

10-15-2008

## Remarks at the NCAA Division II Conference Commissioners' Award of Merit Reception, delivered at Cheyenne Mountain Resort on October 15, 2008

Arend D. Lubbers  
*Grand Valley State University*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/presidential\\_speeches](https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/presidential_speeches)



Part of the [Archival Science Commons](#), [Education Commons](#), and the [History Commons](#)

---

### ScholarWorks Citation

Lubbers, Arend D., "Remarks at the NCAA Division II Conference Commissioners' Award of Merit Reception, delivered at Cheyenne Mountain Resort on October 15, 2008" (2008). *Presidential Speeches*. 247.

[https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/presidential\\_speeches/247](https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/presidential_speeches/247)

This Speech is brought to you for free and open access by the University Archives at ScholarWorks@GVSU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Presidential Speeches by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks@GVSU. For more information, please contact [scholarworks@gvsu.edu](mailto:scholarworks@gvsu.edu).

**Remarks by  
Arend D. Lubbers, President Emeritus,  
Grand Valley State University  
At the NCAA Division II Conference Commissioners'  
Award of Merit Reception  
Cheyenne Mountain Resort, Colorado Springs, Colorado  
October 15, 2008**

I am honored by all of you acceding to Tom Brown's recommendation to give me this award. For many years I worked in the vineyards of Division II as you are doing so successfully now. I was not the kind of President who jumped from one Association meeting to another. The NCAA was my major extra-curricular activity for two reasons. I am intensely interested in athletics, and collegiate sports needs the tempering hands of Presidents just as it does of Conference Commissioners. The Conference Commissioner who is most responsible for my being here tonight, Tom Brown, is a colleague of mine going back to his days as President of Northwood. He is retiring as Commissioner of the Great Lakes Intercollegiate Athletics Conference after a long and distinguished career that at times required him to remodel it. Always his actions and recommendations made it stronger. Tonight he deserves accolades.

When I became President of Central College in Iowa in 1960, all the Presidents of the Iowa Conference institutions had pledged not to give student aid for athletic ability, only for scholarship and need. When I

arrived on the scene Central had completed a football season - winning none, losing seven, and tying one. The coach, who over a long career, had won more times than he had lost, was suffering. What had happened was that all the Presidents had changed their minds except for two, Central and Simpson, the teams that tied.

In that first year as I was assessing the situation, the basketball coach, who had perfected the art of whining, complained about the lack of aid for recruiting good players. At the end of the academic year, after consulting the Athletic Director, I invited him to my office. He laid on me his usual rap, and I said, "Coach, what do you need?" He was surprised, but after fumbling a moment came up with a figure. I responded, "You've got it." The look on his face should have been recorded for history. A day later the Athletic Director was chuckling when he came into my office. He told me that the basketball coach had come directly to him after his meeting with me, complaining that the President was trying to put pressure on him to win ball games.

I tell you about this incident because from that day I knew I was including athletic aid as a category amongst all the categories of student aid and scholarships. If words like integrity, balance, and moderation condition your thinking, it will never get out of hand. By the time the NCAA was

reorganized and Central and the Iowa Conference opted for Division III, I had moved to Grand Valley and felt that Division II was right for us.

I like transparency. The book is open on Division II campuses. Everyone may know who the athletes are that receive financial assistance. We may differ among institutions and conferences as to the number of scholarships per sport we provide, but we announce how much we do provide. And we know the limits. We don't have to play money games and we need games to get talented athletes some financial help. We can recognize talent and award it. We don't exclude athletics in our aid program, and I have never agreed with those who do.

Several years ago, at a time when Grand Valley was beginning to emerge as a consistent winner, the media in our area kept asking when, and even suggesting that it was time to go Division I. We are in a state with two Big Ten teams and three MAC teams who occasionally defeat Big Ten teams, but often play beyond their league to pick up the financial guarantee. I asked one of my colleagues from a MAC University what the athletics budget was at his institution. When I learned it was four times ours my commitment to Division II was reaffirmed. I enjoy big time athletics and I often attend games at my Division III alma mater, Hope College, twenty-five miles away, but I have found advantages to being where we are.

We did not have to adjust our admissions standards for athletes to field competitive teams. Our athletics budget was never challenged by the Faculty Budget Committee. While it was adequately funded, it was never given too favored a place. We have had few “bad actors” while I observe crime is periodically a problem not too many miles away. Our fans have watched some unusually talented performers on the fields and courts because we could attract them with scholarship dollars. This has given me special satisfaction.

I have watched universities move out of our Division into Division I. For a few I thought it was legitimate. For many it will mean paying three to four times more and losing three or four times more often. They pay a huge price to see their football scores pass across the TV screen on Saturdays. I prefer our athletes having a chance to play for Conference Championships, and even the distant possibility to play in a National Championship round.

In the beginning when Divisions were constructed, much as they are today, Division II was considered the least defined, in a crude sense, the runt of the litter. Some of us were determined that impression would not survive. It has not. In fact your work, the work of the Councils, and actions at the conventions have lifted Division II to a place of high accomplishment in

community relations, sportsmanship, improved officiating, championships, scholarships, care for the student athlete, and service.

In my time we wrestled with issues surrounding the distribution of our Division's share of NCAA funds. We concluded that our success depended on strong conferences. Teams joined in conferences are where the action is. That is where attitudes are formed, oversight is given to competitions, sportsmanship is an ever present concern, and officials are selected and trained so contests will be fair. Money had to go to conferences so they could be a sound foundation for our Division. You and your predecessors have provided the professionalism we needed, and tempered it with care for student athletes, for their safety, for their academic success, for their opportunity to compete "on a level playing field" and for both women and men to have these opportunities.

I am profoundly honored to accept your Award of Merit because you are meritorious in what you have accomplished for our Division. You have achieved in a short time more than some of us old-timers could have imagined. We did imagine that the conferences were our Division's foundation, and you have made them that. Thank you.