

SBJ/February 11 - 17, 2002/This Weeks Issue

## Raycom hired to blow horn for the NAIA

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Published February 11, 2002

The NAIA has hired Charlotte-based Raycom Sports as a strategic marketing partner.

The NAIA, established in 1937 and comprising 332 member institutions, has kept a low profile in comparison to the larger and more prominent NCAA.



"Quite frankly, I felt it was necessary for us to do a better job at telling people what our brand is all about," said NAIA President Steve Baker, who took the job four years ago.

Raycom was among several companies vying for the NAIA rights. Baker would not identify those other companies.

Raycom will be responsible for branding the NAIA and developing sponsorship packages for the league.

Baker said Raycom also will help spread the league's mission of education and character development of students through sports. Specifically, the company will help the NAIA build its Champions of Character Program, an educational program created last year to promote responsibility, respect, sportsmanship, integrity and leadership in sports. Though it is still in development, the NAIA hopes to take the program on the road and spread its message to high school and youth leagues across the country.

"They match up with us so well," Baker said, "As a company, [Raycom] made a commitment a number of years ago to produce 'More Than a Game,' a program that told the good stories about sports, and I've been impressed with them ever since."

Raycom officials are performing a top-to-bottom assessment of the NAIA's marketing potential.

"I really believe that the NAIA is a diamond in the rough," said Raycom President Ray Warren. "They have a great bunch of schools all with the right approach toward sports and sportsmanship in college, and I think that's something that corporations would want to support."

The Raycom deal includes an undisclosed consultation fee and revenue-sharing opportunities through sponsorship sales.

Meanwhile, on the public relations front, the NAIA hired Blades & Associates, an Overland Park, Kan., firm, to handle its local and national communications.