

Committee on Athletics Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, February 21, 2024 Meeting #4 – In-Person/Zoom

Present: Chris Karadjov, Arlene Walter, Andre Achacon, Madeleine Liseblad, Bobby Smitheran, Sandra Shirley, Milton Ordonez, Damian Zavala, Nick MacRae, Kurt Escobar, Terry Robertson, Kevin Valenzuela, Khue Duong, Larissa Santos, Maureen Torrez, Michael Solt, and Kimberly Farrell

1. **Call to Order** at 3:01 p.m.
2. **Meeting agenda approved.**
3. **Approval of minutes** from November 15: Minutes approved.

4. **Report from Nick McRae, Associate Head Coach, Men's Volleyball**

Nick McRae introduced himself. He is a CSULB graduate, and it is his 12th year as a coach here.

The men's volleyball team is currently ranked #1 in the country. The Big West conference will take place in April and we're hosting the national championships the first week of May.

Nick wants to continue building relationships, both on campus and in the community, for the benefit of his players. He has three "asks:"

- a) International relationships and support - the team has athletes from several countries. It would be great to connect them with others on campus/in the community.
- b) Faculty relationships – men's volleyball top recruiting tier is CSULB, USC, UCLA and Stanford. At CSULB, we work on personal connections for student-athletes in the recruiting process. For example, Dean Michael Solt has been active during recruiting visits. It would be great to have more faculty involved.
- c) Community relationships – we need more community connections to help student-athletes grow holistically (physically, mentally, spiritually), and in their leadership skills.

Kimberly Farrell responded to Nick McRae's request for ideas on how to build attendance. Her ideas included:

1. Host a pre-MVB match event at the LBSU Alumni center to engage alumni and then attend the game after the alumni networking event.
2. She also suggested having a special keynote speaker in attendance pre- match to increase attendance.

Note: Kimberly Farrell also sent a draft marketing plan on how to engage students, various departments at LBSU, the community and alumni to support men's VB (see draft of ideas given to men's VB, post COA meeting).

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Kimberly Farrell suggested having prior MVB Hall of Fame winners come for pre-March meet and greets, networking or a keynote to gain support in attendance at MVB games.

Sandra Shirley discussed how well men's volleyball players do in the classroom; they are one of the top teams academically.

Chris Karadjov asked about international recruitment strategies. Nick McRae said it is word of mouth; we have a good culture, good support system, but don't strive to become an all-international program. Bobby Smitheran said they are intentional in recruiting, had a foreign tour this summer.

5. **Report from Bobby Smitheran, CSULB Executive Director of Athletics**

Men's basketball are 17-9 on the season, and on a four-game winning streak. They are heading into conference tournament with good momentum.

Women's basketball are 10-14. They have a new coach and are adjusting to a new way of playing.

The NIL (Name, Image Likeness) Collective is hosting a gala to raise funds for men's volleyball. The goal of the collective is to connect players with local businesses.

Baseball kicked off their first home series. They have had good crowds, and have an interim head coach.

Softball is picked to finish second in the conference. They are playing a difficult schedule at the start of the season. Softball will be on national television on March 30 (against CSU Northridge).

Currently 14 of our 19 teams are competing. During the fall semester, student-athletes did well academically; 41 athletes earned a 4.0. Sandra Shirley said 362 athletes earned honors in 2023; 125 earned honors both in spring and fall. The Bickerstaff Academic Center provides team-based study hall and study hall pods. They also have at-risk study halls with students who have early warning issues.

The Nike contract has been re-upped for another five years. Bobby Smitheran thanked Milton Ordonez and his team for their help. Recruits want to be at a Nike school; we have

a good contract. Bobby also mentioned the Hall of Fame inductions. Arlene Walter commented how tight connection between coach and athlete is, even after years apart.

