

From Okemos High to Michigan State: Bill Beekman's Journey from Chieftain Brave to Spartan Top Jock

By Kerry J. Byrnes (Okemos High Class of '63)

Over the past 35 years (1985-2020), William "Bill" Beekman, 1985 graduate of **Okemos High School (OHS)** rose from a **Michigan State University (MSU)** new hire in 1995 to holding one of that university's highest leadership positions. After graduating from OHS, and having completed several academic degrees, Beekman landed a job at MSU as the first step on a journey that, within 25 years, would lead him to becoming that university's newest Athletic Director, in effect, the **Spartan "Top Jock"** responsible for leading one of America's largest athletic programs comprised of 25 sports and 800 student-athletes. But just a year or so on the new job Beekman would suddenly be confronted by two of the biggest challenges of his life.

Drawing on several quoted sources, this article looks back on the life of Bill Beekman, how his journey brought him to Michigan State University, and how he now continues to lead, just as he did in high school, with brain over brawn to build Sparty's "blue blood" credentials in university-level athletics.



William Russell Beekman

Michigan State University Vice President and Director of Intercollegiate Athletics

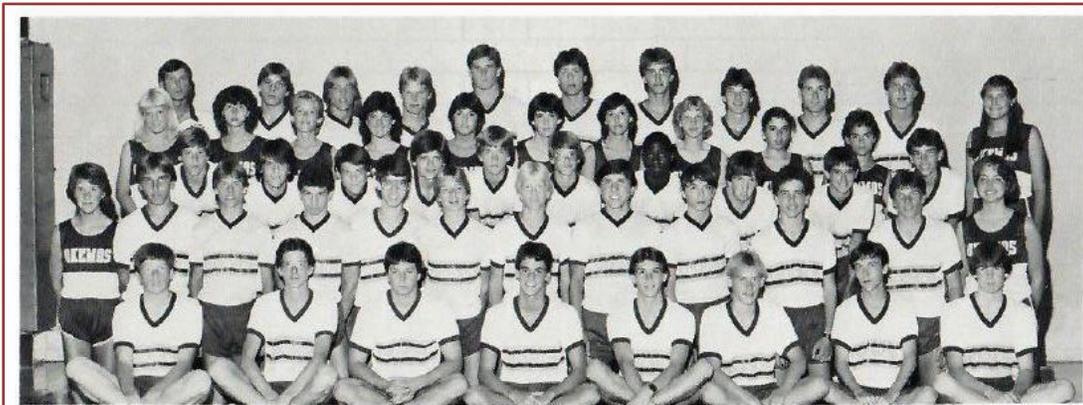
Okemos High School

William "Bill" Beekman, the son of Edward and Kay Beekman, was born on May 14, 1967. He graduated from Okemos High School in 1985.



Bill Beekman Class Photos (Okemos High *Tomahawk* 1982 - 1985)

Interestingly, while in high school, Beekman's only participation in competitive athletics was running on the Chieftain's cross country team in the fall of 1984 during his senior year.



Front Row: Bill Beekman, Chris Curtis, Joe Schwinghamer, Bob Young, Brian Whitmore, Matt Lydens, Matt Gallagher, Mike McMahon. **Row Two:** Tammy Hollander, Mike Ruh, Ken Brewer, Scott Brooks, Chris Harrison, Eric Lamison, Joel Dood, Bob Weishan, Bill Repaskey, Chris Oeschlaeger, Bob Beekman, Laura Russell. **Row Three:** Dan Prince, Jim Perry, John Martilla, Taber Shears, Matt Nelson, Derrick Prince, Tony Smith, Mike Paine, Brian Tenbrunsel, Damon Valentino. **Row Four:** Vonnie Dood, Abby Ochberg, Denys Adam, Tia Johnson, Debbie Maimone, Laura Dixon, Shannon Skehan, Danette Ruh, Susie Hughes, Kara Fettig. **Row Five:** Coach John Quiring, Jon McLellan, Chris Platts, Keith Wilkinsen, Greg Velicer, Spencer Helmbrecht, Jon Russell, Rob Cambray, Scott Cheney, Dave Morrow, Laurie Morrow.

Bill Beekman (Okemos High *Tomahawk* 1985)

That same year Beekman threw his hat into the political ring to run for student body president. To fend off a third candidate who also decided to run, Beekman and the second candidate teamed up to run as co-president. This partnership pulled enough votes from the third candidate for the co-president team to score a victory at the ballot box.



OHS Principal Dr. Mary Carew & Bill Beekman (Okemos High *Tomahawk* 1985)

During Beekman's senior year, he was enrolled in AP History and AP English, was a member of the Quiz Bowl Team that was a runner-up in state competition, a recipient of a State of Michigan Scholarship, and was recognized as the Daughters of the American Revolution Good Citizen,



The Quiz Bowl Team were runners-up in state competition, earning a \$6,000 Alma College Scholarship for a fortunate OHS student. Members of the 1985 team are Bill Beekman, Steve Creswell, Randy Matthews, Brian de los Santos, Mark Ruminger and Douglas Wolk with **Coach Purvis**.



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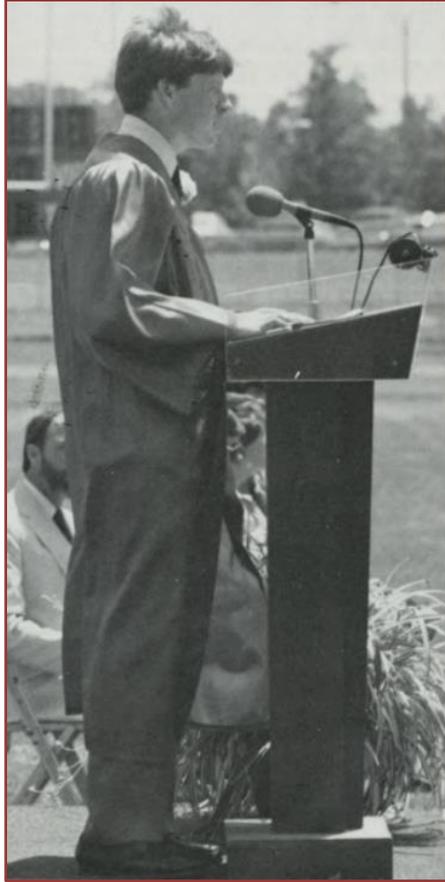
Teacher Ms. Puckett. Cari Alles, Bill Beekman, Kris Johnson, Scott Layman, Eric Paterson, Sharie Pirochta, Dairus Reynnet, Scott Schewe, Anne Spink, Richard Zack. Andrew Bernard, Stefania Burk, Greg Davis, Eric Ederer, Brian Guenther, Josh Howell, Micheal Lamison, Lee Moore, Karen Northrup, Laura Russell.

Senior Bill Beekman in AP History (above) & AP English (below)



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Teacher Mr. Collar. Elizabeth Atkins, Bill Beekman, Andrew Bernard, Kathy Chen, Stephen Creswell, Eric Ederer, Phaedra Fisher, Bramlett Hamilton, Kai-Yee Ho, Nancy Horne, Matthew Kaufman, Jeana Lee, Melissa Lucas, Kelly Mathews, Heather McMullen, Elisabeth Miley, Jame Mukherhee, Karen Northrup, Archana Rajendra, Laura Russell, Tammy Scarlett, Anita Tekchandani, Stephen Wagner, Laura Wheeler, Alisa Zapp.



