

Empire 8 Leads Way For NCAA symposium on hazing

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ROCHESTER, NY (The Empire 8) - The 2008 NCAA Convention will feature a half-day symposium on hazing entitled "A Commitment to Action" that was proposed by the Empire 8 and features conference commissioner Chuck Mitrano as the event's moderator. The summit, which will take place on January 10 in Nashville, will offer athletic and university administrators, coaches, and student-athletes a forum to discuss hazing issues. The idea is to focus on effective ways to bring about change on campuses across the nation. The initial proposal for the event was presented to the NCAA by Mitrano and Empire 8 President Dr. Charles Edmondson of Alfred University in January of this year. Mitrano then lobbied conferences and institutions in all divisions of the NCAA to show their support of the event which led to its approval. "The behavior of student-athletes is highly visible and often highly influential with other students," Dr. Edmondson said. "It is doubly important, then, for all of us to address hazing in intercollegiate athletics." The proposal talked about the seriousness of hazing as a student-athlete welfare issue which has significant physical and psychological impact on young men and women. Mitrano hopes that this will be the start of hazing themes and sessions as part of the NCAA Student-Athlete and National Leadership Programs as well. "This is a groundbreaking event and well deserving of its prominent emphasis within the 2008 NCAA Convention," he said. "We hope it will raise the level of awareness on hazing and compel membership to action." "The NCAA is excited about this opportunity to bring such high caliber hazing prevention experts to the NCAA Convention to assist our membership in proactively addressing this reality that can be so damaging to student-athlete well-being," said Mary Wilfert, NCAA Associate Director for Health and Safety. "We are grateful to the Empire 8 Conference for its advocacy in support of the Hazing Prevention Summit, and for its leadership in assuring the summit will provide valuable useful resources to support a true commitment to action." The NCAA is producing a hazing prevention handbook that will be published later this year with the idea of defining hazing and specifically what types of activities are considered hazing. Mitrano hopes the combination of the summit and resources like the manual will inspire those on campuses to educate all those involved with athletics on the dangers of hazing as well as positive leadership and team-bonding alternatives. "We all must do our best to constantly educate our young men and women about the many harms of hazing and this summit will provide all the resources and information needed to develop great programs and policies," Mitrano said. "This is going to be an outstanding event and we are proud to be a catalyst in making it happen." The Empire 8 will continue its focus on hazing issues at its own Student-Athlete Summit less than a month after the NCAA Convention. That event features guest speakers and brings representatives from each institution who are charged with bringing back action plans on various student-athlete welfare issues to their own campus. School representatives at the summit include members of SAAC, CHAMPS/Life Skills, and Student Athlete Mentor programs as well as advisors, administrators, and coaches. The summit at the NCAA Convention will feature many sessions including a review of current institutional policies and best practices, a panel of student-athletes and coaches discussing the current issues and the foremost hazing experts. One of the key presenters will be Dr. Norman Pollard, Dean of Students at Empire 8 member Alfred University. Dr. Pollard was one of the two key researchers in the Alfred Study completed in 2000 which remains the most extensive study on athletics hazing. Professor Elizabeth Allan of the University of Maine, Orono, will report on a current national survey investigating hazing practices across a range of student groups. Another speaker will be Cornell University Director of Mental Health Initiatives Tim Marchell, who spoke at an Empire 8 Student-Athlete Advisory Committee meeting last December. In addition to involving administrators, coaches, and student-athletes, Mitrano believes it is critical to include various portions of campus life from presidents to those who work in student affairs and campus health services. "The more broad-based the participation, the better because we can learn from other areas of our campuses and enhance those relationships in a constructive way which benefits students well being," he said.