

August 1, 1968

Open letter to the Black Student Organization, representing the black athletes at Iowa State University

From: Iowa State University Athletic Council

The sequence of events that began with the meeting on May 20, 1968 and the submission of the list of 8 grievances has generated considerable interest, has created discussion and, in our opinion, implemented a better understanding of a previously unappreciated problem. While it is difficult to imagine that anything good ever comes from a situation where emotions are strained, deadlines given and people take sides, one important fact remains, the grievances that you submitted have been thoroughly discussed, considered and implemented wherever possible. These grievances were, in our opinion, indicative of a much broader problem that has existed in our community for some time. It was appropriate for you to bring these concerns to the Athletic Council which has approximately one-third of the total population of black students at Iowa State engaged in its programs.

The Athletic Council, in all of its meetings with students, athletes, coaches, faculty, employees, alumni, friends and concerned citizenry, has approached the problems brought to it with an open mind and with resolve to find, if possible, a fair solution to the problems that face the black athlete on the Iowa State University campus. If this had not been the case, the issue would have been closed on May 20, 1968 when the Council was served with grievances defined in the presentation as demands, and interpreted by many as an ultimatum.

Each of us on the Council has been cognizant of the importance of giving this problem careful, considered attention. We knew that for some black athletes

the decisions reached, the way in which they were stated and interpreted, might make the difference between an advanced education, a respectable job, a good income or a less fortunate way of life. In addition, we were concerned for all the young men who participate in intercollegiate athletics, and the opportunity that athletics provide for those yet to come. We regard intercollegiate athletics as a vehicle, one of the many at Iowa State University that provides young people today the opportunity to acquire the tools to be the builders in the democratic society of tomorrow.

Any society conceived as ours must continue to be concerned with people first as human beings and further, in the Council's case, as students and then as athletes.

Those of us on the Council have become sensitive to the feelings which you have and appreciate tensions to which many of you have been exposed. As we have stated, we will do everything in our power, as a representative body of the faculty, alumni and students, to protect your rights as individuals in the program of your choosing. It is our prayerful hope that from this dialogue might come a better understanding of man as a being, the product of his inherited characteristics and his environment.

Inasmuch as public debate on the grievances you submitted has continued to date, the Athletic Council, believing that much which has occurred has been reported in parts and parcels and has not given a complete picture of all that has occurred or been accomplished, takes this occasion to review developments of the last two months as they relate to this issue. The Council also hopes in this way to clarify certain points on which there apparently has been lack of communication or misinterpretation.

on the campus that will be reflected in improved human relationships. The Athletic Council hopes and believes that increased sensitivity in this respect will prevail in the intercollegiate athletic program.

The Athletic Council recommended the employment of a black counselor as an initial response to an expressed need. A person whom both the Athletic Council and the Office of Student Affairs feel to be very outstanding has accepted this position. Due to commitments at his place of present employment and the necessity for approval by the Board of Regents actual announcement has been delayed.

The Ad Hoc committee asked that departments review their policies with regard to absences from class and provide statements of policy for the guidance of students and faculty. Dr. George Christensen, Vice President for Academic Affairs, already has implemented this suggestion with a communication to the various college deans.

The Ad Hoc committee expressed the view that athletes have freedom comparable to that afforded all male students in choice of housing. The Athletic Council, recognizing that it would be impossible to change this policy by August 1, 1968 recommends that the Chairman immediately appoint a committee to investigate the establishment of a policy and regulations relating to off-campus housing. Although various alternatives exist, the Council urges consideration of a choice for off-campus housing be given to those athletes who have proved themselves academically.

The Ad Hoc committee commended the Athletic Council for its action in seeking increases in incidental allowances. This recommendation was transmitted to Mr. Walter Byers, Executive Director, NCAA on June 18, 1968. Mr. Byers has since indicated that it will be placed on the agenda of the Association at its first

On June 27, the Council, after exhaustive study and review, addressed itself to the grievances brought out by your group as follows:

The Council indicated that it would (1) seek to increase the monthly allowance for incidental expenses for athletes on grants-in-aid, (2) that it would address the black students as black athletes or Afro-Americans, (3) that for this coming year existing housing policies would be continued but that alternatives would be explored, (4) that standard procedures would be developed for notifying instructors concerning out-of-town trips for athletes and also of instances where injuries might cause class absence and (5) that steps be taken to hire a black counselor and administrator to be employed jointly by the Athletic Council and the Office of Student Affairs.