Student Body Co-President Bill Beekman speaking at Commencement



Voted "Most Likely To Succeed" (Okemos High *Tomahawk* 1985)

University-Level Education

In the fall of 1985 Beekman enrolled at Michigan State University in the James Madison College where he earned a BA in justice, morality, and constitutional democracy. After graduating in 1989, he earned a law degree from the Wayne State University Law School, and an MBA from Northwestern University's Kellogg School of Management.

Professional Career at Michigan State University

Beekman began working with Michigan State University in 1995, teaching health policy and health finance in the College of Human Medicine and the College of Law. Over the years working with MSU, Beekman took on a various assignments and roles, including serving as Executive Director of the Alumni Association, senior advisor to the provost, and vice president for finance and operations and assistant dean for planning and finance in the College of Human Medicine. Among his accomplishments Beekman led MSU's negotiations with the McLaren Health System to develop a hospital adjacent to campus. Working with several colleagues, he negotiated the expansion of the College of Human Medicine to Grand Rapids.

In 2008 Beekman became vice president and secretary of the Board of Trustees. Also, in January 2018, he briefly served as acting president of Michigan State University. On February 5, Beekman was appointed as interim acting athletic director and, on July 17, was named MSU's 19th Athletic Director (AD). As the AD, Beekman provides leadership in multiple areas, including sports management, game operations, fundraising, financial administration, personnel, corporate interaction, facility management, marketing, and communications ([Source](#)).



New Michigan State athletic director Bill Beekman speaks at an introductory press conference in East Lansing, Mich., Monday, July 16, 2018. (Dale G. Young/Detroit News via AP)

New AD Taking Charge at Michigan St: 'We Must Do Better'

[By Noah Trister](#) The Associated Press / Published: 7/17/2018 12:04:00 AM / Modified: 7/17/2018 12:04:04 AM

East Lansing, Mich. — The new athletic director at Michigan State faces issues beyond just trying to win games and compete for championships.

That much is obvious, and Bill Beekman acknowledged it.

“The last several years have been among the darkest in our history,” Beekman said. “Among the over 300 survivors who came forward that were subject to Larry Nassar’s horrific acts, over 30 were MSU students, and several of those students were student-athletes. We must do better and we will.”

Michigan State officially introduced Beekman as its AD on Monday, giving him the job he has held on an interim basis since early February. John Engler, Michigan State’s interim president, said he is confident Beekman will bring “success and honor” to the athletic department — and it’s the latter of those two goals that likely will shape the perception of this hire in the years to come.

Beekman took over on an interim basis shortly after athletic director Mark Hollis retired following the sex abuse scandal involving Nassar — and just before ESPN reported allegations of sexual assault and violence against women involving Michigan State football and basketball players. The report questioned how the athletic department handled those cases.

“We have improved and increased training at all levels. We’ve developed policies to ensure the availability of, and access to, chaperones for our students when they visit medical professionals, and we’ve reviewed all reporting protocols — to name just a few measures that we’ve taken,” Beekman said. “But all the rules in the world won’t make a difference, unless we have a culture committed to the health, safety and wellness of every member of our community.”

Engler appointed Beekman as interim AD on Feb. 5. Engler said no internal candidates would be considered for the AD job, but Beekman’s ties to Michigan State run deep. The 51-year-old Beekman has an undergraduate degree from the school and joined Michigan State as an administrator in 1995. Beekman has been executive director of the MSU Alumni Association. He has also been a vice president of the school and secretary of its board.

Engler said in the end, the school didn’t need to conduct a national search for the job.

“As we started talking about the search, I kept hearing from virtually everyone that they loved the job that Bill’s doing,” Engler said. “Bill was described as, first and foremost, a person of great integrity, very attentive, a terrific listener, someone who really knows the university. I had several people remark of Bill’s calming influence.”

What Beekman clearly lacked — at least until the last few months — was experience running a major athletic department. He said his only personal involvement in competitive athletics was with his high school cross country team.

“He’s initially coming from the outside of athletics in a way, but as you look around the country, that’s getting to be pretty common now,” Michigan State basketball coach Tom Izzo said. “I think there’s no question he has the skills to be a successful AD.”

Izzo, football coach Mark Dantonio and women’s basketball coach Suzy Merchant all spoke at Monday’s news conference.

Beekman will be in charge of an athletic department that’s enjoyed plenty of success lately, especially as Dantonio’s football program has grown in stature and become a legitimate complement to Izzo’s nationally prominent basketball team. But the scandal involving Nassar, the former sports doctor who worked at Michigan State, has overshadowed much of that. Lou Anna Simon, the school’s previous president, quit in January, and Engler’s time in charge has been contentious.

Engler was asked about those who would say the school needs fresh leadership for hires like these.

“We’ve got that in Bill Beekman. He’s fresh, he’s new, he’s not been here in the department before,” Engler said. “He comes in with a great background to make the kind of changes that are necessary, but no wedded-to-the-past approach on Bill’s part.”

Nassar is serving decades in prison for assault and child pornography crimes. Hundreds of women, including Olympic champion gymnasts, said they were abused by Nassar under the guise of medical treatment while he was working for both USA Gymnastics and Michigan State. . . .

Now Beekman takes charge at a time when Michigan State’s reputation is still very much tarnished.



“Every organization—mine, yours and everybody else’s—can make improvements, and we need to do that and we need to make sure that we’re as prepared and we have policies and procedures in place so that we can prevent things like this from ever happening again.... At the same time, you sort of really have to believe it in your heart. You can come up with all kinds of policies and procedures that can collect dust on the shelf, but you really have to believe it in your heart and you have to think about it every day as you go through your day. That’s the culture piece.” (Bill Beekman - [Source](#))

MSU Athletics under AD Beekman ([Source](#))

In his first year (2018-2019) as Athletic Director, the men’s basketball team advanced to the Final Four and won Big Ten regular season and tournament titles; men’s soccer reached the College Cup for the first time since 1968; and the football team earned a bowl bid for the 11th time in the past 12 seasons. In addition, the men’s and women’s golf teams both played in the NCAA Regionals, the women’s cross country team placed 11th at the NCAA Championships, and the women’s basketball team earned a berth in the NCAA Tournament for the ninth time under head coach Suzy Merchant.

The Spartans were just as impressive off the field. During the 2019 spring semester, Spartan student-athletes posted the highest all-time cumulative grade-point average (3.1771) in the history of the athletic department. It also marked the 17th consecutive semester the department achieved over a 3.00 cumulative GPA. Nineteen teams delivered a cumulative GPA over a 3.0, tying a department record, and an all-time high of 88 students posted a perfect 4.0 GPA in the spring semester of 2019.

Six student-athletes earned Academic All-America honors, while 316 were on the Academic All-Big Ten team. In addition, the men’s basketball, men’s swimming and diving and volleyball programs earned NCAA APR Public Recognition Awards (ranked among the top 10 percent of their sports in the most recent Academic Progress Rate results).

Michigan State also measured at an all-time department high of 88 percent according to the NCAA’s Graduation Success Rate (GSR) in 2018-19. The men’s basketball program produced a perfect 100 percent GSR and the football program posted its all-time high GSR of 82 percent in the most recent NCAA figures that were released in November 2018 (graduation rates for classes 2008-11).

