The NCAA Division I Council has voted to allow schools to permit spring sport student-athletes an additional season of competition and an extension of their five-year period of athletic eligibility on account of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

While it had previously announced that it would consider and potentially adopt modifications, changes, or waivers to current NCAA legislation in response to student-athletes affected COVID-19,

    the NCAA rejected efforts by winter sport athletes, including men’s and women’s basketball student-athletes,

to return to competition during the 2020-2021 academic year since they were denied a potential March Madness experience in 2020. Winter sports athletes were not granted an additional season of competition because all or much of their regular seasons were completed.
The NCAA also announced adjusted financial aid rules to allow collegiate teams to carry more student-athletes on scholarship to permit and account for additional incoming athlete recruits, as well as student-athletes who elect their right to enjoy an extra year of eligibility. The Council also increased the current roster size limitations in baseball to account for the return of student-athletes affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

While the Division Council vote provided schools the flexibility to give students the opportunity to return for 2020-21,

it also provided schools the flexibility to provide scholarships for each student-athlete at the same level or at reduced level from the scholarships provided during the 2019-2020 academic year.

This scholarship flexibility applies only to student-athletes who would have exhausted eligibility in 2019-20. With regard to the scholarship issue, Division I Council Chair M. Grace Calhoun and University of Pennsylvania Athletics Director commented, “At the end of the day, each institution is going to have to figure out what it can do.”

Division I rules limit student-athletes to four seasons of competition in a five-year period.

The Division Council’s decision allows schools to exercise individual waivers to restore one of those seasons of competition for student-athletes who competed during the COVID-19-shortened 2020 spring season.

The Council also voted to allow schools to self-apply a one-year extension of eligibility for spring-sport student-athletes who never had an opportunity to compete during the 2020 spring season. This decision essentially allows each student-athlete to extend their five-year competition window by a year.

Division I Council Chair Calhoun commented, “The Board of Governors encouraged conferences and schools to take action in the best interest of student-athletes and their communities, and now schools have the opportunity to do that.” She concluded, “The Council’s decision gives individual schools the flexibility to make decisions at a campus level.”

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