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Courier-Journal reporter ejected from U of L game

Bennett removed for blogging super-regional

By Rick Bozich

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A Courier-Journal sports reporter had his media credential revoked and was ordered to leave the press box during the NCAA baseball super-regional yesterday because of what the NCAA alleged was a violation of its policies prohibiting live Internet updates from its championship events.

Gene McArtor, a representative of the NCAA baseball committee, approached C-J staffer Brian Bennett at the University of Louisville's Jim Patterson Stadium in the bottom of the fifth inning in the U of L-Oklahoma State game. McArtor told him that blogging from an NCAA championship event "is against NCAA policies. We're revoking the credential and need to ask you to leave the stadium."

Courier-Journal executive editor Bennie L. Ivory challenged the NCAA's action last night and said the newspaper would consider an official response.

"It's clearly a First Amendment issue," Ivory said. "This is part of the evolution of how we present the news to our readers. It's what we did during the Orange Bowl. It's what we did during the NCAA basketball tournament. It's what we do."

U of L circulated a memo on the issue from Jeramy Michiaels, the NCAA's manager of broadcasting, before Friday's first super-regional game. It said blogs are considered a "live representation of the game" and that any blog containing action photos or game reports would be prohibited.

"In essence, no blog entries are permitted between the first pitch and the final out of each game," the memo said.

Bennett had filed Internet reports from U of L's NCAA Tournament games at the Columbia (Mo.) Regional and did so from the first two games of the super-regional.

He was told before yesterday's game by U of L assistant sports information director Sean Moth that he was violating NCAA policy by filing periodic reports for The Courier-Journal's Web site, courier-journal.com.

After consulting with his editors, Bennett filed a report at 4:12 p.m. after the top of the first inning and added 15 more reports before he was asked to leave. U of L won 20-2 to advance to the College World Series in Omaha, Neb.

"It's a real question that we're being deprived of our right to report within the First Amendment from a public facility," said Jon L. Fleischaker, the newspaper's attorney.

"Once a player hits a home run, that's a fact. It's on TV. Everybody sees it. (The NCAA) can't copyright that fact. The blog wasn't a simulcast or a recreation of the game. It was an analysis."

During the middle of yesterday's game, Courier-Journal representatives were told by two members of the U of L athletic staff that if the school did not revoke Bennett's credential it would jeopardize the school's chances of hosting another NCAA baseball event.

"If that's true, that's nothing short of extortion and thuggery," Ivory said. "We will be talking to our attorneys (today) to see where we go from here."

Said U of L athletic director Tom Jurich: "As an NCAA institution, we must abide by all NCAA rules, including those in hosting NCAA events. Our staff sought an amicable solution to this situation from many angles.

"It's unfortunate that it led to the actions that were taken. This is not an issue that should mar the most fantastic day for college baseball in this state."

McArtor said he did not "think it serves any purpose" to answer questions and declined further comment.

U of L's associate athletic director for media relations, Kenny Klein, referred questions to Michiaels, who did not return a telephone call yesterday.

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