



COLLEGE ATHLETES FACE NEW ACADEMIC STANDARDS

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Under new guidelines instituted by the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), failure is no longer an option for student athletes.

Starting this December, a team's success will be determined by how well student athletes perform both on the playing field *and* in the classroom.

Reasons for academic reform

As more and more college athletes leave school early for professional baseball, basketball and football teams, graduation rates are plummeting. In an effort to stem that tide, the NCAA has adopted a new academic reform policy for the major Division I schools -- those with large, well-financed sports programs.

Now, universities and college coaches will be held accountable for their players' academic progress, or lack thereof. The centerpiece of the academic reform package is called the Academic Progress Rate or APR.

Erik Christianson, director of media relations for the NCAA, said, "The vast majority, almost all of our 360,000 student athletes in the NCAA are going to become professionals in fields other than sports. And so it's vitally important for them to do well in the classroom, stay on track and earn that degree."

What is the APR?

The APR will determine how well university sports programs are doing. Each Division I sports program must accrue a 925 score or higher in order to avoid punishment; a perfect score is 1,000.

The APR is a points system. Each player is worth two points; two points are awarded to the player who stays in school and maintains a grade point average that puts him or her on track for graduation. However, if a player either leaves school early or falls below the required GPA level, the team loses one point; if a player fails to achieve both requirements, the team loses two points. The points are then added up, divided by the total points possible and multiplied by 1,000.

Penalties, such as loss of scholarships, will be enforced if a program fails to meet the minimum requirement. Repeat offenders may lose postseason eligibility.

Over half of the 328 Division I schools had one or more teams that would have failed the new standards last year.

What does this mean for high school athletes?

The changes will affect high school students, too. Last fall the NCAA required student athletes to complete 16 core-level courses in high school. The new requirements are intended to help high school students' transition into college and prepare them for the APR.

The NCAA has also organized numerous outreach activities such as mailings and seminars.

How a student performs in the classroom will also affect a coach's decision about a prized recruit, said Dennis Dodd, college football writer for CBS Sportsline.

"They are going to have to decide between taking a five-star athlete of questionable academic credentials against maybe a three-star kid who they know will matriculate through school," said Dodd. "They are going to have to make some hard and fast decisions on every single kid they recruit."

Dodd added that although aspiring athletes love to think of themselves as the next Kobe Bryant or Kevin Garnett, the reality is very different.

"These kids have figured out that jumping to the NBA, either out of high school or after freshmen year, yeah, you'll get paid, but there's an equal chance that you might not make the league and then where are you?" said Dodd.

Will it work?

The APR will go into effect this December and once the new scores are released, penalties will be effective immediately. No school will be exempt unless they apply for a waiver.

Dodd has doubts about the APR. "Whether there'll ever be real damage from taking scholarships away or someone is banned from the postseason, I don't know. And frankly, I won't believe it until I see it."

College coaches may search for loopholes that allow them to get a high school athlete star on their team. For instance, the APR only affects athletic scholarships; the player could get a scholarship for other reasons and make the team as a walk-on.

--Compiled by Chris Han for NewsHour Extra

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