

IIT looking into making transition from NAIA to NCAA DIII

By Graeme Port
SPORTS EDITOR

Last week, President Anderson confirmed that the school is currently looking into the prospect of moving the university's varsity sports program from the NAIA to the NCAA DIII level. "We're thinking about it," explained Anderson, "but there are a lot of things that have to fall into place, and the timing is totally uncertain. If we decide to do it, it could take many years before we are ready to make the transition. It's certainly not something that's going to happen in the near future."

But what exactly does this mean?

The two main athletic associations for four-year academic institutions in the United States are the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) and the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA). The NCAA is the larger association of the two and represents the bigger universities and colleges, whilst the NAIA is the smaller association that represents the smaller universities and colleges in the nation. The divisions within the NCAA are broken down purely by the size of the academic institution, not the standard of the athletic teams; there is no demotion or promotion within the divisions, as each is a separate entity.

The NCAA DI is the most prestigious level for varsity athletics, due to the fact that the schools have more resources - which, for the most part, sees them attract the top athletes in the nation. With the big four American sports - baseball, basketball, football, and ice hockey - the level of competition is at a significantly higher standard than at the DII, DIII, or NAIA level. However, outside these sports the level of competition between the divisions is far more even. To take soccer as an example, many teams within the NAIA, and DII, regularly compete against DI teams and defeat them.

The only other major difference of note between the four separate levels of athletic competition is the fact that the NCAA DIII - the division that IIT is currently looking into join-

ing - is the only level that does not allow its institutions to hand out athletic scholarships. This is significant for two reasons. The first is that talented athletes who are good enough to attain athletic scholarships usually don't consider DIII as a valid option, as they can attain athletic scholarship money at the DI, DII, or the NAIA level. The second is that athletic departments within DIII have far fewer international athletes, as they find it extremely difficult to attract internationals due to the fact that they, again, can't grant athletic scholarships. Evidence of this can clearly be seen by viewing the number of international athletes within departments at the division III level. Of the 22 division III schools in Illinois, the average number of international athletes is just 4; IIT currently has 25. President Anderson acknowledged this potential loss of international athletes but stressed that other interests come into play. "It could have a downside effect, I guess," he explained, "but we do need to look at the benefits for our entire student body."

So are there any other major problems with making the move? The simple answer to this question is yes. The most glaring negative is that once a school announces its intention to make the transition into the NCAA they can't compete in any post-season competition for a four year period. This means that freshman athletes that joined the school in the first year of the four-year transition would not be able to compete in any post-season play during their entire collegiate career. This, obviously, would make it extremely difficult for the departments' coaches to attract athletes to the school, which would severely lower the standards of the universities' varsity sports teams. Another negative would be that the school would have to find a conference within the NCAA DIII that would accept us. If the school was not granted immediate acceptance into an NCAA DIII conference, then we would have to either operate as an independent, which is expensive, or remain in the NAIA, where our teams would have to compete without schol-



arship athletes against universities that would have a multitude.

Given this significant list of cons, what then are the major benefits for students?

A major positive that President Anderson feels would come from making the transition is that the school would be competing against like-minded institutions. "We're currently playing schools in the NAIA that are not similar to us," he explained. "There are between 250-300 NAIA colleges and universities, and of those, only 17 have an accredited engineering college. We, of course, are a technical school with an engineering college. So we're currently competing against colleges and universities that are not similar to us. I think the transition would give our athletes a chance to connect with other athletes of a similar academic background." Another positive that the President feels would benefit the school is that the university would be competing against schools with similar high academic admission standards. "Our requirements for admission to the university are more stringent than a lot of the other NAIA schools," he explained. "This often puts us at a disadvantage, as we're looking at a smaller group of applicants than the schools that we are competing against." A third benefit that the president envisages is the opportunity to get students, along with the sports department, more interested in varsity sports by competing against similar academic insti-

tutions. "The chance to build rivalries with schools that are more academically similar to us will hopefully see our students get into it a little bit more," he stressed. Other positives for students that would come from making the transition into DIII are that the university would have to both increase its number of varsity sports teams, and improve the standard of the schools athletic facilities; both of which would see the need for considerable financial investment.

So do the pros (competing against similar institutions, competing against schools with similar admission levels, building rivalries with similar schools, increasing the number of varsity teams, and improving athletic facilities) outweigh the cons (lowering the standard of the schools athletic teams, lowering the number of international athletes, going without post season competition for four years, and possibly being stuck in limbo as the school waits for NCAA DIII acceptance)? President Anderson feels that they do. "There are pros and cons but I think you can get over it," he explained. "I feel it would be a more enriching experience for our student athletes, and for the students who are not varsity athletes at IIT."

Only time will tell, however, whether the school decides to make the transition; and, if they do, whether it proves to be successful or not.

Tai Chi: the ultimate stress reducer

By Ashlie Ingold
STAFF WRITER

Tai Chi is a stress reducing martial art form focused on balancing Ying and Yang. The instructor, Paul Channic, has been featured in 65 Alive, a newspaper focused on senior citizens, in an article describing how Tai Chi is not about causing pain to benefit the body and mind - rather, it's about listening to the body and making its movements flow together. Earlier this week, I asked Paul a few questions about his teachings:

How long have you been instructing Tai Chi?

I've been teaching full time for almost 7 years now. Before that I was working a job in the 'corporate world' and teaching Tai Chi part time as the schedule allowed. December of 2004 is when I made the transition into being a full time Tai Chi instructor.

How long have you been instructing at IIT?

If memory serves correctly I started in September of 2009.

What do you like about instructing Tai Chi here?

It is a pleasure to meet and interact with students of various cultural backgrounds. The ones who have come to Tai Chi class have been very open-minded and sincerely interested in finding out what the Art of Tai Chi is, how it is practiced and the benefits it offers.

What are the benefits of Tai Chi and how does it reduce stress? Well, I'm not really all that good on 'how' questions, but it seems to me that because Tai Chi is a natural and effortless discipline that helps people to enter a true state of relaxation, that when the body really does relax it just tends to function better. Relaxation helps the whole system function more efficiently; mentally, physically and spiritually. Benefits can include, but are by no means limited to, increased flexibility, better concentration, lowered blood pressure, more restful sleep and just an overall increase of confidence and well-being.

How did you get into Tai Chi?

The short answer would have to be 'by accident'. The long answer would be too lengthy for your article. Suffice it to say that the Universe gets us all where we need to be if we just keep ourselves open, willing and flexible.

Do you teach outside of IIT and where?

This is my schedule from my website. Also, please feel free to use any information, quotes, etc. that you may find there. <http://chantaichi.wordpress.com/tai-chi-class-schedule/>

Tai Chi is offered Mondays at 9 p.m. and Wednesdays at 1 p.m. at Keating Athletic Center.



Photo courtesy of Melanie Koto