

Notes: Conferences aim to tailor new NCAA rules

By Steve Wieberg, USA TODAY

Almost before the ink has dried on a number of high-profile NCAA rules changes, schools and conferences are moving to tweak them.

The Big East is looking to relax the controversial ban on text and instant messaging in recruiting, approved in April. The league wants to free coaches again to IM prospects.

Conference USA is asking the NCAA to loosen one of the reforms targeting the use of prep schools as academic band-aids. Starting in August, the association will require incoming athletes to complete all but one of their needed core courses before graduating from high school, a stance critics say will funnel many to junior colleges. C-USA wants the limit raised to two courses.

"That (still) reinforces exactly what we talked about, to make sure kids are getting a good academic start early in their high school career," says Kevin Lennon, NCAA vice president for membership services. "It's not compromised by going from one to two."

All told, schools and leagues submitted more than 60 legislative proposals before a Sunday deadline, kicking off nine months of review and debate by various NCAA cabinets and boards. Two, including the core-course measure, would amend recently approved rules changes scheduled to take effect in August. A third targets a baseball squad-size cap not scheduled to kick in until August 2008.

Several take aim at academics, potentially extending a series of reforms in that area.

The Southeastern Conference is calling for a crackdown on athletes' use of correspondence, extension and "distance learning" courses (the latter often taken via the Internet), an area of suspected abuse. It would allow junior college transfers to count only those taken at the junior or community college they attended.

"The majority of correspondence, extension and distance-learning (courses) are fine," Lennon says. "It's instances in which there seem to be a large number of those taken at the very end of a student's academic year, whether it be at the end of high school or junior college where they're just making up deficiencies, that has thrown up a red flag in some instances."

Another SEC measure is aimed at athletes who didn't meet NCAA academic requirements coming out of high school and went on to junior college, requiring them to complete six hours of English and three of math at junior college. That's to put them on track toward a four-year degree.

The Ivy League is seeking rescission of the baseball squad-size measure, which was part of a package of April reforms designed to improve the sport's low academic numbers. It limits rosters to 35 players starting in 2008-09, ostensibly discouraging coaches from bringing in larger numbers of players and running off those who prove less talented or productive.

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A separate effort to overturn the roster cap started in June when 72 schools requested an override of that measure and another limiting how small a scholarship a baseball program can offer (no less than one-third the value of a full ride; the Division I Board of Directors will re-examine the issue next month). The text and instant message ban also is the subject of an override request.

Briefly ...

Eric Berry, expected to vie for the starting middle linebacker job at Wake Forest, was ruled academically ineligible and will miss the season. ... Former Nebraska-Omaha running back Kyle Kasperbauer was named most valuable player of the third International Federation of American Football World Championship. He ran for two touchdowns Sunday in a 23-20 double-overtime victory against two-time defending champ Japan for the tournament title. Craig Coffin, formerly of Southern Illinois, had three field goals, including the game-winner. The USA, competing for the first time, used players from all NCAA divisions who had used up college eligibility.

Contributing: Wire reports