

STATE OF THE NCAA

NCAA: seventh-graders 'prospects'

Kids reclassified for men's basketball to regulate camps

Joseph White
The Associated Press

OXON HILL, Md. — Giving in to the young-and-younger movement in college basketball recruiting, the NCAA has decreed that seventh-graders are now officially classified as prospects.

The organization voted yesterday to change the definition of a prospect from ninth grade to seventh grade — for men's basketball only — to nip a trend in which some college coaches were working at private, elite camps and clinics for seventh- and eighth-graders. The NCAA couldn't regulate those camps because those youngsters fell below the current cutoff.

"It's a little scary only because — we talked about this — where does it stop?" said Joe D'Antonio, chairman of the 31-member Division I Legislative Council, which approved the change during a two-day meeting at the NCAA Convention. "The fact that we've got to this point is really just a sign of the times."

Schools had expressed concern that the younger-age elite camps were giving participating coaches a recruiting advantage, pressuring other coaches to start their own camps.

"The need to nip that in the bud was overwhelming," said Steve Mallonee, the NCAA's managing

director of academic and membership affairs.

While men's basketball is the only sport affected, D'Antonio said he could envision future discussions on lowering the limit for other sports, notably football.

In other moves, the council deferred decisions on the NBA draft declaration window, the admission of women's beach volleyball as an emerging sport, the admissibility of online courses and the length of the baseball season. All will be submitted to the NCAA as a whole during a comment period and will likely be put to a vote again by the council in April.

The Atlantic Coast Conference proposed that underclassmen be given a 10-day period to decide whether to remain committed to entering the NBA draft. Currently, a player who declares for the draft can take up to two months to mull over his decision, leaving his team in limbo.

D'Antonio said the consensus seemed to be that 10 days was too short of a span for a player to fully explore his draft prospects, but that the current window was too long. A compromise time period will probably be put to a vote in April.

"Is there somewhere in the middle that we can meet that would make the majority of the membership pleased?" D'Antonio said. "It appears we could be headed in that direction, but it's too early to tell."

Beach volleyball, which the NCAA is calling "sand volleyball" in the quest for more universal appeal, didn't get the two-thirds ap-

proval necessary but looks certain to pass after the comment period, when only 50 percent of the vote is needed. If passed, it would be placed on the list of emerging sports for women in 2010.

The council gave four low-participation women's sports the ax from the emerging list: archery, badminton, team handball and synchronized swimming.

In an era in which students are taking many courses online, the council wasn't ready to allow athletes to do the same. Proposals to allow athletes to take online courses at other schools were defeated, as was a proposal to allow athletes to take all of their courses online at their own school. The council did leave open the possibility of an April vote that would allow athletes to take up to 50 percent of their courses online at their own school.

"There are perception concerns," D'Antonio said, "that if you have an individual who is a high-profile student-athlete who's taking nothing but nontraditional courses and never setting foot on campus, how is that going to be looked at by the general public?"

The council defeated a proposal to increase the number of scholarships for baseball, but left open for comment proposals that would change the length of the season and reduce the number of games.

Today, the NCAA is scheduled to vote on whether to override a new rule that would prohibit men's basketball coaches from attending popular but unsanctioned April tournaments for high-schoolers.