

MEMORANDUM

To: Walter Harrison, Committee on Academic Performance
From: 1A FAR Board of Directors
Date: September 6, 2012
Re: Educational Efforts re Newly Adopted DI Initial-Eligibility Standards

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on your August 20, 2012, memorandum that outlines the educational outreach efforts that NCAA staff is undertaking regarding the new initial-eligibility requirements to ensure the education of key constituency groups (e.g., prospects, parents, high school coaches, and high school guidance counselors). In particular, you have asked for feedback regarding the possible “broadening of current legislation to allow college coaches to have contact and communication with prospect age and younger individuals for the sole purpose of educating them on the new academic requirements.” You go on to say that contact by the coaches would not be about expanded recruiting, but would allow coaches to help educate prospects on the new standards.

We received input from a large number of FARs, including those on the 1A FAR Board (comprised of members representing each of the FBS conferences). All FARs who responded applaud the efforts by CAP and staff to get out the word early about the new initial-eligibility rules. None of us want deserving students boxed out of an opportunity for a college education and college varsity athletics experience simply because they were not apprised (or apprised in time) of the new standards. FARs also share a worry that there might be a differential distribution among middle schools and high schools regarding counselors who are best informed of the new standards and, in turn, who do a better job of advising their students.

All that said, however, not one FAR who responded supports changing the recruiting rules to allow contact by the coaches with these youngsters at a time earlier than the first time at which recruiting contacts or communication is permitted, even if the purpose is intended only to be educational in nature. Similarly, not one FAR supported coaches providing educational information – either because FARs believed that educational instruction should come from educators or because FARs believed that it will be a compliance nightmare to monitor information coming from coaches, or both. In addition, there was a general concern as to how youngsters who are not yet enrolled in ninth grade will be targeted to receive the information, no matter whether it comes from institutional educational and admissions staff, or coaches, or the NCAA national office, or someone else (media representatives, former student-athletes, etc.). The concern was that information dissemination that goes to some but not all youngsters might suggest that for these youngsters their athletic potential matters most. All FARs that addressed the matter believed, moreover, that the NCAA should produce standardized educational information that may be used in alerting prospects.

The following is a sampling of the feedback that we received from individual FBS FARs regarding the proposals:

- Do we really want coaches (as opposed to our academic services & initial eligibility staffs) talking to 8th graders – albeit supposedly only about educational requirements? Although this is intended, in part, to relax current early contact rules for the purpose of educating prospects about the new requirements, and not for recruiting – how is that possibly going to be monitored if a coach is making the contacts?
- Even the proposals to deregulate recruiting methods that are being proposed by the Rules Working Group include a date before which contacts are not permitted (e.g., June 15 following a prospect's sophomore year in high school). The current CAP proposal runs counter to that preclusion on early contacts.
- Eighth graders are 14, plus or minus a year. Coaches are probably considered to be (at least minor) gods by youngsters who believe they are future athletics stars. So, Coach X says, "Now guys/gals, this is not about recruiting, but if you want to come to our school you must follow this set of rules that perhaps your counselors understand, but I'll bet your mother doesn't. Just do what I say." How can this not be recruiting?
- The NCAA is trying to do what's right. But the NCAA really has little business in middle schools.
- The NCAA does have a significant responsibility to help educate principals, teachers (particularly those who also coach), and counselors. But the NCAA needs to talk to grown-ups. Our University admissions folks need to help spread the word to youngsters as they talk about higher education to all college-bound kids.
- From a campus athletics perspective, this education responsibility should be handled by folks who cannot coach or recruit. Our folks should work within the education system.
- The NCAA should utilize social media to provide educational information.
- It is naive to think that educating prospects on changes in initial eligibility regulations can be separated from recruiting. I would also question whether coaches are the right messengers to carry the information anyway. I cannot imagine a coach wanting to do this unless there were some hope for increased access and visibility.
- The young age suggested and the attempt to limit content of contact to electronic documentation is not realistic or believable. A mass information campaign by the NCAA, aimed at middle school administration, guidance counselors, school children, and interscholastic coaches seems about the only way to be effective and ensure collegiate activities don't muddy the recruiting waters

