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Big victory for small colleges

"Mr. Chairman, the Presidents Commission supports this proposal (No. 53).

"The Steering Committee supports this proposal.

"The Restructuring Committee supports this proposal.

"Even the Old Testament prophets support this proposal.

"How long must we live under this inequity? It's a matter of simple justice and equity!"

— David L. Warren, president, Ohio Wesleyan

By Tom Giffen

Beacon Journal staff writer

Nashville, Tenn.

Moments after David Warren closed debate on proposal 53, the Presidents Commission, the NCAA Steering and Restructuring committees and the Old Testament prophets had company.

Delegates to the 85th NCAA convention supported proposal 53 by an almost 3-to-1 margin Thursday.

"We've been trying to accomplish this for years," said College of Wooster athletic director Al Van Wie.

Proposal 53 prohibits a member of Division I from being classified Division II or Division III in football, and members of Division II from being classified Division III in football.

Some have called this the "Dayton Rule."

"It's much more important than Dayton," said Van Wie. "The principle is more important. Either you are a member of the club or not. If you're going to play Division III, you must be Division III."

Following the vote on proposal 53 came proposal 54, which directed the NCAA to develop legislation for the 1992 convention to establish a Division I-AAA football classification and championship. The classification would be for Division I schools who want to play football, but do not want to award scholarships in the sport.

The University of Dayton, a high-profile member of Division I basketball, has thrived in Division III football, winning two national championships in the 1980s.

"We have no problem with the wishes of Division III," said R. Elaine Dreidame, women's athletic director at Dayton. "We support both proposals and plan to do everything we can to make it (I-AAA) happen.

"As long as the loophole (that allowed Dayton to play in Division III) was there," she said, "it was in our best interest to use it."

Use it, Dayton did, advancing to the Division III

playoffs almost every year during the '80s.

"It just wasn't fair for schools like Ohio Wesleyan, Wittenberg, Mount Union, Baldwin-Wallace and others in Ohio being bumped from the playoffs because of Dayton and the other Division I schools (there are 18 more) playing down in Division III football," said North Coast Athletic Conference executive director Dennis Collins, who has been working on this legislation since 1986.

"Those schools tend to have a lot of carry over from their Division I program although they have followed our rules," he said. "However, their facilities and manpower, for example, are geared to Division I, and that's an unfair advantage."

A proposal similar to 53 was voted down in January of 1987. In December '87, Dayton played Wagner, another Division I school playing down, for the Division III national football championship.

"That one simple event was the most eloquent example of what we had been talking about," said Warren.

From a Division III perspective, this legislation was the most important element of this convention.

Proposal 53 was the subject of the longest debate of the day, including comments on the convention floor from athletic director and football coach Fred Martinelli of Ashland University, a Division II school. While admitting that the practice of playing down was an "inequity that should have been addressed five years ago," he urged a vote against the legislation because there was nothing in the legislation to deal with the problems of Division II.

Supporters of proposal 53, which will be effective in 1993, successfully defeated an amendment that would have delayed implementation until 1996.

The proposal had to pass in all three divisions in order for it to be enacted. It did (240-81-3 in Division I, 105-68-6 in Division II, 224-8-5 in Division III and 569-157-14 overall).

Although the vote was close in Division II on proposal 54, it also passed in all three divisions (215-102-5 in Division I, 84-76-11 in Division II, 201-18-15 in Division III for an overall vote of 500-196-31).

The passage of proposal 53 was a particularly happy event for Wooster's Van Wie, who retires in June after 31 years at the school. "It is a high event, a big victory," he said.

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