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National Collegiate Athletic Association

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Marcus L. Plant

*Walter Byers**

Through the years, The University of Michigan has contributed a number of prominent leaders to intercollegiate athletics within the Intercollegiate (Big Ten) Conference and nationally through positions in the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA). Their names populate the history pages of collegiate sports and it has been my privilege, in more than thirty years as executive director of the NCAA, to know a great many of the coaches, athletics directors and faculty representatives of the University. My purpose today is to comment about one of them — a warm, perceptive and extremely keen-minded individual, a former professor of law at the University of Michigan, namely Marcus L. Plant.

I consider it one of the privileges of my profession to have known Mark and, more particularly, I am grateful for the wise counsel and guidance he provided. In fact, the Byers family owes him a personal debt of gratitude for the advice he gave to my youngest sibling who, himself, has become a highly successful lawyer at the age of twenty-nine, residing near Ann Arbor.

To me, Mark symbolized the best of the human character that should emerge from legal training. He was an incisive thinker; he used words sparingly, as if they were valuable coins not to be spent foolishly; he was impatient with sophistry and pomposity, yet he was warm and helpful to those who sought his help. He was most respectful and appreciative of the best qualities of human behavior and expression, and seemed committed to the simple proposition that civilized human beings should conduct their affairs on the basis of honesty and respect and in good humor.

Mark Plant served the nation's colleges in a great many positions within the Big Ten Conference and the NCAA. Collegiate athletics would be a better place today if Mark Plant's philosophy of the relationship of academics and athletics, and the basic integrity needed for a sound athletics policy, would have permeated more institutions of higher education.

Indicative of the confidence his colleagues felt for his ability is the following resumé of some of his NCAA assignments and positions:

* Executive Director, The National Collegiate Athletic Association. — Ed.

Vice-president of District 4 (member, NCAA Council) — 1963 through 1966

NCAA President — 1967 and 1968

Member, NCAA Executive Committee — 1969 through 1973

Constitution and Bylaws Committee — 1960-61 through 1961-62 and 1972-73 through 1977-78

Committee on Competitive Safeguards and Medical Aspects of Sports — 1979-80 through 1983-84

Convention Parliamentarian — 1963 through 1967; 1970 and 1971

The University of Michigan traditionally has fashioned together the frequently competing interests of high-level academic attainment and high-level athletic success better than most. It takes a strong university and firm leadership to maintain the important balance needed to compete in big-time athletics with dignity. Through the years, starting with Fielding Yost and Ralph W. Aigler, another professor of law at the University of Michigan, the University has been fortunate to have within its ranks the kind of leadership that enables the Michigan tradition to continue, sometimes in the face of uncomfortable pressures. Marcus L. Plant played a leading role through a period of some thirty-eight years in seeing that the University of Michigan commitment to maintaining that balance remained constant. As an individual, I miss his counsel and friendship; far more important, however, intercollegiate athletics misses his leadership.