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North Coast Athletic Conference Special

For Immediate Release

**NORTH COAST ADDS SOFTBALL AS 22ND SPORT;
CHAMPIONSHIP COMPETITION BEGINS IN 1997-98**

April 17, 1997

CLEVELAND -- The North Coast Athletic Conference has announced that it will sponsor women's softball as its 22nd championship sport beginning with the 1997-98 academic year. The NCAC has been recognized as a leader in the area of equity for women's athletics since its inception in 1983.

Softball will be the North Coast's 11th championship sport for women, the fourth-highest level of sponsorship among the 88 conferences in all three divisions of the National Collegiate Athletic Association. The only conferences to sponsor more women's sports than the NCAC are the Division I Ivy League (13), Atlantic Coast Conference (12) and Big Ten (12). The NCAC is a member of NCAA Division III, where institutions tend to have smaller enrollments and do not offer athletic scholarships. With 22 championship sports for men and women, the NCAC also ranks sixth among all conferences in terms of total sponsorship.

Charter member Kenyon College of Gambier, Ohio, provided the catalyst for lifting softball to championship sport status in the NCAC when its Board of Directors announced last week that softball would be elevated from club sport to varsity status for the coming academic year. With five of the NCAC's nine members sponsoring softball as a varsity sport, the conference has been authorized by its Presidents' Council to begin championship competition in the spring of 1998. The five NCAC members with softball are Allegheny College, Case Western Reserve University, Denison University, Kenyon and Wittenberg University.

"We are extremely pleased by Kenyon's approval of varsity status for softball," said Michele Tolela Myers, president of Denison and the NCAC. "This action enables our conference to proceed with championship play in the sport and provide another quality competitive opportunity for our women student-athletes." [Myers is completing a term on the NCAA Presidents' Commission and last month was elected chair of the American Council on Education.]

Softball has been building sponsorship momentum within the NCAC over the past three years. CWRU fielded its first varsity team in 1996, while Denison begins play this spring. Allegheny and Wittenberg, meanwhile, have sponsored the sport since the 1970s. Allegheny has made 12 NCAA Tournament appearances over the past 14 seasons, placing second nationally in 1988 and fourth on three other occasions. The Gators were 30-14 in 1996, while Wittenberg compiled a 17-14 mark.

With its inception in 1983, the North Coast Athletic Conference was believed to be the first NCAA conference founded with the principle of equity for women's sports as a charter practice. The NCAC began competition in the 1984-85 academic year with 21 championship sports, 11 for men and 10 for women. Existing conferences were just beginning to add women's championship sports at that time and the collegiate landscape was still dominated by men's-only conferences.

The federal Title IX bill, which was enacted in 1972 and prohibits sex discrimination in school sports, will celebrate its 25th anniversary this June, and President Myers feels the NCAC is among those organizations responsible for bringing about equity for women in collegiate athletics. "When the NCAC was founded in 1983 the phrase 'gender equity' had not yet been coined, and being a pioneer in adding women's sports to a conference did not engender all positive remarks, as it may today," Myers said.

"Given the fact that our institutions have smaller enrollments and do not earn income through athletics, sponsoring 22 sports at the Division III level shows a sizable commitment to intercollegiate athletics, both men's and women's," said NCAC executive director Dennis Collins. "We believe that broad-based athletics programs enhance the educational purpose of our institutions."

The NCAC's announcement has drawn positive reaction from one of the national leaders in the area of women's athletics, Donna Lopiano. "The Women's Sports Foundation applauds the NCAC's commitment to women's sports and the recent expansion of its championships program to include women's softball," says Lopiano, executive director of the New York-based Women's Sports Foundation. "The North Coast is now first amongst all Division III conferences in the number of championship sports sponsored for women."

The NCAC has formed a softball committee and is currently studying possible formats for future championship competition. Nancy Gray, associate athletic director at CWRU, has been named committee chair.

North Coast Athletic Conference

Championship Sports (22)

Men (11): Baseball, Basketball, Cross Country, Football, Golf, Lacrosse, Soccer, Swimming & Diving, Tennis, Track & Field (Indoor), Track & Field (Outdoor).

Women (11): Basketball, Cross Country, Field Hockey, Lacrosse, Soccer, **Softball**, Swimming & Diving, Tennis, Track & Field (Indoor), Track & Field (Outdoor), Volleyball.

NCAA Sports Sponsorship (Women's Sports)

Rank	Conference (Division)	Women's Sports
1)	Ivy League (I)	13
2)	Atlantic Coast Conference (I)	12
	Big 10 Conference (I)	12
4)	North Coast Athletic Conference (III)	11
	America East (I)	11
	Atlantic 10 Conference (I)	11
	Big 12 Conference (I)	11
	Centennial Conference (III)	11
	Middle Atlantic States Conference (III)	11
	Old Dominion Athletic Conference (III)	11
	Patriot League (I)	11
	Southeastern Conference (I)	11
13)	Big East Conference (I)	10
	Big West Conference (I)	10
	Capital Athletic Conference (III)	10
	Mid-American Conference (I)	10
	Midwest Conference (III)	10
	Minnesota Intercollegiate Conference (III)	10
	Missouri Valley Conference (I)	10
	North Central Intercollegiate Conference (II)	10
	Pacific-10 Conference (I)	10
	Pennsylvania State Athletic Conference (II)	10
	Presidents' Athletic Conference (III)	10
	SUNY Athletic Conference (III)	10
	University Athletic Association (III)	10
	Upstate Collegiate Athletic Conference (III)	10
	Western Athletic Conference (I)	10

Note: Data compiled by NCAA Membership Services (Feb. 97)

NCAA Sports Sponsorship (All Sports)

Rank	Conference (Division)	All Sports
1)	Ivy League (I)	27
2)	Atlantic Coast Conference (I)	24
	Big 10 Conference (I)	24
4)	Centennial Conference (III)	23
	Middle Atlantic States Conference (III)	23
6)	North Coast Athletic Conference (III)	22
	Minnesota Intercollegiate Conference (III)	22
	Patriot League (I)	22
	University Athletic Association (III)	22
10)	America East (I)	21
	Atlantic 10 Conference (I)	21
	Big 12 Conference (I)	21
	Mid-American Conference (I)	21
	Midwest Conference (III)	21
	Old Dominion Athletic Conference (III)	21
	Presidents' Athletic Conference (III)	21
	Upstate Collegiate Athletic Conference (III)	21
	Western Athletic Conference (I)	21
19)	Big East Conference (I)	20
	North Central Intercollegiate Conference (II)	20
	Ohio Athletic Conference (III)	20
	Pennsylvania State Athletic Conference (II)	20
	Southeastern Conference (I)	20

Note: Data compiled by NCAA Membership Services (Feb. 97)