

NCAA, allies spend nearly \$1M lobbying

By Ben Nuckols
The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — As Congress considers whether to allow college athletes to receive endorsement money, the NCAA and its allies spent nearly \$1 million last year lobbying lawmakers to shape any reforms to the organization's liking.

The NCAA last fall said it would allow athletes to "benefit from the use of their name, image and likeness" and is crafting rules to put in place for its 1,100 member schools in coming months. But the organization has turned to Congress to step in as more and more states follow the lead of California, where a law set to take effect in 2023 clears the way for athletes to earn endorsement money.

Organizations representing athletes have no paid lobbyists, leading to concern among some reform advocates that the deep-pocketed NCAA is shaping the debate. The NCAA's pressure campaign comes as the Senate prepares for a committee hearing Tuesday on player compensation.

"The NCAA is going to fight for the status quo," said Ramogi Huma, executive director of the National College Players Association.

Rep. Mark Walker, a North Carolina Republican who introduced a bill last spring that would guarantee players the right to earn money



In this April 4 file photo, NCAA President Mark Emmert answers questions at a news conference at the Final Four college basketball tournament in Minneapolis. [MATT YORK/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS]

from their name, image and likeness, told The Associated Press "there's no question" the NCAA's lobbying has been effective.

"The NCAA is already at a position of power," Walker said. "Otherwise you would have seen progress. ... There's been little to nothing done in this arena, and had the student-athlete had proper representation on the federal level, we'd be much further down this path than we are."

The NCAA spent \$690,000 last year on in-house and outside lobbyists, according to disclosure forms reviewed by the AP. That's the most the organization has spent on lobbying in any year since

2014. And it got some help from two of the Power Five conferences.

The Atlantic Coast Conference hired lobbyists last year for the first time, giving at least \$210,000 to the law firm DLA Piper and another lobbyist, Tom Korologos, to influence Congress on "legislative and regulatory proposals affecting intercollegiate athletes," disclosure forms show.

The Big 12 Conference has worked with lobbyist Kenny Hulshof, a former Republican congressman from Missouri, for several years, but it paid him less than \$5,000 per quarter before ramping up its spending last year, records

show. In the last six months of 2019, the Big 12 paid Hulshof \$90,000 — some of it specifically to address Walker's bill.

The NCAA and the two conferences alone spent \$990,000 on lobbying last year.

The NCAA's ability to spend big on lobbying is a symptom of the larger problem, according to advocates for player compensation: a college sports system that generates \$14 billion a year from athletes who are compensated only in scholarships and other education-specific aid.

"The NCAA is a well-heeled organization and college athletes, not by accident, don't have the kind of organizational power or influence that the NCAA does," Sen. Chris Murphy, a Connecticut Democrat who supports giving players more earning power, told the AP. "You have to be more assiduous in soliciting the opinion of athletes than you do the NCAA."

The NCAA and its allies have a big reason to increase their spending: If Congress does nothing, athlete-friendly laws like the one in California will take effect around the country. Huma said 28 states are considering action to grant additional rights to college players.

Tom McMillen, president and CEO of the LEAD1 Association, a trade group for Division I athletic directors, shrugged off the influence of lobbying.

LOCAL NOTES

Garden of Life to sponsor marathon

Special to The Post

Garden of Life is the new title sponsor of The Palm Beaches Marathon with this year's race in downtown West Palm Beach set for Sunday, Dec. 13.

The Palm Beach Gardens-based natural supplements company signed a three-year agreement to sponsor the marathon. Meanwhile, Garden of Life's SunRun 5K, traditionally held in April at PGA National Resort & Spa, will be part of the Garden of Life Palm Beaches Marathon weekend, running from Dec. 11-13.

The race weekend will include the 5K and 10K runs on the morning of Dec. 12 and then the featured Marathon, Half Marathon and Marathon Relay on Dec. 13 at 6 a.m.

A Health and Fitness Expo will coincide with packet pickup on Dec. 11-12 at a location to be determined. The Expo will feature the latest in health and fitness products and services, running apparel, and upcoming race information.

"We are excited to add Garden of Life as the title sponsor of The Palm Beaches Marathon," said Ken Kennerly, who also is the Executive Director of The Honda Classic. "We are looking forward to continuing to grow the race not only in our community, but also on an international level."

Garden of Life President Brian Ray said, "This is an opportunity to help grow this great local event and make a larger impact for our charity partner, Special Olympics, which is so important to us."

Early registration is open at \$95 for the Marathon and \$75 for the Half Marathon. The early registration fee for the Sun Run 5K is \$35 and the 10K is \$45.

For information on The Garden of Life Palm Beaches Marathon, visit gardenoflifefemarathon.com.

Trio tied for lead at PGA Stroke Play

Alex Beach of Rye, N.Y., Omar Uresti of Austin, Tex., and Jason Caron of Oyster Bay, N.Y. are tied for the lead at 4-under 140 entering today's final round of the PGA Stroke Play Championship at PGA Golf Club in Port St. Lucie.

They are among nine players within two shots of the lead.

Beach shot a 3-under 69 Monday on the Ryder Course that included four birdies in his last six holes. But he was lamenting the shots that got away.

"It was one of those days where I could be 9-under instead of 4-under," said Beach, a PGA Teaching Professional at Westchester (N.Y.) Country Club who won last year's PGA Professional Championship.

Uresti, the first-round leader, overcame a double bogey on his second hole ("a mud ball that went straight left") by playing his last 16 holes in 4-under for a 71. Uresti is a PGA Life Member who has played in more than 370 PGA Tour events.

