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NU-Q Holds Session on Sports Media Law and Ethics

Doha, Qatar – September 6, 2017 – Connections between business, law, and media make the sports industry unique, according to an expert on sports media law who spoke at Northwestern University in Qatar (NU-Q).

Mark Conrad, author of *The Business of Sports* and a professor at Fordham University in New York, spoke at a session at NU-Q where he discussed issues that make the sports industry unique from other sectors, while also addressing exclusive ethical issues and media laws that surround the business model for sports organizations.

NU-Q is in the process of designing an executive education and graduate program in sports media and management. The program will serve as a link for professionals who want to begin or enhance a career in sports media and will include courses in finance, analytics, marketing, and law.

“Professor Conrad’s session on the significance and uniqueness of sports media law further emphasizes NU-Q’s commitment to exploring the development of Qatar’s media and sports sectors,” said Everette E. Dennis, dean and CEO. “Many of our students are interested in being part of Qatar’s growing sports industry, and Professor Conrad’s visit provides them with insights from experts in the industry on how things work– from the media’s role to the laws that guide it.”

Conrad identified several reasons for the uniqueness in sports organizations, which included that it is talent-oriented, has exclusive governance through leagues or federations, includes exclusive broadcasting rights, and also has strong relations with governments.

“They have the power to control, exclusively, the teams that play in the league. They have the power to make exclusive franchises of leagues, negotiate their own sponsorship agreements, merchandise agreements, and broadcasting agreements. It is part of the monopoly or oligopoly influence they have,” Conrad said.

Conrad also noted that the legal affiliations between players and agencies are unique in that “athletes are restricted employees, who generally do not have the right to quit their job and join a rival team easily.”

An additional area which highlights why sports organizations are different from most private organizations is the loyalty formed between audiences/viewers and their team, which he said also makes the industry more powerful. “Sports fans will root for their team year in and year out, no matter how bad it will be, hoping it will be better next time,” he said.

On ethical issues, Conrad identified six main categories: political, commercialism, eligibility, transparency, governance, and doping. Among the issues in these categories, he said disability – which affects the eligibility of talent – is one the biggest. “With medical advances today we have the development of prosthetic devices and as we look to the future we can certainly see more issues will arise from genome alterations and how that will affect the eligibility of athletes,” he said.

Conrad also touched on media law in the coverage of sports, discussing new trends in how sports coverage is disseminated over the internet, as well as the increase in media coverage of social issues – including labor and management, business and economics, taxation, power struggles, and government policies.

With this increase in attention on social issues, the lack of transparency among international sports federations has become a larger issue. “Most of the sports federations are based in Switzerland where they can enjoy banking secrecy; however, governments and media are trying to crack down on illegal activity, which has caused many problems for federations such as FIFA in recent years,” said Conrad.

Professor Craig LaMay, who is leading the executive education project at NU-Q, said that Qatar’s media landscape will evolve as the country continues to play a pivotal role in sports governance, and that NU-Q’s role is to provide learning opportunities to help professionals keep up with the changes and know how to work within such a complicated industry.

“Part of Qatar’s sport strategy is to situate itself as a big player in global sports governance,” said LaMay. “The country realizes that with such decisions – like making beIN Sports one of the largest sports media operators or hosting large-scale events like the FIFA World Cup – the local media sector will have to transform as well. We, at NU-Q, want to be at the forefront of good sports media by educating journalists on media law and ethics in the region.”

Conrad received his BA from City College of New York and his JD from New York Law School. He also holds an MS from Columbia University's Graduate School of Journalism. During his visit to NU-Q, he is also conducting workshops with students on media law.

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About Northwestern University in Qatar

Northwestern University in Qatar draws from its parent organization, [Northwestern University](#) (Evanston, Illinois), a distinguished history, famous programs and an exceptional faculty. Founded in partnership with Qatar Foundation, NU-Q provides a framework through which students explore the world and, ultimately, shape its future through its distinguished schools of [communication](#), [journalism and strategic communication](#), and [liberal arts](#).