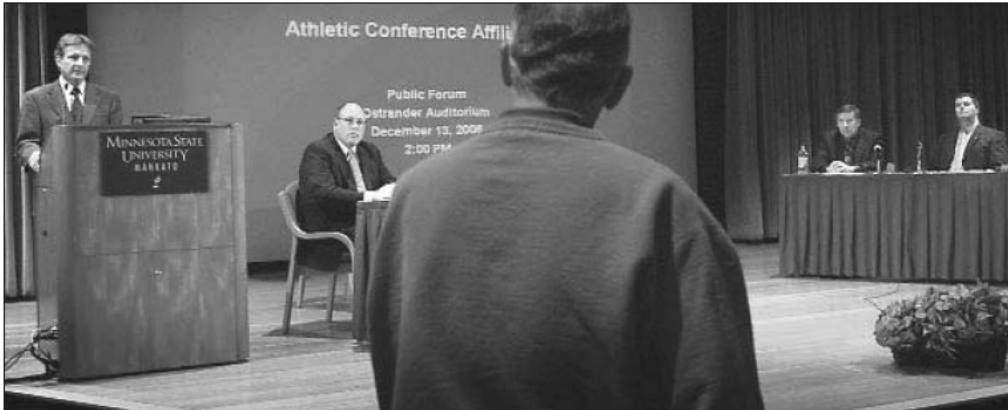




Sports

FUTURE OF MAVERICKS ATHLETICS DISCUSSED AT OPEN FORUM



John Cross

MSU President Richard Davenport (left) fields an audience question during an open forum on the future of MSU intercollegiate athletics held Wednesday at MSU's Ostrander Auditorium. Vice President of Finance Rick Straka (sitting, left), Vice President Dean Trauger and athletic director Kevin Buisman (far right) made up the panel for the forum.

RUEDA: Division II, NSIC probably best route to go

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State will remain Division II and attempt to join the NSIC. All things considered, that's probably the best way to go.

As attractive as going Division I might be from a visibility standpoint, it would require some very distasteful decisions.

I believe there are only two financially viable Division I options. One would involve keeping football, basketball and hockey and cutting just about all the other men's programs. The other would involve cutting football along with a sprinkling of other men's and women's sports.

I can't see Davenport pulling the trigger on either of those two alternatives.

Whichever way he goes, we should know within two weeks.

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MSU student senate president Gabe Afolayan also expressed concern that the additional \$2 million Davenport said it would take annually to go Division I might come at the expense of other improvements and upgrades that have already been promised to other areas of the college.

Baseball alumnus Bob Bresnahan was a strong opponent of the Division I move, saying MSU should not try to be what it isn't — it should continue to be a successful Division II institution both athletically and academically.

So now, Davenport has to make a decision. It could come as early as next week or the week after Christmas. It will almost surely come before Jan. 1, since that's the deadline for MSU to officially apply for admission to the Northern Sun Conference.

My guess is, he'll announce that Minnesota

The consensus is ... there is no consensus. Minnesota State University President Richard Davenport, along with three other MSU administrators, held an open forum for students, faculty, staff and community members Wednesday to discuss the future of intercollegiate athletics at MSU.



JIM RUEDA
The Free Press

Forum not much help to Davenport

After an hour-long presentation on the different options president Davenport is considering, the forum was open to audience members for questions and comments.

If Davenport was looking for some help in which way to go, he didn't get it.

The audience was divided on whether MSU should elevate its athletic programs to Division I status, or remain Division II and seek entrance into the Northern Sun Intercollegiate Conference.

A contingent of football players appeared to favor the Division I option. Community member and MSU basketball alumnus Mark Olson also appeared to favor Division I and wondered if Division II would even still exist in 10 years.

Others, such as Joe Walsh, a professor in MSU's department of human performance, suggested going Division I would be tantamount to committing financial suicide and would negatively impact the academic side of the university.

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Please see RUEDA, Page D3

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(Division II) conferences."

Bob Bresnahan, who played baseball at Minnesota State from 1978-81, said that Division II is the obvious choice for the future, given the university's success and financial viability.

"It would be a foolish decision, financially, to (go Division I)

because that would put (Minnesota State) in dire financial straits, with the possibility of moving backward in the future," Bresnahan said. "The right thing to be is who we are, that's to be the best in Division II. We're a regional institution, not a national institution."

No decision — yet

MSU officials must choose between staying in Division II or moving to Division I

By Chad Courrier
Free Press Staff Writer

MANKATO — Tony Hunter heard Minnesota State President Richard Davenport and other university officials say that no decision has been made on the future of the Mavericks' athletic programs, but he's not so sure.

"Even though they didn't say much, I feel they're pushing us to go (Division II)," said Hunter, a sophomore on the Mavericks' football team. "We were promised certain things when we signed here. I don't feel like this decision was based on talking with student athletes, it's all about money."

Davenport held an open forum Wednesday at Minnesota State, with about 300 students, coaches, staff and community members listening to information and asking questions. The crux of the problem facing Minnesota State athletics is that, since the demise of the North Central Conference is imminent, should the university stay at Division II and make application to a new conference, most likely the Northern Sun Intercollegiate Conference or move up to Division I and seek membership in some conference, most likely the

Mid-Continent Conference.

Davenport emphasized that no decision has been made, but a possible deadline of Jan. 1 exists if the university wants to apply to the Northern Sun.

Staying Division II within the Northern Sun would require a reduction of 30 scholarships, 15 on both the men's and women's side. For the men, 12 scholarships would gradually be phased out in football, though Davenport said that he would fight that all current scholarships would be honored through the athlete's time at Minnesota State.

University officials said that research shows that a reclassification to Division I would likely cost at least an additional \$2 million per year.

Hunter worries that the university will settle for the Northern Sun instead of trying to raise the money for Division I or to handle the increased travel costs of finding another Division II conference.

"I want to stay competitive, and the Northern Sun isn't as competitive (in football)," Hunter said. "If they can't raise the money to go Division I, they could get the money for one of the other