

washingtonpost.com

NCAA Penalties for Low Graduation Rates to Rise

By Eric Prisbell
Washington Post Staff Writer
Thursday, May 3, 2007; E01

The NCAA sanctioned 112 Division I college sports programs yesterday for failing to meet academic standards, and the organization's officials warned that significantly more teams, including marquee men's basketball and football programs, could be punished next year.

The latest wave of penalties for poor Academic Progress Rate (APR) scores, which measure how well a team returns academically eligible athletes semester to semester, will immediately affect only 63 programs out of 6,110 Division I sports teams.

In all, 44 percent of men's basketball programs and 40 percent of football programs fell below the 925 cutoff score, which equates roughly to a 60 percent graduation rate. But most of those programs were spared penalties because teams with smaller rosters are granted greater margins for error.

With a fourth year of data available next year, the margin for error, also known as the squad-size adjustment, will be eliminated, putting all teams that fell below the 925 threshold at risk. Teams that score below 925 and have a player fail academically and leave school can lose up to 10 percent of their scholarships.

"Unless a team has a significant improvement over the next year, when the [margin for error] goes away, or unless they have a workable plan for recovery, there will be more penalties," NCAA President Myles Brand said. "It's hard to estimate how many more, but it could be significantly more than we have seen this year."

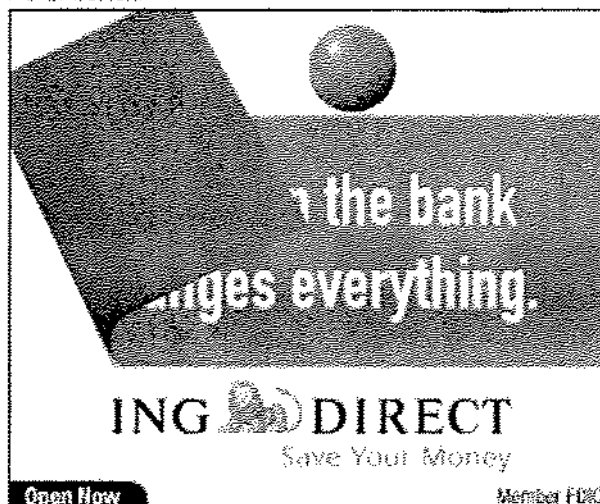
The Maryland's men's basketball team had a three-year score of 908 that was based on the 2003-04, 2004-05 and 2005-06 academic years, but was spared penalties because of the squad-size adjustment.

Maryland's score was significantly hurt by the fact that all four seniors on the 2005-06 team left school last spring without graduating. Programs can earn bonus points if players later return to school to earn their degree. None of the four players who left has earned his degree, according to Anton Goff, Maryland's associate athletic director for academic support.

"We have got to get a message to guys that it is not good enough to just leave," Goff said. "We want you to leave in good standing -- hopefully graduate, but if you're not going to graduate, at least finish out the semester here and leave in good standing. If a young man can see the light at the end of the tunnel, say the season ends mid-March, it's really only a month and a half left. They can get all the training and what they need right here."

Three of Maryland's five scholarship seniors this past season -- Will Bowers, Ekene Ibekwe and Parrish

Advertisement



Brown -- are on track to graduate, a source said, while two, D.J. Strawberry and Mike Jones, have left school to train for a professional basketball career.

Brand acknowledged that while fewer players in baseball and football are leaving school in poor standing, he has not seen the same improvement in men's basketball.

College basketball coaches long have said that it's almost impossible to influence a player to finish the semester when he wants to begin training for his professional career. Syracuse Coach Jim Boeheim said he recommends that players try to graduate within 3 1/2 years, but even that plan does not account for non-seniors who choose to leave in the middle of the spring semester.

"You can't do anything," Boeheim said yesterday. "If one or two kids leave, it doesn't take much to be below 925. Who do we hold responsible? How do you hold the kid or the coach responsible? If you have three or four great players at once, how do you have an APR? You might have a chance to win something big, but your APR is bad."

Thirty-one programs received formal warnings that they were in danger of receiving penalties reserved for chronic scores of 900 or less. Beginning next year, the NCAA will impose historical penalties that could include additional scholarship losses and even postseason bans.

Only a small number of marquee programs in men's basketball and football were immediately affected. This year, only one football team from a BCS conference, Arizona, and one men's basketball program from a power conference, Cincinnati, will lose scholarships. (Iowa State men's basketball program will avoid scholarship losses after receiving a waiver because several players left after a head coaching change.)

More recognizable programs could be affected next year. Walter Harrison, the University of Hartford president and chair of the NCAA's committee on academic performance, said, "This year, to a large extent, should be a warning and advice to the presidents, athletic directors and the coaches that this is a good year to get a plan together and show some improvement."

© 2007 The Washington Post Company

Ads by Google

Athletes: Help Yourself
to an Athletic Scholarship. Free Guide to Being Recruited
www.Recruit-Me.com

Free College Scholarships
\$15,000 in Free Scholarships Everyone is Approved! Guaranteed.
Scholarships.Free-Grant-Kit.com

Athletic Scholarships
Free College Scholarship Website - 1.3 Million College Scholarships
www.FreeScholarshipSearch.com