MSU Athletics has been succeeding at record levels in the Federal Graduation Rate (FGR) as well, posting record highs in both the four-year (75 percent) and single-year (80 percent) marks. The single-year 80 percent FGR topped the general student population for the first time (79 percent).

Press Coverage of Bill Beekman's Tenure at Michigan State

This section shares three feature articles focusing on Bill Beekman during the period of his transition from earlier university positions (e.g., Vice President and Secretary of the Board of Trustees) to becoming MSU's Vice President and Athletic Director.

These articles provide further insight into Beekman's background, his accomplishments while working at Michigan State, and anecdotes that shed light on his **Chieftain-cum Spartan** character.

First Article:

[Who is new MSU athletic director Bill Beekman?](#)

[Eric Lacy](#), Lansing State Journal Published 11:07 a.m. ET July 16, 2018 | Updated 7:13 a.m. ET July 17, 2018



Bill Beekman was named Michigan State University's new athletic director on Monday, July 16, 2018 (Photo: Matthew Dae Smith/Lansing State Journal)

EAST LANSING -- Michigan State's new athletic director, the university's 19th, has no experience being in charge of college sports programs.

But Bill Beekman, 51, has spent over two decades at MSU serving a variety of roles.

He also has the temperament to handle stress and adversity, said Stepheni Schlinker, a friend for over 20 years.

"He's always smiling," Schlinker said. "He could probably be on fire inside and you wouldn't know that."

For four years, Schlinker worked two floors below Beekman in MSU's Hannah Administration building.

Schlinker quickly became impressed with the care and attention to detail Beekman displayed with co-workers on campus. He "genuinely cared about your life," she recalled.

News Monday of Beekman's appointment as permanent athletic director adds a new title to his already extensive resume. . . .

Beekman also served briefly as interim president before the MSU board tapped former Gov. John Engler to lead the university through fallout from the Larry Nassar sexual abuse scandal.

Lou Anna Simon and Mark Hollis left their positions as president and athletic director in late January. Engler was named interim president Jan. 31.

Beekman, an Okemos High School graduate, now may have the most daunting task of his career, overseeing an athletic department with 25 sports programs for over 800 student-athletes.

The department ranked No. 21 among nationwide in revenue ([\\$126,021,377](#)), according to [USA Today](#), which used data from the 2016-17 year.

Former Lansing Mayor David Hollister is intrigued by MSU's hire and recalls Beekman as a welcoming presence within the university's political structure.

Hollister was the mayor from 1993 to 2003 and often saw Beekman in his MSU office before meetings with Simon, who was then provost, and M. Peter McPherson, who preceded her as president.

"He played a very quiet behind-the-scenes role," Hollister said of Beekman. "Very confident, very skilled, very diplomatic."

Beekman has been vice president and secretary to the Board of Trustees since 2008.

Beekman rose to prominence at MSU quickly after several staff and faculty roles, which included executive director of MSU Alumni Association, senior adviser to the provost and assistant dean for finance in the College of Human Medicine.

Beekman joined MSU in 1995 as an administrator with the MSU Health Team and spent time as assistant dean for planning and finance in the College of Human Medicine. He also taught health policy and health finance in the College of Human Medicine and the College of Law.

Beekman is a dedicated family man with a love for sports, said Steve Finamore, his son's former high school basketball coach.

Beekman's son Nick didn't play much last season for East Lansing High School's varsity team, but that didn't stop his dad from supporting the team, Finamore said.

"In today's day and age, where parents complain about their son's playing time, Bill never said a word to me," Finamore said. "I think Michigan State has hired an outstanding person."

During the season, Bill Beekman was known to offer plenty of positive reinforcement.

In late February on the day when Finamore stepped down from coaching at East Lansing, he received an email that night from Bill Beekman, who thanked Finamore for working with his son.

Earlier in the season, Finamore said Beekman sent him "three to five" text messages also heaped with praise.

"You got a good person in there," Finamore said of Beekman.

Beekman has spent most of his life in Michigan, including two years working at Dickinson Wright, a Detroit-based law firm that also has an office in Lansing.

Geoff Blair lived on the same floor as Beekman in Case Hall when they were MSU sophomores.

He wrote in a Facebook message to a State Journal reporter that Beekman has a reputation for strong ethics that hasn't appeared to change.

"The Bill Beekman I knew was always the steady, calm influence in our circle of friends," Blair wrote. "He always treated people fairly, which is why I believe he was a wise choice."

Second Article: Chris Solari of the *Detroit Free Press* posted the following article.

[Michigan State's Bill Beekman 'the least likely person' for AD job](#)



EAST LANSING — Bill Beekman, in one of his first February meetings with Michigan State's newly appointed interim president John Engler, arrived with a list of more than a dozen topics the university needed to address.

The first was finding an athletic director.

Engler already had his plan. [He told Beekman the job was his.](#)

“Frankly, my first thought was, ‘Oh my goodness, all my friends from high school are going to be in emergency rooms around the country,’ because I’m about the least likely person they’d expect to be in this role and they’re all having heart attacks,” Beekman joked after Monday’s news conference to announce him as MSU’s full-time athletic director.

[Engler made Beekman’s appointment permanent on Monday, contradicting what he said when he named the MSU alum and Okemos native as Mark Hollis’ replacement in February.](#)

The former governor said in a release at the time that the university would conduct a nationwide search and “that no internal candidates will be considered in the search process.”

“I’m very confident in Bill, his qualities, his integrity and leadership,” Engler said Monday. “He has all of the skills necessary. I think we could have looked across the country and been hard-pressed to find somebody that would know Michigan State the way Bill does with the quality he has.”

Beekman, who has no athletic management experience and whose only athletic experience was on his high school cross country team more than 30 years ago, takes over at a tumultuous time.

[Hollis retired abruptly on Jan. 26](#) amid the Larry Nassar scandal and hours before an ESPN report detailed allegations of sexual assault and violence against women by MSU’s football and men’s basketball players.

Engler said support from football coach Mark Dantonio and men’s basketball coach Tom Izzo, along with unanimous approval from the Board of Trustees, contributed to the decision to make Beekman permanent now rather than waiting for the university to hire a new full-time president.

“I think this time right now, unanimous decisions on things is imperative as we try to heal and advance,” Izzo said.

Beekman, 51, said he only learned about Nassar from reading the Indianapolis Star story in 2016 and has limited knowledge of the case beyond what has been reported.

“We need to make sure that we’re prepared and have policies and procedures in place so that we can prevent things like this from happening ever again,” Beekman said. “At the same time, you sort of have to really believe in your heart. You can come up with all kinds of policies and procedures that can collect dust on the shelf, but you really have to believe it in your heart. And you have to think about it every day as you go through your day. That’s the culture piece.”

Asked if he would be prepared to replace either Izzo or Dantonio or both if they were to retire or step down, Beekman said he believes he will not have to do that.

"I don't see either of them going anywhere for a while," Beekman said. "So yes, eventually everyone will turn over, but those are decisions I think we can postpone for a fair number of years."

Dantonio called Beekman "calm" and "a great listener."

"I really believe leadership takes its place in so many forms," Dantonio said. "He's had a unifying force really for our entire athletic department since coming on. ... He is a Spartan — I don't think there is any question about that — and he has the best interest of all Spartans at heart. I believe at this point in time, by making this decision, President Engler has given our Michigan State athletic department a focus, one focus, to be able to move forward with force. And I think that's what we need at this time."