- The best way to communicate the information would be to use the network provided by admissions offices and whatever networks are available to reach coaches. For this to be effective we need a succinct, clear, and complete description of the changes that will occur.
- It would be better to educate the counselors and coaches than to try to reach all of the students. Otherwise, you would need to return and meet with each ensuing year's group. If you ask most middle school athletes if they are likely to be a college prospect, you will get a resounding yes.
- I do not understand the role of member institutions (coaches or otherwise) in making contact with children not yet even of prospect age. This proposal seems to initiate athletics opportunities with children who in the past were "hands off." Some of the children about whom they are most concerned are the same children who see their role identity exclusively or predominantly wrapped up in their athletics ability (or perceived athletics ability). I am concerned about any initiative that seems to underscore this role identity. More broadly, I fail to understand how these children too young to be prospects will be identified.
- If what is intended is to allow in-person contacts or telephone calls, then this not only will be a compliance nightmare, but it invites issues for and with coaches. I cannot imagine any situation in which I would be in favor of such "contacts" that are described as being not for recruiting purposes.
- If what is intended is for big-name coaches to do radio and TV spots, then I think this already is permissible under NCAA bylaws. If what is intended is for big-name coaches to address high school groups at which prospects may be present, then I think the proposal needs to specify just what is intended. Right now it is too difficult to provide feedback with any degree of certainty.
- I assume the NCAA is looking to member schools to help with educational outreach because there are not enough national office staff to get this done. I also assume the NCAA is looking to coaches and other athletics administrators in part for fear that "regular" institutional personnel might misinform or, in any event, would not have the same ability to get the attention of the prospects. But, I think there are other ways to achieve these goals with fewer negative consequences. Couldn't the NCAA ask former players to help out? Certainly a good number of them do talk radio and local and national TV. Could the NCAA ask pro coaches to do TV spots?
- I do not agree with including coaching staff in the shared outreach effort. And, I am using coaching staff in the broadest way possible to include directors of operations for the sport, etc. I am less concerned about using other athletic department staff – from academics, compliance, and the like.
- Although the fourth principle states "... and not to permit earlier recruiting access," I am afraid that assuring this does not happen (especially if the coaching staff is involved)

will become a compliance headache at best. Inevitably, additional resources at the NCAA, conference, and/or institutional level will have to be devoted to monitoring the minority of individuals who will tarnish what on the surface is a noble endeavor. Wouldn't it be preferable to program these resources from the outset in support of the educational initiative being proposed? I like the idea of using professional coaches, former collegiate players, etc., to get the word out, followed up by trained individuals at each institution (again, not coaching staff) who can serve as resource people for high school guidance counselors, coaches, etc., to contact for more information and guidance.

- Educational materials should be prepared by the NCAA alone to ensure consistency in content. Plus, I would encourage training to accompany these materials to ensure consistency in presentation if institutional non-coaching staff will be used. The questions about recruiting calendars and rules are not relevant because I oppose using coaching staff.

- I cannot find a persuasive rationale for sending coaches to schools to disseminate this information. The new rules are fundamentally about academic issues, and so one could argue that it is logical to have administrative staff, advisors, or other non-coaching personnel from member institutions talking with students. I understand that the coaches might provide the name recognition that would interest students in paying close attention. But, in that fact there is another problem. It does not seem feasible or realistic to draw a clear-cut line between educational presentations by coaches and recruiting. It seems to invite questionable practices if not outright violations. I concur with others that professional coaches, former players, etc. would also be possible and preferable as part of a solution to the problem of getting information out there.

- I am unclear about which K-12 schools any given member institution is supposed to target. Does it send a message in and of itself if a given institution is going to a school to be the conduit of NCAA information? What is the message if one institution makes repeat informational visits to one school? I'm uncomfortable as well with the lack of specification of the age of students ("younger" could cover a lot). It also is not completely clear to me the extent to which the campaign is targeting administrators/teachers/counselors and to what extent it is targeting students. At some points in the document it mentions reaching "high school personnel," which seems very important and appropriate and does not raise as many issues about potential recruiting.

- The idea of member institutions developing their own educational materials has the potential to further blur the line between informational materials and promotional or recruiting materials (and misinformation might unintentionally get introduced through such a process). I agree with others in stressing the importance of using standard materials prepared by the NCAA. I also agree that training would be imperative.

- I am totally opposed to using coaching staff but would support using other non-coaching institutional staff (or former players, etc.) if they had participated in an NCAA training session and used only NCAA prepared materials. I also support trying to get the

information out to middle school administrators and school counselors because encouragement to attend college begins in earnest during this time.

- Monitoring would be impossible and this only serves to expose 8th graders to recruiting by college coaches. Why have any regulations if you are going to lower the bar to middle school children?

In addition, we also understand that CAP has considered an alternative to instead provide an NCAA template document that coaches could then mail to prospects and younger children. As is evidenced by several of the comments above, we applaud the creation of educational materials. However, we would again urge that you not open the door to direct contact by the coaches with these youngsters. It would be far better to have the materials distributed by the NCAA and member institutions to high school guidance counselors and principals. Additionally, coaches associations like the American Football Coaches Association could be asked to send out the information to their many members who are high school coaches. Another alternative could be to have pre-printed NCAA educational materials that could be picked up by attendees at summer camps. The NCAA should also utilize social media to get the word out. In sum, we share your desire to provide helpful educational information about the new eligibility requirements. But, we urge you not to allow direct contact by coaches with prospects and “pre-prospects” as has been proposed.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback.