

Giannini's Response to Criticism 'Weak'

Growing College Football-Related Controversy Harmful to Southern Miss

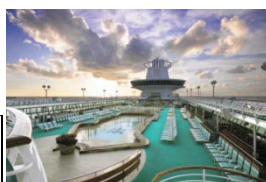
The growing controversy surrounding the late-March-2011 revelations that led to the end of Fiesta Bowl president and CEO John Junker's tenure – which was marked by lavish gifts, a \$1,200 visit to a strip club, an almost \$30,000 per year car allowance, and memberships in various country clubs – continues to hound USM athletics director Richard Giannini. Though not directly involved in Junker's activities, Giannini has been named to a "task force" that is set to analyze the Junker/Fiesta Bowl situation and make recommendations that are hoped to avoid such controversies in the future. However, a late-night **... breaking news ...** report on 30-Mar-2011 [here](#) at USMNEWS.net highlights Dan Wetzel's [criticisms](#) of Giannini's involvement with the task force. Wetzel, the award-winning **YAHOO!SPORTS** sports journalist whose report broke the recent scandal involving Ohio State head football coach Jim Tressel, informed the nation that having Giannini on the task force means "... having a guy ... who takes lavish gifts from one bowl game ... judge another bowl game for giving out lavish gifts." Here, Wetzel is referring to Giannini's receipt of a "complimentary getaway" Caribbean cruise (during June-2010), courtesy of the Orange Bowl, which was characterized by PlayoffPAC as a vacation where college football executives enjoyed a visit to the private island of CoCoCay for parasailing and sipping mixed drinks in the sun. Though Orange Bowl officials describe the event as legitimate, Wetzel points out that Fiesta Bowl officials made the same claim when PlayoffPAC first complained of Junker's activities. PlayoffPAC has since filed an IRS complaint, alleging that the Fiesta Bowl's activities violate not-for-profit rules.



Giannini



YAHOO!SPORTS' Wetzel



RC's Majesty of the Seas



CoCoCay, Bahamas

In response to these types of criticisms, USM's Giannini [told](#) *The Hattiesburg American's* Alan Hinton that his receipt of "the Orange Bowl-sponsored cruise ... does not conflict with his membership on a task force that is investigating Fiesta Bowl improprieties." Giannini stated that neither he nor anyone else on board the cruise ship received any "lavish gifts," a comment online readers of *THA's* story have characterized as nonsensical, realizing that a complimentary cruise to the Caribbean is itself a lavish gift. Sources tell USMNEWS.net that Giannini's entire response to the controversy is, at best, weak. Other parts of the response include Giannini's argument that his presence on the cruise facilitated "discussions" with some of the sport's "decision makers" during a time of elevated conference realignment activity. Giannini's own inflated sense of self-importance was, according to sources, on display with this comment to Hinton – "I was honored to be a part of the group because it came the same week of conference realignment last year and most of the decision makers were together in the same room. I publicly stated in the media at that time that I intended to participate in this trip, and [I] blogged during and after the event about how fascinating it was to be among my peers during the intense realignment discussions." What he omits to comment on, during what sources call his bloviating about high-level discussions on board the Majesty of the Seas and at CoCoCay, was how his wife, Gayle, was occupying her free time during *their* complimentary "four-day Caribbean junket."