Upon taking over as full-time athletic director Monday, Beekman stepped down as vice president and secretary of the MSU Board of Trustees, a position he held since 2008. The 1989 MSU graduate previously served as executive director of the MSU Alumni Association before that after being hired by his alma mater in 1995 as an administrator with the MSU Health Team. He also served as assistant dean for finance and planning in the College of Human Medicine from 1998-2004.

Beekman earned his law degree from Wayne State in 1993 and an MBA from Northwestern in 2004. He attended the Big Ten athletic directors meetings with Engler in Chicago in May and said he felt welcomed by the rest of the league's leaders.

"In terms of areas where not having 20 years of athletics experience is a down side, from my perspective, I've spent part of the last five months getting to know the folks in the conference. And they've been a tremendous help trying to get me up to speed," Beekman said. "Many of my fellow athletic directors are wonderful colleagues. Warde Manuel at the University of Michigan reached out immediately and was very welcoming. Many people think Michigan and Michigan State are at odds, and we certainly are several days of the year, but much of the rest of the year, we're great collaborators and colleagues." . . .

"Warde has been very helpful in getting me introduced to folks and just getting more acclimated with the players, the personnel, the people in the conference. Jim Delany has been very helpful to work with. But that's a steep learning curve — it's surmountable, but it's a learning curve."

Engler said Beekman is the third Big Ten athletic director who has a law degree, and the former governor believes Beekman being a lawyer with an MBA will aid the conference's Big Ten Network in negotiations with cable providers and with other pending national legislation and court cases.

"If you look around the country, there [is] also a number of what I would call non-traditional selections," Engler said. "The biggest challenge we have right now is to make sure that Comcast listens to the needs of the Big Ten in the new contract negotiations. They've already denied Spartans in Texas and Florida for example access to the Big Ten Network. That doesn't make us very happy, so there are those kinds of negotiations. We've got

litigation in California relative to what is the impact of compensation to student-athletes. That's a tough, hard question — that's kind of a legal issue that's being fought through. There's some of that kind of stuff where I think it's [a law degree is] helpful.”

Beekman now takes over an athletic department that has more than 800 athletes in 25 varsity sports and accounted for \$103,920,895 in revenue and \$96,008,462 in expenses during the 2016-17 school year, according to the U.S. Department of Education.

One of Beekman's first actions, which came from Engler's directions, was to meet with MSU coaches in all sports. Beekman expanded that to going to each of their offices and “trying to get to know them as people.” He also admitted to being overwhelmed with what he has learned about the Spartans' athletes.

“As I met with the coaches and I met with the student-athletes, it was very rewarding. They're easy people to work for,” he said. “And certainly as the months progressed, I felt more comfortable in the role and thought it would be a great challenge to take on. So I was presently surprised when that came to pass.”

Third Article:

[The Story of Michigan State's Accidental Athletic Director](#)

The following article on Beekman, authored by [Brendan Quinn](#), appeared online at *The Athletic*:



(Photo: Jake May/The Flint Journal-MLive.com, via AP)

EAST LANSING, Mich. — It's autumn at Michigan State. Leaves falling, blown sideways by students whizzing past on bicycles, all the clichés of new beginnings. It looks like another year, but it is not another year. This is the year after The Year. Larry Nassar shattered this place last winter, and now, like wearing a sweater backward, everyone is uncomfortable feeling normal. This is the pivot point in time that determines how a place goes forward after the mirror breaks. In few places does this resonate more so than on the fourth floor of 1855 Place, the university athletic department office.

Bill Beekman enters through the side door. He pulls out a chair from a 20-seat table in the athletic director's conference room, placing both hands on the table. He's wearing a blue blazer and a well-starched Oxford shirt unbuttoned at the top. He is polite and deliberate, and when the conversation turns to his role at Michigan State, he begins, "Well, gee, in my past life ..." That's how Beekman talks — lots of "geez" and "gollies," an occasional, "aw, heck." At 51 years old he's distinctly a hometown boy and, for the next hour, and for another 90 minutes in a subsequent interview, he will splice together stories of who he is and what he's doing here.

Beekman is nearly three months into his tenure as Michigan State athletic director. His rise has been both rapid and unforeseen. Last February, roughly a week after Mark Hollis resigned as MSU AD, Beekman, then the vice president and secretary of the board of trustees, met with interim university president John Engler and submitted a list of interim athletic director candidates. Engler looked over the assortment of candidates, cocked an eye, looked back at Beekman and said: "I've got your list, but why don't you do it?" Five months after that, he was given the job full-time.

"I must say that, until that moment, it had really never crossed my mind," Beekman now says, drawing a tight smile.

Beekman never considered being the athletic director at Michigan State — a Big Ten institution with a nine-figure operating budget — because Beekman never before worked in collegiate athletics. A self-described "fat kid" growing up, he spent childhood days surrounded by books as his younger brothers played outside. His closest encounter with sports was one season of high school cross-country in 1984. Beekman is a lawyer by trade. He began working at Michigan State in 1995 negotiating contracts for the medical school. He worked his way up to assistant dean for finance in the College of Human Medicine (1998-2004), despite knowing little about finance, and then became executive director of the MSU Alumni Association (2006-07), despite knowing little about schmoozing. In 2008, he was named MSU vice president and secretary of the board of trustees, where he worked as a behind-the-scenes fixer. He admits, in hindsight, that his career path has been "totally bizarre." Thirty years ago, he majored in justice, morality and constitutional democracy at Michigan State, graduating in 1989, and then received his law degree at Wayne State and his MBA at Northwestern. He thought he would be a politician or a lawyer before straying into higher education. Until February, Beekman thought his next job might be as president of a small state college.

Now, here he is, in this conference room, as an accidental athletic director, telling me his plan for Michigan State sports. On July 16, Engler, who previously said the university would conduct a national search for AD and consider no internal candidates, instead selected Beekman, calling it "a very important day in the history of Michigan State athletics." The job came with a five-year contract worth \$750,000 annually, along with vanishing anonymity and pressing questions of competence. With that, Bill Beekman's former life ended.

"I was a vice president at the university for 11 years, roughly, and up until about six months ago, no one knew who I was," he says.

Beekman's first foray into public life came in 1986. He was a sophomore at Michigan State when two seats opened up on the Okemos school board. He was 19 and entered his name against seven adult candidates, including two incumbents. No one was younger than 38. Beekman didn't care. Only two years earlier, as a senior at Okemos High School, he was running for class president against one primary contender when, from nowhere, a third candidate arose. This unexpected *parvenu* threatened to pull votes from one of the favorites, forcing Beekman to concoct a plan. He and his counterpart staged a coup, agreeing to run as co-presidents, thus blocking the attack from the flank. They coasted to victory. A lesson in bilateral negotiation.

Beekman's campaign for school board needed some party activism. Though not a drinker himself, he found that cheap beer helped. He recruited about 20 friends to stuff thousands of envelopes, creating an assembly line that addressed, filled and sorted letters by carrier route. ("You got a significant discount on postage," he says, "if you sorted it by carrier route.") Beekman hit the streets, too, going door-to-door, handing out campaign literature. When it came time to detail his school board goals for an election flier, he wrote exactly 500 words, the requested limit. Upon being told the other candidates went well over the limit, and asked to write an additional 300 words, he refused, and demanded the other candidates follow the rules and write 500 words, not 800. When the flier ran, each candidate spelled out their goals in approximately 500 words.

