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**COSIDA'S NEW EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR HAS A PLAN**

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By Gary Brown, *The NCAA News*

John Humenik, who has more than 30 years of experience in the sports public relations and communications industry, officially begins his tenure tomorrow as the first executive director for the College Sports Information Directors of America.

CoSIDA is a 2,300-member national organization composed of the sports public relations, communications and information professionals throughout all levels of collegiate athletics. The organization has relied on volunteer committee service to administer day-to-day operations in the past, including oversight of an annual convention.

While that committee structure will continue, CoSIDA selected Humenik in January to provide broader and more strategic leadership. CoSIDA membership president Charles Bloom of the Southeastern Conference said while the previous structure managed well enough, the membership needed someone to provide a big-picture perspective.

"John was unmatched in his approach to the position, and he has strong opinions about the industry and where the organization should be going. Having been involved as a board member and in some of our efforts like the Academic All-America program, and also being in private business, he was able to use some of those past experiences and give us insight into a more strategic direction for the organization," Bloom said. The NCAA News asked Humenik, who has been SID at Princeton, Michigan and Florida, to talk about that strategic direction, and about how the sports information industry can increase its value in intercollegiate athletics operations in the years ahead.

Q: Why is it important for CoSIDA to have an executive director, and what prompted you to seek the position?

A: I sought the post due to my career and life-long passion for collegiate sports public and media relations, the dedicated people of this profession and organization, and the services and roles that CoSIDA and its members have played in so many positive ways with regard to the growth of college sports over the years. It's a true honor to be chosen as the organization's first executive director, and I so much want to play a significant role in helping this profession, organization and its people – who I feel rank among the most noble, industrious and dedicated in all of college sports management – to advance its standing and status within the collegiate athletics community. Another reason is that as chair of CoSIDA's Academic All-America Committee during the 1980s, I saw first-hand what can indeed be positively achieved for this organization, this profession, its membership and collegiate sports in general when there is a passionate commitment and dedication to a vision of significant advancement. That rewarding experience shaped much of my professional career. I believe that such a focused and active strategic approach can take this organization, profession and its membership forward in multiple ways in the future.

Q: Changes in technology over time have affected how SIDs perform their jobs. Compare SID duties now to those that existed when you entered the profession.

A: Things that once took hours now take minutes, but at the same time there are so many more demands on the SID's time: media-based interest and growth, recruiting/fund-raising/marketing support aspects of the job as well as the time-consuming aspects of Web site management. Time management is complicated further by the demands of all of those constituencies to have everything done immediately.

Q: The number and types of media wanting access to information and athletics personnel have multiplied exponentially over the past two decades. How does that affect day-to-day operations in the sports information department, and how does it affect the ability for the SID to establish meaningful relationships with media entities?

A: There is no question that there has been a significant change with regard to the media relations/services aspect of sports communications.



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When I began in the profession, everything was done via personal and direct phone contact. Today, virtually everything the media is receiving is telecommunications-driven, which means the amount of personal day-to-day contact has suffered. It was easier before the communications-based evolution to “build and establish” relationships, but today that takes a determined effort. Relationship-building/enhancing seems to be much harder than ever, but at the same time it has never been so important. Sports PR folks have always been – and should always be – viewed as the approachable person in an athletics department who can be perceived as part of the solution rather than as part of the problem. During my few years away from direct SID work, I was struck by the fact that both the sports PR and media communities need to work much harder on building and establishing relationships. There are so many issues in sports communications that need to be addressed through collaboration and partnership – that comes only with sound and respectful relationships and understanding.

Q: How does CoSIDA address the needs of its diverse membership, from high-resource Division I institutions to one-person shops at smaller schools?

A: The diversity of our professional membership is a plus in terms of its people and ideas, but it has also made it more difficult for the organization/membership to generate consensus and mobilize to actively deal with issues and challenges. CoSIDA, in my opinion, must develop a management structure that is more in line with what the NCAA did when it went from its Association-wide one-school/one-vote decision-making process to the federated governance structure of today that gives each division/group more autonomy and direct responsibility. I would like to see us move more toward that type of model and thus allow our diverse membership to be empowered to deal with more issues and challenges via a leadership structure that caters to like-minded schools.

