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John Gilmore

Stephen Lay

Fairbanks, Alaska

1980s

Series: University focus

University of Alaska (UAF) campus in Fairbanks, Alaska

Stephen Lay said this year the University of Alaska Fairbanks athletics switched from the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA) to the more prestigious National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA). Previously the Nanooks were members of both organizations. The NAIA was the governing board for basketball while the hockey, cross-country skiing and rifle teams were under the NCAA. John Gilmore, director of Intercollegiate Athletics, said this arrangement worked well in the past, but it was time for a change. He said in recent years legislation and the NCAA will no longer allow them to straddle the fence. In order for them to qualify their skiers and rifle member to the NCAA championships their basketball team must also fully meet NCAA requirements. That forced them to take a look at their situation. Along with this at the same time they looked at what the NCAA had to offer them in basketball. They decided it was a better situation. They really didn't have a choice, but it was time to make a choice anyway. Lay asked if this meant they were going to have a stronger basketball team in the future. Gilmore said that is their hope. He realizes NCAA Division II basketball competition is tougher than NAIA competition. They are also in the process of forming a NCAA Division II conference with the University of Alaska Anchorage, Seattle Pacific University, Puget Sound University, Eastern Washington University and Eastern Montana College. It will be an extremely strong conference and they will have to upgrade their basketball program to keep up with that competition. Lay said the hockey team has always played in NCAA as well as the men's ski team and co-ed rifle team. Both the ski team and the rifle team have been nationally ranked. Last year the ski team was tenth in the nation and the rifle team was thirteenth. The UAF women's teams all compete in the Association for Intercollegiate Athletics for Women (AIAW). Now that the NCAA has added championships in women's sports the university is investigating switching to the NCAA for women. That decision will be made in the future. Gilmore said he is pleased with the direction they have taken in terms of the kind of coaching and performance level they have been able to have, but he is worried about falling behind financially in financing the program. Intercollegiate athletics is extremely expensive. Airfares are a big part of the cost. He would like to add more sports, but he doesn't see that in the future for financial reasons. They are awarding athletic scholarships at about a forty-five percent level than what they should be doing. They are trying to find new ways to raise private funds to supplement legislative funds. The future is going to rely on maintaining and improving their level of coaching. It rests on the kind of financing they can receive from the legislature and from private sources.