Everyone involved, of course, thought a 19-year-old running for school board was rather strange. But this was uniquely Beekman. He is disinterested in common popularity. "He's the kind of guy that, even though he knows everyone, if he's at a party or in a big group, he'll fade into the background and watch people," says Patrick McGow, Beekman's roommate from 1985-89.

Civics came naturally to Beekman. He is a son of Lansing. His family dates back five generations in the city. Theirs is a legacy of service in education. Bill's grandfather Marvin E. Beekman was a pioneer, overcoming a stutter to become a public school teacher in Lansing and ultimately climbing to Director of Special Education for the Michigan Department of Education. He opened specialized schools, including the Lansing School for the Blind, where Stevie Wonder attended. In 1968, a new special education center was funded and constructed by the Lansing School District; a 1,200-signature petition was signed to name it the Beekman Center. It still stands today on Wabash Road. Later on, Marvin's son Lynwood Beekman, Bill's uncle, an attorney specializing in special education law, wrote much of the legislation that secured the policies enacted by his father. He ended up as an adjunct professor at Michigan State and was appointed to the State Board of Education's Special Education Advisory Committee.

Bill's political career ended quickly, though. He finished fourth in the '86 school board election. He ran again in 1987 and 1988, but lost again to two incumbents. Only a 36-vote gap kept him from election in '88. "It was a great experience," he says, "because I learned to put myself out there."

School board elections

Here are the results of Monday's local school board elections as of 2 a.m. Key: ✓ = Elected.

Ingham County	
DANSVILLE	
Two 4-year terms	Votes
✓ David Forbord (Incumbent)	395
✓ Sharlene Tietsort	379
Mike Glenn	216
Jeffrey Venn	65
One 2-year term	Votes
Steve Hageberger	
EAST LANSING	
Two 4-year terms	Votes
✓ Nancy Danhof	1,297
✓ Richard Ball	1,101
Jerry Sutton	1,038
Rod Murphy	777
Charles Bassos	411
Bobby Mitchell Sr.	256

OKEMOS	
Two 4-year terms	Votes
✓ Ronald Basso (Incumbent)	1,359
✓ Bruce Hunting (Incumbent)	1,288
William Beekman	1,252
STOCKBRIDGE	
Two 4-year terms	Votes
Judy Heeney (Incumbent)	
NOTE: A write-in candidate will fill one position on the board.	
WAVERLY	
One 4-year term	Votes
Norman Baczkiewicz	
Marian Feebery	
WEBBERVILLE	
Two 4-year terms	Votes
✓ Jacqueline Risner (Incumbent)	182
✓ Raymond Ryan (Incumbent)	217
One 2-year term	Votes

MAPLE VALLEY	
One 4-year term	Votes
✓ Harold Stewart	170
One 1-year term	Votes
✓ Richard Ewing (Incumbent)	164
POTTERVILLE	
Two 4-year terms	Votes
✓ Chris Stover	132
✓ Bill Wilson	89
Mel Simpson	88
William Christensen (I)	80
Ron Lichti (Incumbent)	61
Clinton County	
BATH	
Two 4-year terms	Votes
✓ Mary Anne Cooley	324
Jo Miller	260

Shiawassee County	
CORUNNA	
Two 4-year terms	Votes
✓ John Jenkins	1,371
✓ Warren Gutting (Incumbent)	1,261
Carolyn Cromwell	1,031
LAINGSBURG	
Two 4-year terms	Votes
✓ Dennis Morrill (Incumbent)	900
✓ James Cribbs (Incumbent)	678
Raymond Bates	626
MORRICE	
Two 4-year terms	Votes
✓ Nikki Cunningham	198
✓ John Haas	158
Jim Eymann	147
Bruce Grubba	135
OWOSSO	
One 4-year term	Votes

The Lansing State Journal, June 14, 1988

Surely, he would have more chances. "We always thought Bill would someday run for office," McGow says. "He just has the leadership personality." Beekman's mind was, and is, politically eccentric. In 1976, he told his parents that if Jimmy Carter defeated incumbent President Gerald Ford — the pride of Michigan — he would demand to move to Canada. He was 9. Years later, he was assigned a paper at Michigan State on U.S. presidential programs. Beekman's classmates picked modern, contemporary policies like Truman's foreign policy, NATO, etc., as you would expect. Beekman, meanwhile, chose James Polk's domestic policies of the 1840s.

Asked about the paper all these years later, Beekman gets riled up. He laughs, red-faced, eyes closed. "I'm a big James Polk fan," he says. "He's an underestimated president."

Beekman is, in reality, too earnest to be a politician. He was lucky to figure this out early. He figured out politics was more about bickering and power plays. His upbringing called for a more right-minded, principled purpose. Beekman's parents were high school sweethearts who passed on college educations in favor of marriage and work. His mother, Kay, ended up becoming a dental assistant. His father, Edward, walked over to Oldsmobile and asked for a job, as you did in those days. He landed a spot on the assembly line that week, working on the body drop, guiding car frames onto chassis. As the decades rolled by, Edward Beekman, a U.S. Marine Corps Reserve, worked his way up to manager at General Motors and ended up as head of final assembly audits. He and Kay raised four boys. William was the oldest.

Today, Bill Beekman's thinning auburn hair is combed back, streaked by white along the sides. His only vice is Diet Coke. He squints when he smiles, like the guy next door, waving as he picks up the paper. "Hey, neighbor!" Then, though, Beekman trains his obedient eyes and considers a pressing question. His mind, one shaped by sidwinding ambitions, looks for what doors to open and which alleys to dodge. "A true statesman is someone who listens," he says. "It's a skill, like writing a good letter. It's a lost art form."

Though no institution can prepare for a monster like Larry Nassar, the aftermath that occurred at Michigan State was a cross of its own making. Day after day, from the president's office on down, responses were framed by finger pointing, naïveté and tone-deafness. The sun never rose last winter. Protests erupted on campus. Media swarmed, wielding pens shaped like sickles. Nassar was sentenced to 40 to 175 years in prison for abusing, among others, 25 MSU student-athletes between 1997 to 2016. Amid the tumult, university president Lou Anna Simon and athletic director Mark Hollis both resigned, creating a vacuum of leadership. The university's board of trustees attempted to fill it, managing the institution and the impending optics.

What happened, instead, was an often brutal, public display of petty political gamesmanship. The board of trustees — a body of publicly elected officials — devolved at a time the university needed it most.

Beekman was in the middle of it all. As secretary of the board, he was one of the lone stalwarts in place to restore order and tamp down the crisis. At a time when the shortcomings of the president's office, the board and the athletic department all came under heavy fire, he was the primary conduit between all of them. His standing was high enough that, following Simon's resignation, he was named interim university president for a little over a week in late January until Engler arrived.

A complicated picture of Beekman emerges here. This summer, when Engler promoted him to full-time AD, Beekman's dealings with the board were held up as an exemplar of his aptitude and experience. He was touted as coolheaded and self-possessed. The praise is difficult to square with last year's storm. The question jumps off the page — did Beekman do as well as possible in an impossible situation or was he part of the problem?

