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## Step up to deter recruiting infractions

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The constant analysis and re-analysis of the recruiting structure and guidelines on the men's side of college basketball is an ever-present reminder that the water is muddy and that there are sharks swimming just below the surface.



Recruiting violations are creeping into the women's side of college basketball as well.

While the women's game hasn't yet devolved to the same extent, we seem to be sinking to greater and greater depths. Increased pressure to win resulting from higher salaries; inexperienced and unprepared coaches; as well as the escalating involvement and self-serving influence from third parties are all contributing factors.

We're not talking about shoeboxes of cash, keys to a new Escalade or rent-free leases on condos. Issues on the women's side more often stem from early or excessive contact with prospective student athletes. Whether that be face-to-face, by phone or other electronic means, coaches are trying to get a jumpstart on building a relationship with a recruit and her parents. Another area of concern has always been the mathematical capabilities of some recruiters. Whether it's exceeding the five recruiting opportunities per recruit or the 100 days per institution throughout the academic year, liberties are being taken in the accounting department. And the area embraced all too warmly from the men's side is the utilization of club coaches and other third-party individuals to facilitate both legitimate and illicit efforts on the part of college coaches.

The Women's Basketball Coaches Association recently instituted a procedure for NCAA violations reported to the WBCA office. Effective Sept. 10, the intent is to provide a "response to a membership perceived lack of communication and accountability among coaches regarding unacceptable behavior" in regard to NCAA recruiting violations.

While any effort to curtail legislatively sidetracked recruiters is admirable, it's hard to imagine that institutional compliance officers would be too thrilled with their coaches taking their concerns first to

their coaches association rather than their own employers. Additionally, without any true investigative authority, the procedure has a unique resemblance to the inmates running the asylum. All coaches are aware that any NCAA investigation or enforcement efforts must come through the institutions themselves or their conferences and adding a new unofficial layer, while well-intended, lacks the potential for any real impact.

Through the years the biggest frustration that coaches have felt in their efforts to get accusations addressed is the inability of an institution or the NCAA to act without actual evidence or confirmation of a specific violation. At the same time you have to appreciate and respect that action isn't going to be taken just on accusation and innuendo. In a competitive environment like recruiting, jealousies, bitterness and the perception that "they have to be doing something" abound. Additionally there are times when the imagination and ego of teenage student-athletes leads to some creative and inflated stories regarding their recruitment.

The reality is that the majority of recruiting infractions need the collaboration of the athlete, her parents or coaches to facilitate investigative action by the NCAA. Obviously, the wayward recruiting efforts of a college coach can put an athlete in an awkward position tantamount to biting the hand that feeds them. "This coach is bending and breaking rules because they want me, I can't turn them in." It's a nice thought but it's important to never mistake any decision to ignore NCAA parameters as anything other than self-serving on the part of the coach. If they are doing it with one recruit, they are doing it with another. Breaking rules for you doesn't mean they care more; it means that the ultimate outcome is the most important thing to them. Any relationship in which a recruit's decision becomes more important than her future is a relationship worth ending.

It's essential that prospects and those around them understand that there is no acceptable explanation for going to the dark side of the recruiting process. Contrary to what they might tell you, not everybody does it. If you're looking for some indicators about the class and character of the coaches recruiting you, someone's willingness to intentionally break any NCAA rule is proof they're lacking in both areas. While the NCAA may have what they deem major and minor infractions, when it comes to your recruitment, absolutely nothing is minor just because some narrow-minded recruiter tells you so.

Know the rules and hold those programs looking for your commitment to the highest standard. Understand that it's not a compliment or evidence that a recruit is "big time" when a school ignores NCAA guidelines. Realize that it's quite the opposite and actually an insult to the recruit as well as the institution that the recruiter represents.

Society is constantly encouraging young people in general and athletes specifically to take ownership in many aspects of their lives. While classes of recruits and the people around them come and go each year, the sport needs them to step up and embrace the impact of this issue on themselves and the recruits who will follow them in seasons to come. Recruiting violations will continue and even escalate without the deterrent of NCAA and recruiting repercussions.

Take the awkward and challenging step of reporting college coaches who choose to step out of bounds. Let other schools recruiting you know who they are and what they've done. Notify their head coach or athletics director of their actions and discretions. And most effectively, drop them from consideration for your academic and athletic future. If the threat of NCAA sanctions doesn't intimidate them, maybe the words "No thanks coach" will.

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