Q: Some institutions have changed the dynamic of the SID to be more of a public relations specialist for the athletics department – a much more strategic position than the traditional information-dissemination role of the past. What prompted the change?

A: This is something that had to take place as management of communications-based needs and issues became more demanding and complex. It is a positive step for the sports communication/PR industry as it enables specialists to clearly demonstrate their value to others in the athletics community. This is quite frankly the way it should be, and it is our obligation to assist our members in continuing to make this transformation from seeing themselves not simply as “information directors,” but rather as “strategic information and communications directors.” It is also imperative for us to get more administrators and coaches in intercollegiate athletics to view us in this appropriate manner.

Q: Sports information directors have always been valued for the duties they perform on campus, but as a group, SIDs perhaps have been less involved at the strategic level of NCAA decision-making. In other words, there hasn’t been a defined place in the NCAA governance structure for the collective SID voice to be heard. Ideally, what role would you like CoSIDA to play in NCAA governance matters?

A: I see the need for me/us to continue to work hard at being visible and active with discussion and decisions about communication-based issues that affect our membership and intercollegiate athletics in general. It is imperative for us to build relationships and develop key contacts so that when an issue/challenge/opportunity presents itself that should have input from us, we are in fact in a position to offer it. I very much want us to have representation/voice on committees/task forces that are being put into place by the various national governing bodies to study communication-based issues. On issues that SIDs have background/knowledge/insight, we should be part of the strategic decision-making process, and I will do everything I can with our organizational leadership to make sure that we are active in that regard.

Q: What’s the No. 1 challenge facing the sports information industry today? How can CoSIDA be part of the solution?

A: To me, it is that college athletics needs – now more than ever because of the growing demands and complexities of the job – more well-trained, career-orientated, strategic-thinking professionals in the sports PR/communication industry. At the same time, however, the prevailing belief on the part of many of those current career professionals is that there is not an appropriate level of senior management respect and value appreciation for what they do, and that prevailing attitude is greatly impacting the morale of the people in the profession as well as young people who are considering this as a career. Way too many quality people are leaving the profession as a result of those feelings and it is also impacting our ability to attract more quality young people into the profession. The job SIDs are being asked to execute is more demanding and more complex and should be more valued than ever, but the rate of people leaving the profession is very high, largely because senior management does not value, in many cases, what they do to the degree needed.

Recently I received a letter from Missouri Valley Conference Commissioner Doug Elgin, who wrote, “In our conference we are facing a crisis in our athletics public relations – we cannot keep our good, young professionals long enough. The constant turnover of our SID staff positions has hurt our universities. The new demands of the profession, brought on in part by the rapid advances in our technology, have made the recruitment and retention of our sports public relations staff members a high priority for the Missouri Valley Conference. We need the kind of understanding of the issues faced in this crucial area of intercollegiate athletics. You will have our total support in dealing with this and other issues.” In short, the challenge before me and our organization’s leadership is to get more top-level administrators to understand, as Doug does, that the issues facing us are/will become debilitating issues for college athletics in general if they are not dealt with quickly. Doug and his conference’s leadership “get it” when it comes to understanding what our profession and its people face. Our charge is to get more senior management folks to feel similarly.

Q: What are your short-term goals and objectives as you move into this post?

A: First is to develop a comprehensive strategic plan for the organization and profession that will guide us over the next three to five years. The essence and methodology of that plan is based on seven core principles that have been identified.

We need to ask ourselves when making key decisions whether our actions:

- Advance the profession;
- Advance its professionals;
- Advance and strengthen our organization/professional society;
- Advance establishing a prominent national leadership position within the college athletics community;
- Aid in image building/enhancement within the college athletics community;

- Aid in image building/ enhancement with the profession and its professionals; and
- Ensure that the action(s) positively support the overall strategic plan.

In addition to a strategic plan, I want us to consider an organizational management structure that will enable us to more effectively carry out multiple aspects of that plan. I also want us to be quite visible within the collegiate community in a variety of ways, and to generate fund-raising initiatives that will result in additional revenue streams for the organization so that we can then move forward with other major strategic initiatives in the future, especially as it relates to marketing and continuing-education objectives.