Brian Mosallam, a member of the board and a former MSU football player, leans to the former: "He did a great job managing the egos of eight different constituents and eight different personalities. Just watching him operate during the crisis and how calm he was, and the way, internally, how everybody reacted to the situation and the way he managed everybody."

Multiple trustees interviewed for this story describe Beekman as a mediator. He worked both sides of the aisle, massaging agendas from Republicans and Democrats alike. (It's unclear whether Beekman comes from the left or the right, but the safe bet says it's straight down the middle.) Dianne Byrum, a trustee since 2008 and a partner at Byrum & Fisk Advocacy Communications, a public-relations firm, told me Beekman was, and is, "trusted across the board." One of his best qualities, she says, is "keeping conversations in confidence." This is how Beekman operated in all his previous jobs. He negotiated the medical school's contracts with Blue Cross and Physicians Health Plan of Mid-Michigan for physicians working in residency, resulting in him being named interim CEO of the MSU Health Team at only 29 years old. Later he negotiated the medical school's move to Grand Rapids in 2010, striking deals with the city's power-brokers, names like DeVos, Secchia and Van Andel.

Despite the Feb. 5 statement that he would only make an out-of-house hire, Engler never conducted a national search for athletic director and never considered an outside candidate. His decision to appoint Beekman was, nevertheless, approved 8-0 by the board, even though multiple board members saw no need for Engler to make a full-time hire. "I didn't think it was necessary. I thought we were going to wait for a new president," Mosallam says, remembering back. Beekman's appointment came as a surprise but received full support. On the outside, some were offended that after everything Michigan State had been through, it had the gall to hire a perceived insider. The fact that the decision was made by Engler, whose interim presidency at MSU has been, from the start, blistered by controversy and contention, only caused further unease.

Engler shakes his head. Sitting in a conference room atop the Hannah Administration Building, the former Republican governor of Michigan tells me Beekman's performance as interim AD was "so strong that it became kind of unnecessary" to pursue outside candidates.

As interim president, Engler sees it as his role to "get things as squared away as I can," and not to "stack up problems or decisions for the next president." He says he chose Beekman for institutional stability.

Multiple sources with knowledge of the AD transition, however, attest that the impetus to hire Beekman full-time was prompted more so by head basketball coach Tom Izzo and football coach Mark Dantonio than by Engler. They, along with other athletic department personnel, felt comfortable with Beekman. He met with every coach in the department one-on-one. His demeanor was confident and unruffled. Most importantly, perhaps, he wasn't a stranger; an outsider who would come in and startle the horses. According to sources, Izzo and Dantonio galvanized the MSU coaches throughout the department to tout Beekman's performance to Engler and push the idea of him as full-time AD. Each also personally told Engler that Beekman was the man for the job.

Such a level of endorsement made it easy to check "Athletic Director" off the to-do list. Recounting the time of Beekman's hiring, Engler says: "We had a few other things going on, we had a lot of litigation to get behind, we had a lot of other things. So I didn't have time to even think about a search. I said we'd do it later and I didn't want to do it during the school year, but when we started to get time to think about, 'OK, what are we going to do here?' Then the conversation was, 'Hey, Bill's been here X amount of months, and what do you think?' I thought, well, he ought to stay here."

That is not how a high-major athletic director is typically hired.

Engler, whose term as interim president is expected to end next summer, gave Beekman a five-year contract nearly identical to Hollis' deal. It was no coincidence. When it came time to agree on a deal, Beekman essentially took his predecessor's contract and put his own name on it. "I figured the least controversial thing to do would be to just sort of sign the same contract that had been signed before," Beekman tells me. "Nothing more, nothing less."

One contract clause, though, sticks out. Beekman's deal states that if he's removed as AD before July 31, 2023, without cause, he can automatically shift back to a position as senior consultant to the provost and vice president for finance and operations. Upon reassignment, per the contract, he'll begin a new five-year term paying \$375,000 annually.

Among those who follow the big business of college athletic administrators, this stipulation appears to be a veiled out-clause for the school. The logic goes: Engler hired Beekman as a sign of stability, but left the side door open for the next university president — expected to be hired in the summer of 2019 — to bring in an athletic director of his or her choosing.

"I think maybe they thought about, 'Who can we attract in this environment, with everything going on?'" says sports attorney Jason Belzer, the publisher of AthleticDirectorU and a professor of sports business and management at Rutgers. "If you're not going to get a top-tier candidate anyway, let's play it safe and hire someone who will be able to steer the ship for a little bit before going on and figuring out a permanent answer."

Putting it more bluntly, one high-major administrator said of Beekman: "I have a feeling that he won't be around (as AD) for an extended period of time."

In theory, the logic makes sense. In reality, the deal might be exactly what it seems.

Beekman tells me the perceived out-clause is, in fact, a reworked version of Hollis' buyout — a stipulation paying out 50 percent of the base salary over the remainder of the term, in case of termination. Beekman's preexisting deal as secretary of the board and vice president, similarly, carried a proviso assuring him reassignment. In essence, the two contracts were combined. "It's basically a blending of the language in Hollis' contract with what had previously been in my contract," he says.

The perception of Beekman-as-placeholder still exists, though, among some onlookers. He was such a long-shot hire that anyone exploring the deal looks for angles in a circle.



Beekman, during his stint as interim athletic director, chats with MSU interim president John Engler before a board of trustees meeting. (Matthew Dae Smith/Lansing State Journal, via USA TODAY NETWORK)

For their part, the leadership at Michigan State scoff at the idea.

“Bill Beekman came in on an 8-0 vote,” Mosallam, the trustee, says. “He’s got more support than John Engler. ... I think Bill is going to be part of the package that comes with the new president. A new president will have to look at the board and respect the board’s decision. We’ll see as time goes, but anyone who applies for this job (as president) has to realize that we just hired our athletic director.”

Engler rolled his eyes at a question of Beekman’s longevity, saying, “It would be silly to suggest that. I expect Bill to be here for a long time. I expect him to be the guy in 20 years who hires Tom Izzo’s replacement.”

As for himself, Beekman says that, while he does not yet feel like an athletic director, he doesn’t plan on going anywhere. “If I do my job really well,” he says, “everything else will take care of itself.”

The fact remains, though, that Beekman is a gamble. “It’s definitely an unconventional hire,” says Stephen W. Dittmore, a sports management professor at the University of Arkansas. Most athletic directors who don’t take traditional routes to the job at least have a background in athletics. Jack Swarbrick, hired at Notre Dame in 2008 after working as an attorney, served as chairman of the Indiana Sports Corp., and represented such entities as USA Gymnastics. Syracuse hired ESPN executive John Wildhack, but his athletics background included oversight of ESPN’s rights negotiations with the SEC, ACC, NBA, Major League Baseball and others. At Michigan, former AD Dave Brandon came from the private sector, but at least played college football at U-M.

Beekman’s lack of experience is no small matter. He’s the first to admit it. Many wonder what might happen if a significant event arises. How wide is Beekman’s blind spot and who will he consult? How empowered is he to manage Dantonio and Izzo, two coaches with enormous power? And what happens if or when he has to tell one of them “no.” What if, in an unforeseen event, he has to replace either, or both? Is he prepared to conduct a high-level coaching search? As a fundraiser, a mission that takes up 50 percent of a high-major AD’s work, can Beekman keep up with the department’s financial demands, especially in athletic facilities?