Athletics is currently engaged in two larger projects, utilizing two companies. They are looking at creating collateral for fundraising purposes. This includes mapping out a future vision for the athletic department. In addition, they are doing a study on renovating Blair Field, paying close attention to the facility's charm; we don't want to lose the charm, but need to enhance and bring it up to date. Athletics is also waiting for input on how to reconstruct some of the Pyramid to fix leaks. The timeline for these projects varies.

Athletics is looking at revenue generating events. For example, the Area Code Baseball Games are back. Over 200 prep baseball players will descent on Long Beach. It's a good economic drive for the city and a good recruiting tool for the school.

Athletics had their first-ever student-athlete leadership council. Athletes with diverse backgrounds were selected. It's a space for the student-athletes to bring concerns and for the athletic department to share their thoughts and vision. Arlene Walter wondered if each team has one person. Bobby Smitheran said they had over 40 in attendance; some teams sent more than one student-athlete.

There are several legal threats to the NCAA intercollegiate athletics model. For example, NIL lawsuits and Dartmouth being sued by athletes who want to be considered employees. The Big West conference has issued a White Paper showing we are not commercial enterprises. Chris Karadjov asked how an employee model would affect us. Bobby Smitheran said we would not be able to afford all current sports. Milton Ordonez mentioned we're a union institution. Bobby discussed how NIL and the transfer portal has changed the athletic environment; the Big West is positioning itself as a true amateur-athlete model.

Kimberly Farrell asked why we recruit so many international MVB players (the team currently has 5) instead of using the team headcount to train young men from the USA. She asked if LBSU athletics was concerned about training other countries talent to compete against our American men for the gold in the Olympics. Bobby Smitheran said that is a good question to consider. Then Arlene Walter mentioned that we want to build the LBSU MVB program to be a competitive as possible. Bobby said it's a balance. The women's tennis roster is almost all international. Sandra Shirley said we currently have about 40 international student-athletes.

Andre Achacon is working on ASI-athletics partnerships. Andre asked where we are headed with branding; student-athletes dislike the shark. Bobby Smitheran said we're working on branding. Athletics is The Beach and it is crucial to get student input in the process. Andre asked about the student-athlete council. Bobby said it is more community service oriented and not the same as the leadership committee.

The COA members discussed how to engage the community. Sandra Shirley said athletic events being late in the evening is an issue; we're a commuting campus. Kimberly Farrell

suggested giveaways. Andre Achacon said ASI is working on increasing student attendance at events.

6. **Introductions** - the committee has new members and did brief introductions.

7. **Presentation from Kimberly Farrell, Alumni Association**

Kimberly Farrell played BB for LBSU for four years on an athletic scholarship. She said the experience was fantastic both in sports and academics. Her basketball team over 4 years won 103 games and only lost 27. The team was ranked as high as #2 nationally. They won the WCAA Western Athletic Conference 3 years in a row, went to the Elite 8 twice and the Sweet 16 once. She said with her team she visited 25-50 states by the time she graduated. She was team captain and defensive player of the year her senior year.

Kimberly Farrell shared how the LBSU Business School prepared her well for a successful career. She said she was hired into pharmaceutical sales from in campus interviews. She made President's Club for Astra Zeneca her second year in business. After 16 years in Pharma with 11 career rotations, she started her own company, Unlimited Performance Training, Inc. It is an educational consulting company that for the past 22 years has focused on leadership development for women and people of colors in healthcare. She said LBSU prepared her well with many practical experiences to help her do well in business. She shared her gratitude to the university. She also has her MBA from the University of Notre Dame and an M.Ed. from Loyola University Chicago. Michael Solt said it is always great to hear how alumni are doing. The Business School is trying to make sure students get practical experiences.

8. **Communication** - Chris Karadjov reminded members we can communicate via the email distribution list.

9. **Adjournment:** Meeting ended at 4:26 p.m. The next meeting is March 20.

COA: <https://www.csulb.edu/academic-senate/committee-athletics-coa>

Recurring Zoom link: <https://csulb.zoom.us/j/84550458692>