

# AN OVERVIEW OF NCAA ELIGIBILITY

by Rusty Haynes

Few years ago, when many of the new regulations were announced and the NCAA Clearinghouse was established, what alarmed me most, I think, was the total lack of understanding, not only by the athletes, but by the coaches themselves. Student athletes were loosing their eligibility left and right. At the time, coaches appeared afraid to do anything out of fear they might violate some unknown code of conduct. Whether you call it Prop 48, Prop 42 or Prop 16, what it basically amounts to are simply guidelines and rules. The true enemy is ignorance. It's not really a matter of us versus them, but one of what can we do to make this unholy marriage easier for all concerned. As counselors we could simply sit idly by and say it not our responsibility, or we could actively work to overcome the problem. If we choose the latter, our mission should simply be to educate and not to judge. Afterall, it's not entirely the NCAA's fault. There have certainly been abuses on both sides (e.g. Dexter Manley, Tracy Kesterson, etc.). As my father used to remind me earlier in my life, if you are not part of the solution than you are just another part of the problem.

I developed my current philosophy a couple of years ago. Previously, I pretty much ignored any controversy involving the NCAA; not a particularly easy task considering the fact that I grew up in Oklahoma, the site of many NCAA reprisals. At the time, I was working with a young man by the name of Kenny Thomas (currently with the Houston Rockets). Kenny was very concerned about passing the ACT. It was, I believe, his fourth time and he was a nervous wreck having failed to attain a sufficient score for the new clearinghouse guidelines in 3 previous tries. He was being hounded by the media and had two weeks to prepare for his final shot. Fortunately he passed the test. However, his celebration was short-lived. Apparently because of a snafu between two schools he had attended in different states the NCAA ruled he was short a class. I can't remember now if the 48-H (now called the NCAA Approved Core Courses) failed to list that particular course or the NCAA just didn't approve it. Whatever the reason, someone gave him poor advice or at the very least no advice. The coaches who, because of suspicion or paranoia regarding the NCAA Clearinghouse, advised him not to register until he got the appropriate ACT score compounded this later. However, had he done so, any curricular deficits might have been spotted early enough to correct the problem. Although I encouraged him to register immediately when we first met, by then it was much too late; Kenny was already a senior and about to complete his last semester. Unfortunately, the NCAA expected him to graduate with the senior class and wouldn't allow him to take any more courses after graduation in order to remain eligible. The NCAA expected him to become a partial qualifier and not to play his first year of college. Although after a lengthy trial he was allowed to play, he later had to sit out some games as part of a

\*The NCAA Initial-Eligibility clearinghouse was established in January 1993.

Source: Rusty Haynes, 1996

settlement between the NCAA and the University of New Mexico.

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Early intervention and proper education would have certainly allowed Kenny to avoid such an unpleasant situation. Kenny was lucky; many others have been far less fortunate. Without proper guidance and information, many more athletes stand to lose the opportunity to participate in college sports.

Recently I began to believe that things had changed. It seemed that word was finally getting out to student athletes and their coaches. The NCAA sent out roughly 50,000 pamphlets designed for prospective student athletes. Unfortunately, according to my good friend Jay Rosner of the Princeton Review Foundation, I was mistaken. Jay conducts many free pre-game clinics or Prop 48 workshops around the country. He informed me that many of the attending students are still lacking even the most fundamental information regarding NCAA eligibility.

How can we make a difference? It is very important that we point students in the right direction where they can locate good information regarding college athletics and athletic recruitment. Furthermore, counselors need to recommend sports camps between the junior and senior years (you don't have to spend tons of money; scholarships are sometimes even available), resumes reporting sport statistics, highlight films (particularly from the junior year), and recommendations writing by current coaches. Counselors should also encourage student athletes to prepare for the college entrance exams, explore the various sport association web sites, and talk to coaches and current college athletes. Students should also be encouraged to stay away from sports agents while in high school or college and read everything available on the NCAA and Clearinghouse websites: <http://www.naaclearinghouse.net> and <http://www.ncaa.org>. Also, *The High School Athlete's Guide to College Sports: How to Market Yourself to the School of Your Dreams* by College Bound Sports.

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