These are major questions and the chances of Michigan State going five years without one arising are slim.

It’s a rainy Friday in East Lansing when I spot Beekman walking toward the Smith Center, MSU’s student-athlete academic support building, across the street from Spartan Stadium. He is carrying an enormous Michigan State megaphone. “We’re starting a new tradition,” he tells me. “We’re gonna have all the members of each year’s Hall of Fame class sign one of these and display it in the office. It’ll be a nice thing.”

Beekman is a man who appreciates legacy. It's why, in college, he'd grab a buddy or two and ask them to hop in a car, and drive to go see a speech by Gerald Ford, George H. W. Bush, Mike Dukakis, Dick Gephardt, Dan Quayle, whoever. It is why it's not enough for him to love something — he has to be a collector. Despite being an accidental athletic director, he does, in fact, love sports. He has “an incredible memorabilia collection,” according to Patrick McGow, his old friend. Beekman's basement, meanwhile, is an unofficial university museum. Nostalgia abounds, including a carved slice from the [elm tree](#) planted by Theodore Roosevelt for MSU's semi-centennial in 1907. In his wallet, Beekman carries a handful of laminated grass from the Rose Bowl. He snatched a handful from the field after MSU's 2014 win over Stanford.

For Beekman, much of his early life was spent trying to figure out what name to make for himself. Politics. Law. Higher Ed. Now, in his 50s, he finds himself in a bizarre, deeply personal role. He loves Michigan State — grew up cheering for MSU, went there, met his wife there, sent a daughter there — and is suddenly in a high-profile position to help fix the place. He is the curator of Michigan State athletics at a time needing essential leadership. The Spartan brand is in recovery mode — from the Nassar scandal, from culture questions, from questions about its handling of football and men's basketball players in sexual misconduct cases.

When he goes home at night, extra work tucked under his arm, Beekman heads to his basement and sits at a grand old desk. He rescued it years ago after it was discarded from the Hannah Building during a renovation. He had his eye on it and found out it was taken to a salvage yard. Upon seeing it placed outside one day, priced at \$50, he handed over the cash, loaded the desk up on a truck and took it home. “A massive thing,” he says, that was “in a fair bit of disrepair.” It's so large the school needed a crane to originally place it in the building.

Alone at night, Beekman leans over that desk, papers spread, pecking at a keyboard, doing a job he never expected to have — one that some are unsure he can do. As it turns out, John Hannah himself, the university president from 1941 to 1969, also sat at this desk. So did every subsequent Michigan State president up to Simon, a time spanning six decades. At least 12 MSU presidents used it. He can rattle off most of their names.

This is where Bill Beekman sits, trying to lead his Spartans to a new day. An uncommon man in an unlikely position.



Spartan Head Coach Mark Dantonio & Athletic Director Bill Beekman

Two Unanticipated Challenges for MSU's New Athletic Director

By early 2020, barely a year had passed since Beekman had moved from being interim Athletic Director to permanent Athletic Director – and just as quickly Beekman's charge to lead "his Spartans to a new day" became doubly challenging! First, in early 2020, the Spartan head football coach Mark Dantonio announced that he was retiring immediately from that position which he held for 13 seasons. Just like that, Job 1 on Beekman's "to do" list became recruiting and hiring a new head football coach.

Second, just a month later, a second challenge arrived—namely, following the COVID-19-driven cancellation of the Big Ten and NCAA basketball tournaments, suspension of classroom-based instruction on the MSU campus, and the NCAA's cancellation of all remaining winter sports as well as all spring sports, Beekman had another new charge: how MSU's athletic program could adapt to, succeed, and be sustained in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. The image below encapsulates this new double challenge.

MSU athletic director Bill Beekman on Wednesday told WVFN-AM (730 in Lansing) that almost the entire athletic department has been working remotely due to the ongoing coronavirus pandemic. However, he also is acutely aware that the challenges of that are significant for Tucker, who took over Feb. 12 for Mark Dantonio following his sudden retirement after 13 seasons.



Michigan State's new head football coach Mel Tucker, right, and MSU Athletic Director Bill Beekman talk after Tucker arrived on Wednesday, Feb. 12, 2020, at the Capital Region International Airport in Lansing. (Photo: Nick King/Lansing State Journal)

"Well, the coaches are certainly spending a lot of time getting together via Zoom and other technologies," Beekman said. "And as the players are home, it's not - to the best of my knowledge at least – against the rules for our coaches to have some contact with players via technology, to begin to have conversations about the new playbook and to begin to have conversations about what they're looking at in the new season and getting-to-know-you kinds of conversations."

Recruiting a New Head Football Coach

Beekman moved quickly with MSU colleagues to develop a list of potential candidates for the head football coach position. Initially, the names of several potential candidates for the job appeared in print or on social media.

MSU Athletic Department briefing Board of Trustees on head coaching search Monday



Andrew Brewster
February 9, 2020

Amidst a **firestorm of rumors** around the University of Cincinnati football head coach Luke Fickell, the Michigan State University Athletic Department will meet with the University's Board of Trustees on Monday to brief them on the search. This was **reported by Nick Mantas**, reporter and anchor for WLNS, a Lansing TV station.

What isn't a rumor is that Michigan State Athletic Director Bill Beekman **was in Cincinnati this weekend**. As of right now, Fickell is the clear top choice and the only name who has been brought up as an interviewee who has not publicly declined the role.

Colorado head coach Mel Tucker **removed his name from consideration** for the role on Saturday morning. San Francisco 49ers defensive coordinator **Robert Saleh declined to interview**, stating he had unfinished business in the NFL with San Francisco. Former MSU defensive coordinator Pat Narduzzi was a name that was initially floated for the role, but he quickly killed that rumor in **hilarious fashion**.

Then, just three days after February 9, when it had been reported (see box above) that **Colorado** head coach Mel Tucker had “removed his name from consideration,” Sparty’s new head football coach, Mel Tucker, arrived at Lansing’s Capital Region International Airport on February 12, ready to take on the charge of revitalizing the Spartans football program.



Tucker first focused on recruitment of a new staff of coaching assistants; and second on recruiting talented high school players, and doing the latter during a period in which the NCAA had banned recruiting-related travel to meet with potential recruits or high school students traveling to the MSU campus for a look-see and with hopes of being offered a football scholarship.

This quickly led the Beekman-Tucker team (and assistant coaches) to forge a recruiting process based, for example, on holding meetings virtually and engaging with potential recruits through communication technologies such as holding meetings by Zoom and showcasing the MSU campus through virtual tours—as well as communicating virtually with the team’s existing players to present and discuss Tucker’s new playbook.

“I think in this fluid environment, it’s hard to tell when anything close to a face-to-face conversation or things like spring ball will be able to occur. But I know we’re trying to be as creative as possible to get the coaches prepared and ready to go, so that whenever that day comes, we’re ready for it.” (Bill Beekman - [Source](#)).

