Alcoholic Beverage Service at Kinnick Stadium  
Minority Report to Phillip E. Jones  
8/11/04

In a letter dated 5/20/04, Vice President Phillip Jones approved beer/wine service to those who purchase luxury suites and premium seating at Kinnick Stadium in response to a verbal request from Department of Athletics Director Bob Bowlsby to serve beer, wine, and alcoholic liquor at the proposed Kinnick Stadium premium seating areas. In June, Vice President Jones charged David Grady to chair a task force of University of Iowa representatives to further address Mr. Bowlsby’s request to serve hard alcoholic liquor in the Premium seats and luxury boxes. Vice President Jones also invited the task force to offer a recommendation regarding availability of any alcohol at Kinnick Stadium.

During the several meetings when the task force met to discuss this issue from June to August, several pertinent facts came to light that influenced our position. These are as follows:

1. The University of Iowa has been cited (College Alcohol Study, 2003, Harvard School of Public Health) as having a "binge drinking" problem on campus. In addition, several recent tragic events involving University of Iowa students who have suffered injury and/or death related to alcohol consumption has lead to the realization that there is a serious drinking problem on campus. Special concern about alcohol consumption has been directed toward the Kinnick Stadium environment on football Saturdays. Partially due to these concerns, efforts have been initiated by the University Department of Public Safety to increase and intensify enforcement of current the no-liquor policy around Kinnick Stadium on football Saturdays.

2. The citizens of Iowa will view action by the University to permit alcohol to be served only to those in the premium seats as discrimination and hypocrisy. The president's office has relayed to the task force communications received from concerned citizens who, upon learning of the charge to this task force, complained to President Skorton that to approve this request was to “institutionalize discrimination” on the basis of income. Society as a whole has chosen to avoid this discrimination. A major contributor to the University has communicated his disapproval of this issue to the task force. Director of Public Safety and task force member Charles Green reported to the task force he had received communications from Johnson County Attorney J. Patrick White and from Iowa City Chief of Police R.J. Winklehake that they view offering alcohol to those who choose to pay for premium seats as “hypocrisy” in light of the University’s position against alcohol abuse on campus.

3. The major rationale offered to support approval of the Department of Athletics request to serve alcoholic liquor at Kinnick Stadium on game-day is that those who have agreed to purchase the premium seats have donated considerable funds to the Department of Athletics to support the stadium renovations. It has been suggested that these individuals and corporations considered "availability of alcohol" as a factor in their decision to purchase premium seating. When pressed for clarification, however, Department of Athletics representative and task force member Jane Meyer acknowledged that availability of alcohol was a minor factor for all but a few prospective buyers. There was no evidence offered to the task force that would suggest that any of the premium seats would remain unsold if alcoholic beverages in general or hard alcoholic liquor in particular were not made available. Alternatively, there is every reason to believe that those who choose to contribute to the Department of Athletics and the University do so because they support and enjoy Hawkeye football and because they want to support the mission of the University without consideration for personal reward or gratification. To suggest that their intentions would change based on the availability of alcoholic liquor during football games is to denigrate the character of the individuals who so generously support the university.

4. The University community and the public should not be comforted by the provision in the Department of Athletics’ proposal that would end alcoholic liquor sales to those in the suites and premium seats at the end of the third quarter. According to the proposal, anyone who wishes to do so may purchase two hard alcoholic liquor drinks at the end of the third quarter when sales end and then consume those drinks throughout the fourth quarter right up until they leave the stadium to get behind the wheel of their vehicles for the drive home. Ending sales at the end of the third quarter without ending consumption at that time offers no margin of safety.

5. Before being granted approval to do so, Department of Athletics representatives communicated to those who were considering purchasing premium seating in Kinnick Stadium that approval to serve alcoholic beverages in these areas was forthcoming. Those same officials then argued to the task force that because those who had agreed to purchase the seats were expecting to have alcohol available to them, the task force should grant the
Department of Athletics’ request. This was wrong and appeared to be an attempt to bias the discussions of the task force.

Based on these facts we strongly believe the University of Iowa should not approve the Department of Athletics’ request to serve hard alcoholic liquor to suite and premium seat holders at Kinnick Stadium on gameday. To do so is to send the wrong message to the citizens of Iowa, the university community, and in particular, the university’s students at a time when the University is under intense scrutiny regarding alcohol abuse on campus.

We also do not believe it is right to serve beer or wine at Kinnick Stadium on game days unless the university concluded it was safe enough to offer it to everyone of legal drinking age. However, the fact that Vice President Jones approved beer/wine for the Suite/Club seats prior to establishment of this task force and that he has communicated that approval to Athletic Director Bowlsby suggests to us that he may find it difficult to reverse that decision now. If so, a reasonable middle ground would be for the University to grant temporary approval of beer/wine service only in the Suite/Club seats for a period of no less than five years. If after that five-year trial period there have been no major concerns or problems related to beer/wine consumption, the Department of Athletics may re-petition for approval for alcoholic liquor.

We are particularly distressed that the Department of Athletics would tell prospective buyers that liquor would be available, contrary to current university policy, before being given approval to do so. That action was irresponsible, misleading, and should be discouraged.

We were also disappointed in the lack of leadership shown by the Department of Athletics when our discussion turned to changes in the pre-game and post game environment in the parking lots and on the streets around the stadium. Their focus seemed to be limited to appeasing the interests of donors who wish to consume alcohol both inside and outside of the stadium without regard for public safety. Their failure to endorse and support the new regulations set forth by Vice President Jones and the University Police Department sends the message that Athletics is disengaging from what happens outside the stadium and is in fact turning a blind eye towards this continuing problem. Unless the Athletic Department gives full and enthusiastic public support any cultural change in the parking areas around the stadium will fail. In fact, Athletics needs to lead the way on improving the game day experience in the areas around the stadium.

If the tens of thousands of Iowans who pay substantial amounts of money to buy tickets and attend the football games cannot be trusted to consume alcohol responsibly inside the stadium, we see no reason to expect that a few thousand who would pay the extra premium for the suite and club seats are more responsible or trustworthy. This seems true particularly when it only takes one irresponsible guest, who doesn't show the obvious external signs of alcohol overuse but who whose judgment is nevertheless impaired by alcohol, to cause a serious alcohol-related accident in the wake of a game. The Department of Athletics and the University in general will suffer considerably when that happens. And we believe such an accident is inevitable. It's just a matter of time.

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