Caron birdied three of his first six holes and held on for a 2-under 70 to move into a share of the lead. Caron played on the PGA Tour for two years and, along with Beach, qualified for last year's PGA Championship.

Zac Oakley of Palm City and Jeff Sorenson of Blaine, Minn., are tied for fourth, a shot back at 141. Oakley had a 70 on the Ryder Course, Sorenson a 71.

MARLINS

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lengths the franchise is going to as they try to turn the corner on what has been a rebuild for the last two seasons.

"When they started arriving into South Florida, I got a little higher off the ground each time one of them walked through the door," Marlins president of baseball operations Michael Hill said. "It's why we put in all the hard work, all the tough decisions that we made."

The Marlins added 15 new players to their 40-man roster over the past three months. Nine, including Dickerson, Villar, Aguilar, catcher Francisco Cervelli and Kintzler, came in off-season acquisitions.

That doesn't include the non-roster invites to spring

camp like outfielder Matt Kemp and utility man Sean Rodriguez.

The influx of new faces adds to the team's young core that has been built over the past two years, a group centered around third baseman/right fielder Brian Anderson, pitchers Sandy Alcantara and Caleb Smith, shortstop Miguel Rojas and catcher Jorge Alfaro. There are prospects knocking on the door to make their MLB debut, as well.

Put it all together, and there is bound to be a good share of competition in spring training, which begins Wednesday when pitchers and catchers report to the Roger Dean Chevrolet Stadium complex in Jupiter. The first full-squad practice is Feb. 17.

Is this a playoff team? The odds are against it. Most projections have the Marlins winning between 62 and 70 games.

But improvement and the chance to increase the win column by double digits was the Marlins' plan from the start of the offseason. They're heading into Year 3 of their rebuild that began shortly after the Bruce Sherman and Derek Jeter ownership group took over the franchise.

"All these pieces that we're getting," Rojas said, "it's showing that we're through the worst."

Miami went a combined 120-203 over the first two seasons, a short-term sacrifice at the MLB level as the Marlins restocked a barren farm system and focused on organization depth at the expense of the few big-name players they had to offer.

Now, the Marlins say, there are no more excuses. They have a consensus top-10 farm system. They have players with a considerable amount of big-league experience. They have

up-and-comers who are projected to turn the corner.

Progress isn't a goal anymore. It needs to become apparent.

"If we don't make significant improvements this year," Marlins manager Don Mattingly said, "we're going to be disappointed."

Kintzler, a 10-year MLB veteran and 2017 All-Star, went through a similar juncture that the Marlins are currently in when he was a member of the Minnesota Twins. Minnesota had an MLB-worst 59-103 record during his first season with the club in 2016. They went 85-77 a year later and reached the playoffs as a wild card team.

"You saw a lot of talent, but it was very raw," Kintzler said. "Experience is the best thing for these young guys. Hopefully, they get the learning curve out of the way and can start winning games."

METS

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2. Will he remain healthy throughout the spring?

He'll have to answer those. No. 2 is the first step to a 2020 in which he redeems himself.

3. The Jake Marisnick addition: This offseason was something else for the Mets. Because of that, the Jake Marisnick acquisition feels like ages ago.

The Mets, who moved on from Juan Lagares, sought outfield depth. They feel they achieved it in Marisnick, though his name isn't splashy.

Lagares had -0.7 WAR (wins above replacement) last season, per Baseball Reference, while Marisnick had 1.2. Defensively, he's an upgrade as he had more defensive runs saved (5 to -2) than Lagares last season, according to Fangraphs.

The Mets hope Marisnick isn't a dud on the bench as Lagares was — for the most part — last season.

4. Marcus Stroman ready for 2020: If you're on Twitter,



The Mets' new manager Luis Rojas, center, poses with Mets executive vice president & general manager Brodie Van Wagenen, left, and Mets owner Jeff Wilpon after his introduction at a news conference last month. [BEBETO MATTHEWS/ASSOCIATED PRESS]

you've heard from Marcus Stroman over the past four months.

He's tweeted about how he's ready for the 2020 season. Of course, most players say it.

Stroman's situation might be different, though. He'll be a free agent after this season and, after last year's trade, it took him some time to get his footing. But over his last four starts, he compiled a 1.88 ERA.

Perhaps he can take it to another level. He's an ace-type pitcher at his best.

Let's see how his spring training begins.

5. Did the defense improve? If the Mets want to contend, their defense must improve from 2019, when they were next to last in defensive runs saved, per Fangraphs.

This offseason, the Mets sought to improve in the field. Have they? There's no way to know until they hit the diamond.

Comeback relievers key to success

The Mets' bullpen seems

to possess exciting potential this season. For it to reach the ceiling, though, two relievers need to bounce back — Edwin Diaz and Jeurys Familia.

When evaluating New York's bullpen, a few "ifs" arise. There are always questions, especially before any games have been played. But even at this point, some points seem certain.

Here's one: If Diaz and Familia can't improve upon disappointing 2019 campaigns, the Mets' bullpen might not be much better.

In December, the Mets added Dellin Betances. A couple weeks before, they re-signed Brad Brach. They have six starting pitchers for five spots, and the odd man out could join the bullpen.

All signs point to the unit being a strength in 2020.

But Diaz and Familia must be much better. On Monday, both were positive about the season ahead.

"I think we have a great bullpen," Diaz said through team interpreter Alan Suriel. "I think, at the end of the day, it's going to come down to health. If we're healthy, we're going to be one of the best bullpens in the league."

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