Leading MSU's Athletic Program in the Time of COVID-19

The Spartans basketball team had just finished the Big Ten season as conference tri-champion and was ready to make a deep run in the Big Ten and NCAA tournaments, with a strong possibility of winning the 2020 national championship. Then, suddenly, all that was taken away when both tournaments were cancelled. And almost as quickly not only was classroom instruction suspended at MSU but also winter/spring sports which left Beekman as MSU's Athletic Director as well as other Big Ten school ADs facing the uncertainty of whether and when their athletes would be allowed to get back on the field or on the court – and under what conditions and with what restrictions. Commenting on this unprecedented situation, Beekman stated:

“From my perspective, [obviously with a new head coach](#), we'd relish the opportunity to get our young men in for some number of days,” Beekman said. “Spring ball is off the table. But could we schedule something in early June or mid-June with enough time to get our guys home and rested for most of July? That probably would be optimal. At the conference level and at the NCAA, they're exploring those options.

“And I think the watch word so far has been to try and be as flexible as possible, to help people through this situation and to think about how we can amend the rules on a one-time basis to keep people as whole as we can. It's my hope that we find a way to do that.”

Beekman said he understands how Tucker and MSU's other coaches are feeling in the middle of the college sports stoppage.

“We've got our coaches who are probably like my kids, who are after three days at home beginning to get antsy,” he said. “I think our coaches are antsy and trying to strategize about diving in in the fall.” ([Source](#))

During this “wait and see” period but yet having the foresight and flexibility to prepare and be ready to move forward once restrictions are relaxed, Beekman found himself reengaging in the health field in which he previously worked (see next two articles).



([Source](#): Click on Image to Access the Arrow to Listen to the Interview)

Bill Beekman: Big Ten united in response to coronavirus, some schools worried about financial impact

Updated Mar 19, 2020; Posted Mar 18, 2020



In this May 28, 2019, file photo, Michigan State University athletic director Bill Beekman, listens at a Board of Trustees meeting in East Lansing, Mich.(AP Photo/Paul Sancya, File) AP

By [Matt Wenzel | mwenzel2@mlive.com](mailto:mwenzel2@mlive.com)

At this time last week, the Big Ten men's basketball tournament was about to start in Indianapolis.

Less than 24 hours later, the event was scrapped and, shortly after that, the NCAA canceled all remaining winter sports championships as well as all spring sports championships.

The coronavirus pandemic has shut down sports across the globe and created an ever-changing environment. That's forced athletic directors across the country to scramble.

"I think the Big Ten athletic directors have a couple of concerns," Michigan State athletic director Bill Beekman said Wednesday on Staudt on Sports on 730 AM in Lansing. "I think that as we've walked through it, as we've talked about when we send students home, when we shut down facilities, people have not talked about 'gee, is that a competitive advantage or disadvantage to me?' And I don't think in their hearts they've been really thinking about it all that much.

"What I've heard from my colleagues is really a laser focus on what's in the best interest of our students, how do we keep them safe, how do we keep our coaches and our staff safe? How do we implement that and how do we work with our colleagues to make all that happen? I think people have been very uniform in being concerned about, in this uncharted water, what do we do to be on the safe side of life, to take care of people and make sure they're safe and healthy and well?"

The Big Ten on Thursday canceled all remaining athletic competitions through the end of the academic year. A day later, the conference suspended all organized team activities through at least April 6, at which point it will be re-evaluated. That means Michigan State football spring practice, scheduled to start Tuesday, is postponed indefinitely and Beekman said the likely “optimal” outlook would be for it to take place in June, which would require NCAA rule changes.

Beekman said Big Ten athletic directors met last Wednesday and their next in-person gathering is scheduled for early May at conference headquarters in Rosemont, Ill. He’s hopeful that meeting will still take place but said communication is ongoing.

“We’re meeting regularly. Commissioner (Kevin) Warren has really taken the bull by the horns and so we have, amongst the athletic directors, regular conference calls to just sort of check in,” Beekman said. “And it’s always helpful to understand what other schools are doing, how they’re approaching problems, how their campuses are handling things and to make sure that we’re trying to be on the same page and as consistent as we can.”

Financial impact

Although Beekman said Big Ten athletic directors are aligned when it comes to health and safety of students and staff, there’s one topic in which some universities have more concerns than others.

“Where I think things get variable is with the NCAA Tournament canceled, with the Big Ten tournament largely canceled, there’s going to be a very interesting economic impact and some schools are simply significantly wealthier than others,” Beekman said. “There is some variability in the anxiety over how we’re going to grapple with the finances of this as they roll out and how prepared we are to deal with that. I think it’s a concern that everybody has but certainly it impacts some of us more than others.”

The cancellation of the NCAA Tournament will likely lead a reduction in the NCAA’s planned distribution of \$600 million to Division I universities and conferences this spring, according to the USATODAY. Beekman can see that leading to some schools cutting sports, staff or altering how they operate.

“I wouldn’t be surprised at all to see some of those things happen,” he said. “Obviously we cut sports as a last resort, but I think conversations about not filling open positions as they come due to be on the safe side whenever possible – those kinds of conversations are ongoing.”

Spring sports

The NCAA on Friday announced eligibility relief was appropriate for Division I athletes in spring sports. How exactly that will be worked out and the effects it would have on rosters are still being considered.

“I think there are a lot of ideas being kicked around,” Beekman said. “One is to simply give those students, where the stoppage would have cost them a year, to give them an additional year. ... There’s also been some conversation about, is it possible, if this passes successfully and we’re back to sort of a full-functioning environment in June or July, is it possible to have some abbreviated spring sport schedule in the fall. That’s been kicked around by a number of folks.”

Beekman noted it was still early in developing ideas and there’s creativity between schools, conferences and the NCAA.

“With the unfortunate stoppage of spring sports,” Beekman said, “we’ve got our coaches who are probably like my kids who are, after three days at home, beginning to get antsy. I think our coaches are antsy and trying to strategize about diving in in the fall” ([Source](#)).

In this difficult period, even Michigan’s two arch-rivals, the University of Michigan and Michigan State, facing a common enemy, found common ground to join forces and work together as convey in the video below.



University of Michigan & Michigan State University combine forces against COVID-19

Forward to the Future

As of this writing (5/30/20), only time will tell what the future holds for **AD Bill Beekman** and **Michigan State’s** athletics program. However, if past is prologue, fans of **Spartans** athletics can rest assured that, under Athletic Director Bill Beekman’s leadership, the future of Spartan athletics is in the good hands of MSU’s **Top Jock Spartan!**

Looking Back

Bill Beekman’s career began 40 years ago as a young **Chieftain** brave at **Okemos High**. Beekman’s journey since leaving high school is a legacy of which all **Chieftains** can be proud. Now, looking back on that journey to date, Beekman shared the following reflections of his days as a student at **Okemos High**.

My four years at Okemos High School were among the most transformational in my life. At OHS I met several lifelong friends, people that I continue to stay in touch with 35 years after we graduated. I had many great experiences, from dating and relationships to intellectual challenges and academic rigor to running cross country, one of the most challenging yet rewarding things I've ever done. From Ms. Puckett I learned what it means to love what you do; from Mr. Collar I learned the importance of being open-minded; and Coach Quiring exemplified true kindness and selflessness. I often think about the many lessons I learned at Okemos High School, from friends and faculty alike, and how they've served me so well over the course of my career. Those lessons could fill a book – maybe someday they will – for they will always be with me. Even after so many years, I will always carry with me a good measure of Chieftain pride!

Going forward, keep watch for the “smoke signals” and listen to the “drum beats” as this **Chieftain Brave-cum-Spartan Top Jock**, Bill Beekman, continues to lead hundreds of **Spartan** student-athletes onward to **“Victory for MSU.”**