



Knight Commission On Intercollegiate Athletics

A PROJECT OF THE JOHN S. AND JAMES L. KNIGHT FOUNDATION

Session Summaries and Panelists Bios **Knight Commission May 13, 2026 Meeting** **Gaylord National, Washington, DC**

9:15 – 10:45 a.m.

Proposed Changes to NCAA Eligibility Rules and Federal Legislation Impacting College Sports

During this session, leaders will discuss impacts on college sports from major proposals to college athlete eligibility rules, recent Presidential Executive Order, the status of federal legislation, and other pressing issues for college sports.

Val Ackerman, Commissioner, Big East Conference

Ackerman is the fifth Commissioner of the BIG EAST Conference and the founding President of the WNBA. While leading the BIG EAST, various conference sports teams have won eight national championships, including four in men's basketball. Val is an accomplished sports administrator who has held leadership positions in men's and women's sports at the collegiate, professional, national, and international levels. She was the past President of USA Basketball, an inductee of the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame, and a member of the NCAA Women's Basketball Oversight Committee. Ackerman is also a former member of the Knight Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics, serving on the Commission for 8 years. Her national leadership in college sports includes having served on the NCAA's Federal and State Legislation Working Group. On April 20, 2026, Ackerman announced that she will retire on August 31, 2026.

Sam Edwards, Football Athlete, Michigan State University

Edwards was a four-year letterwinner during his six years on the Michigan State football team where he played linebacker and contributed on defense and special teams. He is a college athlete representative on the NCAA Division I Board of Directors and is just the fourth-ever football player to serve on the highest-ranking governing body in Division I. Edwards is involved in several community service events including an athlete food drive, Be the Match, and peer tutoring. A three-time recipient of the team's scholar-athlete award, Edwards graduated with a double major in political theory and constitutional democracy and international relations, a minor in political economy, and earned a master's in marketing research.

Jenn Fraser, Senior Vice President for Governance and Member Services, NCAA

Fraser is in her first year as Senior Vice President for Governance and Member Services at the NCAA after serving as Vice President for Division I Governance. In that role, she was the primary liaison to the Division I Board of Directors and Division I Council, where she helped implement the revised Division I governance structure and worked on several policy initiatives, including transfer issues and initial eligibility standards. She has extensive experience working across the NCAA national office and in various conference and athletic department offices nationwide.

Rob Mangas, Shareholder, Greenberg Traurig

Mangas is a shareholder in Greenberg Traurig's Federal Government Law & Policy group. He has represented clients before Congress and federal agencies from a variety of industries and in

multiple policy areas, including trade, energy, environment, health care, biotechnology, transportation, financial services, information technology, artificial intelligence, manufacturing, tax, education, pensions, defense, and foreign relations. He previously served as chief of staff to U.S. Senator Wendell Ford, the former Senate Majority Whip. Mangas played football at the University of Kentucky where he was an Academic All American.

Timothy D. Sands, President, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University; Chair, NCAA Division I Board of Directors

Sands is the 16th president of Virginia Tech and a professor in the College of Engineering. He has served in the role for more than 11 years and has led Virginia Tech's strategic planning and alignment with the emerging needs and opportunities in the higher education landscape. Under his leadership, Virginia Tech's undergraduate enrollment has increased by 5,000 and the institution has continued to expand its research capabilities. Sands has chaired the NCAA Division I Board of Directors since August 2024 and is also a member of the ACC's Board of Directors. On April 9, 2026, Sands announced his plans to step down and his commitment to serve until a successor has been named.

11:00 – 12:15 p.m. University of Louisville Leaders Call for Reforms

University of Louisville leaders recently published four papers calling for substantive reforms, including the need for extensive cost controls, stronger protections for college athletes' academic interests, and a commitment to broad-based opportunities and gender equity. Their paper, "From the Arena Not the Sidelines: College Athletics is Running Out of Time," notably called for athletics spending caps. These leaders will highlight their perspectives and the data that support their call for change.

Dr. Laurence N. Benz, Chairman, Board of Trustees

Dr. Benz is a nationally recognized expert in physical therapy and occupational medicine and the president and CEO of Confluent Health. He has served on the University of Louisville's Board of Trustees twice, serving as the chair of the board from 2015-2017. He was re-appointed to the Board of Trustees in 2022 before becoming the chair in 2025. Dr. Benz also serves as a board member for Louisville's Athletic Association.

Dr. Gerry Bradley, President

Dr. Bradley is the 20th President of the University of Louisville, ascending to the position in March 2025, following his time as the University's executive vice president and university provost. Prior to those roles, he came to the institution as dean of the School of Dentistry before becoming the chief academic officer of the university. During his tenure as provost, the institution experienced enrollment growth, an increase in financial aid for university scholarships, and the development of strategic plans to increase enrollment and retention rates.

Josh Heird, Vice President and Director of Athletics

Josh Heird has served as the University of Louisville's Vice President and Director of Athletics since June 2022. He oversees the operation of 23 varsity sports with more than 650 college athletes participating. Heird has led the athletic department to its highest academic performance in program history, generated economic impact for the community of \$3.84 billion, and produced more than \$2.3 billion in university brand exposure. Heird also currently serves on the NCAA Women's Basketball Selection Committee and the College Sports Commission Implementation Committee.