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NCAA Academic Report Hits Black Schools

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INDIANAPOLIS -- Big-money athletic programs avoided most of the NCAA's penalties. Next year, they might not be so lucky.

The latest Academic Progress Report released by the NCAA on Wednesday showed only 11 BCS teams were punished for poor classroom performance, while historically black colleges and universities accounted for 13 percent of all sanctioned schools. Of the 49 warning letters sent out, 13 went to Louisiana teams.

That discrepancy could change next year when the NCAA plans to drop a mathematical calculation that helped some BCS teams avoid punishment this year, and NCAA president Myles Brand is already sounding the warnings.

"Many more teams could be subject to these penalties next year," he said. "We've written letters to coaches and others saying we are concerned about this issue and we want to help put together plans that will help them improve."

That's little consolation to the schools already facing penalties. This is the first time the NCAA has sent out warning letters based on academic performance.

The NCAA compiles an APR, which measures eligibility and retention of student athletes, for every program at every Division I school.

Teams scoring less than 925 — the equivalent of a 60 percent graduation rate under the NCAA's formula — received warning letters and could face harsher sanctions over the next three years. A second offense during that time would result in a reduction of practice time or games played. A third offense would result in disqualification from NCAA tournaments.

Louisiana-based Nicholls State received the second-most warning letters in four sports: baseball, men's cross country and women's indoor and outdoor track. Texas Southern in Houston received five.

BCS teams, in contrast, received no warning letters and the most prominent programs cited were Arizona's football team and the men's basketball teams at Cincinnati and Iowa State, which could all lose scholarships next year.

Brand believes the disparity is primarily about money.

"It's more about low-income, low-resource schools," he said. "We're concerned about all schools with a

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low-support basis, and there are a number of HBCUs in that category. We're trying to provide them with the resources to do better."

HBCUs received more than 50 waivers, excusing them from penalties for now, NCAA vice president Kevin Lennon said. The NCAA didn't have the figures on how many hurricane-affected schools got waivers.

Texas Southern athletic director Alois Blackwell and Southern University sports information director Kevin Manns concur. Manns pointed to LSU's massive academic center as an example of what can be bought.

But Blackwell does not believe that's an excuse.

"I'm not saying you can't (succeed), but it makes it a little more difficult for you to do it," Blackwell said.

Brand praised New Orleans' Tulane University for its strong academic performance despite Hurricane Katrina -- all seven of its teams scored 940 or better.

"What Tulane and these other schools have been through is one of the worst historical situations possible," Brand said. "If Tulane can accomplish that, it's just remarkable."

Brand has committed the NCAA to helping schools improve, through planning and counseling and now with providing grants for academic projects. Last week, the NCAA's board of directors approved a \$1.6 million fund that will help low-income schools starting next year.

"We want to help give those schools a jump-start in those academic areas," Brand said.

If a team's score fell under 900, it could lose scholarships based on the number of ineligible players leaving school during the next year. No team could lose more than 10 percent of its allotted scholarships, so football teams would lose up to nine players while basketball teams would lose only two.

Tennessee-Chattanooga and San Jose State were the only two schools that received warning letters and also face the loss of scholarships. Each were cited in football. Tennessee-Chattanooga also was penalized in wrestling, while San Jose State was cited in men's soccer.

The NCAA expects those results to be more balanced next year when a fourth year of data is added to the equation.

"We have seen in football and baseball significant improvement the last two years," Brand said. "Unfortunately, we have not seen that in basketball. Unless we significant improvement or plans for recovery, I think we'll see more penalties next year and significantly more."

Wednesday's report showed women's teams continued to perform better academically than men's teams. Women's teams averaged a score of 970, men's teams 950. Thirteen women's teams were cited, compared with 99 men's squads.

Although no sport averaged less than 925 during the three-year period, football, baseball and men's basketball consistently compiled the lowest scores and most citations.

Associated Press Sports writer Brett Martel in New Orleans and Associated Press writer Rasha Madkour in Houston also contributed to this report.

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