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NCAA To Address Historic Early Recruiting Legislation

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Landmark reform to restrict colleges' aggressive early recruiting tactics of student-athletes is on the agenda at the National Collegiate Athletic Association Division I Council April 12-14 annual meeting.

One item, Proposal 2016-26,

could make lacrosse the pilot program for creating specific restrictions for the recruiting of high school athletes prior to the beginning of their junior year of high school.

If approved, the proposal will go into effect on August 1, 2017.

The NCAA will monitor the program for its potential use as a model for broader reform in all sports.

The early recruiting process, especially in lacrosse, has come under harsh criticism for years. In recent years, colleges have sought verbal commitments from prospective student-athletes (PSA) who are high school freshmen and even younger.

Most college coaches agree that early recruiting of such young athletes is a no-win situation for both athletes and colleges.

Early recruiting has increased the pressure for PSA to verbally commit to colleges before they are physical or emotionally ready to make such decisions. The process also leads to mistakes by college coaches who must commit to players years before the PSA will join their program.

The latest in the long history of the NCAA's efforts to curb the early recruiting problem is the NCAA Student-Athlete Committee's approval of bans on unofficial visits and off-campus contact in April 2016. However, the Committee balked at including restrictions on incoming telephone calls to college coaches. College coaches saw this as a loophole that defanged the recruiting restrictions.

According to US Lacrosse Magazine, the lacrosse community lobbied NCAA Division I Council members for Proposal 2016-16 (which includes a prohibition on incoming phone calls) and on the importance of keeping it intact.

Proposal 2016-26 would amend the NCAA's existing legislative bylaws to bar coaches from all communication with prospective student-athletes and their families - including incoming and outbound phone calls, unofficial visits, or off-campus contact - prior to September 1 of the student's junior year of high school.

Proposal 2016-26 has strong support from the Steve Stenersen, CEO of US Lacrosse. Stenersen notes, "[T]he positive culture of youth lacrosse is being destroyed and the best interests of children are being ignored as a result of early recruiting practices, which now require young athletes to engage in the college selection process long before they are physically, cognitively and emotionally prepared to do so."

Stenersen continued, "On behalf of US Lacrosse, the sport's 450,000-member national governing body, I want to reiterate our organization's strong endorsement of the full legislative proposal introduced by the Intercollegiate Women's Lacrosse Coaches Association (IWLCA) and supported by the Intercollegiate Men's Lacrosse Coaches Association (IMLCA) to designate September 1 of a prospective student athlete's [] junior year as the initial date

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for contact between a college coach and a PSA.”

The options for the NCAA Division I Council are clear. They can: (1) adopt the proposal, (2) amend and adopt it, and (3) reject it. We will report on these important developments in NCAA recruiting.

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