

NCAA may expand flag ban

COLUMBIA, S.C. (AP) - The NCAA will consider expanding its ban of championship events in South Carolina, possibly disallowing baseball and football teams from hosting postseason games, because the Confederate flag is displayed on Statehouse grounds.

Robert Vowels Jr., head of the NCAA's Minority Opportunities and Interest Committee, said his group received a request from the Black Coaches Association about widening the ban. Predetermined postseason events, such as basketball regionals and cross-country championships are now barred from South Carolina sites.

"I think it's something worth looking at," said Vowels, commissioner of the Southwestern Athletic Conference.

The NAACP started an economic boycott of South Carolina in 2000 because the Confederate flag flew over the Capitol dome. The Legislature voted that spring to move the flag to the Confederate monument in front of the Statehouse. However, the NAACP has continued its boycott, saying the legislative action did not go far enough.

In 2001, the NCAA announced a two-year moratorium on awarding predetermined postseason events to the state. The governing body has continued the ban indefinitely,

saying in 2004 that significant change on the issue had not taken place in South Carolina.

Floyd Keith, executive director of the Black Coaches Association, said he received a request from members about furthering action against the state and closing what he saw as a loophole.

"I don't know that anybody is comfortable playing in a place where they fly the Confederate flag," he said by telephone Tuesday.

A subcommittee will study the question before bringing any recommendations to the full panel, Vowels said.

He expects the process to take several months.

Furman University's football team has held Division I-AA playoff games at Paladin Stadium in five of the past seven seasons. Clemson's baseball team hosted NCAA tournament games nine times since 1994. South Carolina's Sarge Frye Field was a host site for the tournament each season between 2000-2004.

"If the legislation goes through to change the interpretation, more people are going to be affected," Furman athletic director Gary Clark said.

The NAACP has marched and protested outside several sports events since the ban, including the 2002 NCAA basketball regional at the Bi-

Lo Center in Greenville, the WTA's Family Circle Cup in Charleston and the PGA Tour's Verizon Heritage in Hilton Head.

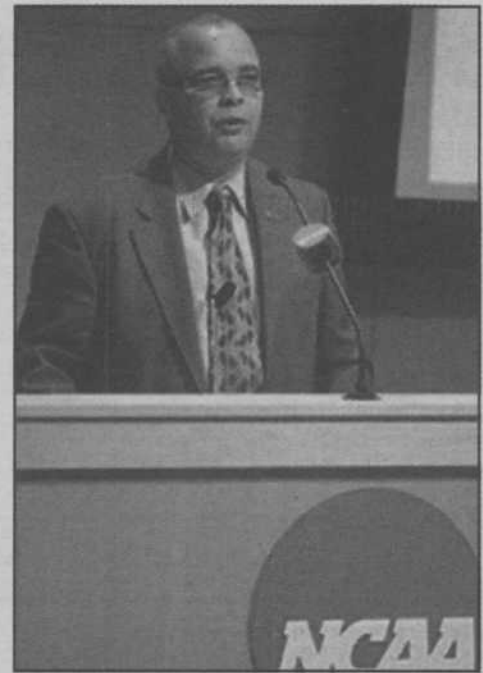
And new arenas, like the University of South Carolina's 5-year-old, 18,000-seat Colonial Center, lost a bid for an NCAA basketball regional because of the ban, according to former athletic director Mike McGee.

Clark said Furman hosted the NCAA cross-country championships for 21 years

until the event was taken away.

The Rev. Joseph Darby, vice president of Charleston's NAACP chapter and a former officer at the state level, says it's appropriate for the Black coaches and the NCAA to raise questions about the flag because of the number of Blacks who participate in college and pro sports.

"It's a matter of respect," he said. "They should be able to come into a state that's visibly welcoming of them."



Floyd Keith, executive director of the Black Coaches Association, says members want the Confederate flag ban continued. "I don't know that anybody is comfortable playing in a place where they fly the Confederate flag," he says.

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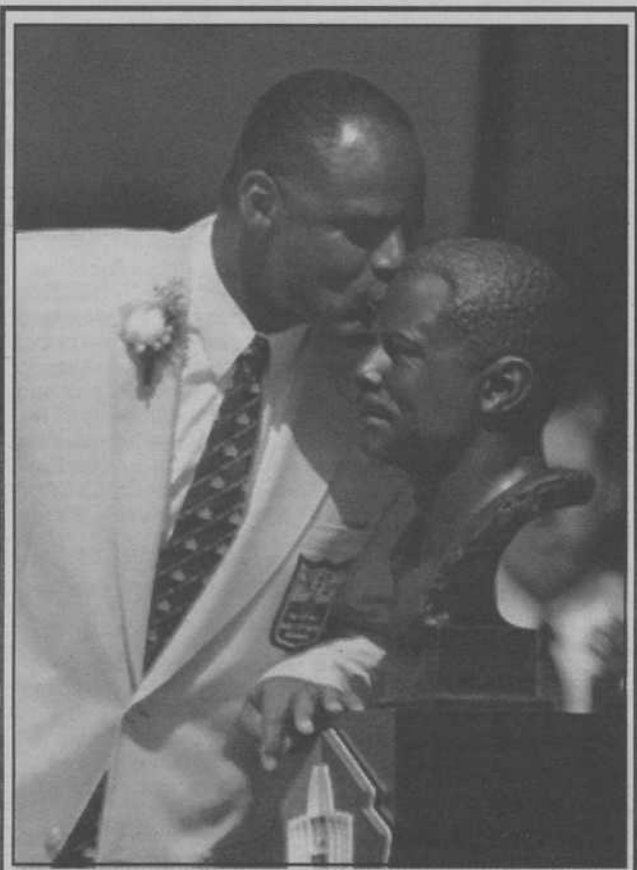
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