In response to other grievances, the Council said that its intensive investigation failed to reveal any planned or knowing discrimination on the part of athletic personnel brought into question. With regard to the hiring of a "black coach in each major sport at Iowa State," the Council said that its "guidelines in selecting the...coaching staff at Iowa State will continue to be to find the best possible person...and not because of the color of his skin."

Previously, on June 23, the Council distributed to the coaching staff a Code of Ethics which would become a part of the operating policy of Intercollegiate Athletics at Iowa State University. This Code recognized the particular problems under discussion and specifically outlined its opposition to discriminatory practices under any circumstances.

Subsequently, President Parks asked an Ad Hoc committee of the Human Relations Committee "not only to continue to pursue its on-going function of investigating any allegations of discriminatory treatment on a total campus basis but to take on the more positive job of building a University-wide educational program whose purpose is to develop better understanding and greater human sympathy."

As is well known, the Ad Hoc committee found no basis for allegations of planned discrimination on the part of athletic personnel. The Ad Hoc committee did conclude, and we think no doubt correctly, that prejudice by individual action exists on the campus and that in other cases quite innocent acts have been misinterpreted as being racially prejudiced. The Ad Hoc committee expressed the belief that the recent discussions may have started a re-structuring of attitudes

meeting this fall. Supporting data to substantiate this need will be assembled by the Council and given to its representative for presentation.

The Ad Hoc committee amplified and supported the request, previously granted, that black students be referred to as "black" or "Afro-Americans."

Finally the Ad Hoc committee recommended "immediate appointment of a Black coach in football and aggressive recruiting of Black coaches in other sports."

The "immediate" initiation of such a policy cannot be undertaken without the absolute violation of previous commitments. The Athletic Council recognizes the advantages for ethnic groups to have persons with whom to identify. Thus the Council will encourage consideration of qualified black coaches for appointment to the intercollegiate athletic staff at Iowa State University in the future. We feel that a greater representation of all minority groups is desirable in academic departments as well as in athletics. However, it rejects the thesis that this be accomplished under conditions of confrontation and duress. It would be contrary to the very principles of academic freedom for the administration to demand that all minority groups be represented in each department, regardless of professional qualification.

The By-laws under which the Athletic Council functions specify that "a head coach may choose his assistants with the approval of the Executive Committee of the Athletic Council." Our head coaches have all been hired with the understanding that they would have this freedom of choice which is so clearly defined in our By-laws and, for that matter, is a recognized principle of academic freedom. It is for this reason that the Council finds it impossible to accept

the recommendation of the Ad Hoc committee for an "immediate appointment of a Black coach in football."

We defend the right of the head coach to use his discretion and freedom as a professional educator in the selection of qualified staff members, a practice followed by the other departments on the Iowa State University campus. If a head coach is "forced" to hire a black coach "immediately," it would be a direct infringement of his academic freedom, a violation of his appointment and a restriction of his opportunity to recruit freely. The Council, therefore, reaffirms the policy that the employment of assistant coaches in the athletic program must properly remain the decision of the head coaches, with the approval of the Athletic Director, the Athletic Council and the Administration.

We believe further, that it is the responsibility of the Council to recommend to the Administration the best qualified coaches, regardless of color, religion or ethnic background. As we have stated previously, the Council has not opposed the hiring of qualified black coaches. We refuse, however, to be bound by a quota system. We further believe that the threat of boycott is inconsistent with the methods for the solution of the current problem which the academic community faces.

We have appreciated the support of the administration in regard to the principles under which we operate, and the role that this body plays in the inter-collegiate athletic program at Iowa State University.

In conclusion the Athletic Council would like to point out that University staff and faculty members, including the administration and the various committees, have spent literally hundreds of hours on this delicate matter during the last two months. In our judgment the University has reacted responsibly and with

sensitivity. It defended its staff members against charges which, in the words of the Ad Hoc committee, "were of a nature difficult, if not impossible, to prove outside the processes of the courts." It said flatly that it would not tolerate boycotts or ultimatums. At the same time it has with sincerity and good faith explored and taken steps to alleviate points of tension which have obviously been the source of frustration and misunderstanding.

It is the Council's honest conviction that black students can, with honor, continue at Iowa State secure in the knowledge that the intercollegiate athletic program is and will continue to be sensitive to the needs of minority groups.