COLLEGE BASKETBALL

Players use biggest stage to deliver important message

BY RALPH D. RUSSO

AP College Sports Writer INDIANAPOLIS — A social media effort to raise awareness about inequities in college sports by some prominent basketball players came with day he was not aware of any plans for player protests that could interfere with tournament games being played.

"Am I concerned? I would be concerned about any potential disruption, I guess, of games," Gavitt said. 'I'm certainly not at all concerned and, quite frankly, supportive of student-athletes using their voices for advocacy in issues that they are very passionate about. We have certainly seen that throughout 2020 in particular." Using the #NotNCAAProperty hashtag on Twitter, players pushed for the NČAA to change its rules banning college athletes from earning money for things like endorsements, sponsorship deals and personal appearances, all encompassing revenue tied to their name, image or likeness (NIL). Three prominent Big Ten players -Isaiah Livers of Michigan, Geo Baker of Rutgers and Jordan Bohannon of Iowa — led the way, and players from

"Maybe it's protesting a game or delaying a game — because it would be a nightmare for NCAA. I know they don't want that. Right for the association's NIL rules.

"President Emmert regularly meets with student-athletes to discuss matters that impact them and their lives. While there have been limited opportunities over the past year due to the pandemic, he has met virtually when possible," NCAA spokesman Bob Williams said in a statement to the AP. "He would be happy to connect either virtually or in person when appropriate with any student-athletes who want to engage." The NCAA has been working toward changing its rules governing NIL compensation to pull back most restrictions. But those efforts have bogged down under scrutiny from the Justice Department and with an antitrust case involving the NCAA heading to the Supreme Court later this month.

what they hoped to accomplish.

There were no hints about what was next or whether they would take their messages to the courts when they start playing.

"The players are driving this so I'm

calls for rules changes and requests for meetings with the NCAA president and lawmakers.

The players who got #NotNCAAProperty trending on social made no threats of protests at tournament games, which started Thursday night and will have millions of viewers all weekend.

Following a year of activism in sports that included NBA players shutting down the playoffs after a police shooting, it seems fitting that college athletes would use March Madness to get a message across.

NCAA vice president of basketball Dan Gavitt, who communicates frequently with coaches, said Thursnow, we certainly have the leverage to do that."

— Jordan Bohannon, Iowa Hawkeyes men's basketball player

at least 15 tournament teams jumped on board with tweets of support.

The National College Players Association, a college athlete advocacy group, released a statement late Wednesday that detailed the players' goals. They included meetings with NCAA President Mark Emmert and the opportunity to meet with state and local lawmakers who are working on passing laws that could set parameters

The players were back to Twitter on Thursday, circulating the hashtag and

not going to speak on their behalf," said NCPA executive director Ramogi Huma, a former UCLA football player.

Bohannon, Livers and Baker spoke to The Athletic on Thursday and said they were hoping to build the movement during their time in Indianapolis.

"The good part about this tournament is it's over multiple weeks," Baker told The Athletic. "So there's time to come up with something."

come up with something." Bohannon said: "Maybe it's protesting a game or delaying a game because it would be a nightmare for NCAA. I know they don't want that.

"Right now, we certainly have the leverage to do that."

Tournament

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But in recent years, both programs have blossomed into perennial national powers under coach Scott Rueck (Oregon State) and Kelly Graves (Oregon), and a trip to the tournament has become an expectation rather than an exception. The Beavers have qualified for the tournament seven consecutive times, advancing as far as the Final Four in 2016, and Oregon has done so four consecutive times, reaching the Final Four in 2019. (This does not include 2020, when the tournament was canceled because of the coronavirus pandemic).

For the Oregon State men, however, the 2021 tournament berth is monumental. The Beavers made early Final Four appearances in 1949 and 1963 under legendary coach Slats Gill and enjoyed sustained success under coach Ralph Miller, qualifying for the tournament eight times from 1980-90.

But Oregon State has played in the tournament just once since, in 2016, when it lost in the first round to Virginia Commonwealth.

The Beavers' extended drought, in large part, had doomed hope of the Oregon foursome reaching the tournament in the same season. But the teams have come close over the years. Three of the four have played in the tournament in the same season four different times. The first came in 1984, when the Oregon State men and women joined the Oregon women in the tournament field. In 1995, both women's programs and the Ducks men qualified for the tournament. And, more recently, in 2017 and 2019, the Oregon men and both women's programs reached the tournament.

But now, 81 years after the Ducks won the first men's championship and 39 years after the women's tournament made its debut, the four Oregon schools will compete together.

"Just how blessed and grateful I am for being here, and being in this position," Beavers point guard Gianni Hunt said, after OSU won the Pac-12 for the first time in school history. "I'm just so blessed and thankful to be here with this team, with these guys. It's been a special run, but we're not done."

Ducks, Beavers in the NCAA tournaments

Men: No. 12 Oregon State vs. No. 5 Tennessee, 1:30 p.m. Friday (TNT) Men: No. 7 Oregon vs. No. 10 VCU,

6:57 p.m. Saturday (TNT) **Women:** No. 8 Oregon State vs. No. 9 Florida State, 4:30 p.m. Sunday (ESPN2)

Women: No. 6 Oregon vs. No. 11 South Dakota, 7 p.m. Monday (ESPN2)



Oregon State's Talia Von Oelhoffen (22) shoots over Oregon's Jaz Shelley during the Pac-12 tournament on March 4.

