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Academic Progress Reports: Leadership Implications for College Basketball Coaches

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The Academic Progress Report, commonly referred to as APR, is an evaluation tool established by the NCAA to monitor current academic progress for Division I intercollegiate student-athletes in regard to eligibility, retention, and graduation. APR data collection was initially started with the 2003-04 academic year. The first data report was released in February 2005 for all Division I member institutions. The Academic Progress Report was born out of a need to better calculate graduation rates and is a continuous assessment tool for the NCAA. Under this new system, the APR awards two points each term to student-athletes who meet all minimum academic eligibility standards and who remain at that Division I institution. The Division I Board of Directors approved 925 as the minimum cut off score for all teams. The 925 score out of a possible 1,000 translates to approximately sixty percent on the new Graduation Success Rate (GSR). The GSR is an alternate graduation rate system that was also recently launched by the NCAA. While the existing graduation rate calculation system is still in place, the new GSR accounts for outgoing transfer or incoming transfer student-athletes which the current graduation rate calculation does not. The existing graduation rate system also does not monitor student-athlete eligibility.

Each Division I institution will have an overall APR score which encompasses all of their male and female athletic programs. Each specific athletic program will have their own score for their student-athletes. This system has been mandated by college presidents to place more accountability and responsibility on its' athletic programs to ensure the success of student-athletes in maintaining eligibility requirements and progressing toward the ultimate goal of graduation within five years. The APR is working toward a rolling four year APR per team at each institution. This is presently not possible since the program has not been in place long enough to obtain data for four years. The most important situation for teams to prevent is an APR score of 0 for 2. A student-athlete score of 0-for-2 indicates a student who is neither academically eligible nor enrolled at the institution. This could include a student-athlete who transfers to another institution, leaves the institution for personal reasons, or turns professional. Regardless of the reason for leaving, the student-athlete would not have been eligible to play if returning to the original institution. This aspect puts tremendous pressure on coaches to promote their student-athletes' academic success while balancing vital time spent on the playing field or court to maintain competitiveness.

When athletic teams fall below the minimum 925 cut off score, penalties will accrue for continued lack of academic progress. One possible penalty teams could face is an immediate ten percent reduction of financial aid for teams assessed academic penalties. Thus a men's basketball team with thirteen full scholarships could lose a maximum of two scholarships for the upcoming season. Academic progress penalties can affect a variety of people and organizations including conference headquarters, institutions, athletic academic personnel, specific athletic programs, coaches, athletes, non-student athletes, and fans.

Conference headquarters will be affected by having institutions and teams in their conference involved with academic shortcomings that may affect team performance and reduce competitiveness within the conference. The institutions in general may be affected by a reduction of scholarships that could reduce

competitiveness and perhaps lead to a loss of revenue. The athletic academic personnel will come under intense pressure to help student-athletes produce in the classroom. The specific athletics program will be directly affected by having to deal with the repercussions for that sport. The coaching staff, specifically the head coach will have his or her daily and yearly operations scrutinized. The student-athletes will be affected in that it could reduce the amount of available scholarships to that specific sport where the sanctions occurred. Lastly, and often overlooked, the fans may be affected because their team will receive negative publicity and have a diminished opportunity for being successful.

“The NCAA is committed more than ever to the academic success of student-athletes in American higher education,” (Lawry, 2005). The NCAA has been forced by poor graduation rates of intercollegiate student-athletes to develop a formula to more consistently monitor academic progress toward graduation. It is important colleges stay true to the mission of preparing student-athletes for success in life (Davis, 2006). However, institutions still want to be successful in intercollegiate athletics. The institutions want to maintain a balance between academic success and athletic success. In the spring of 2006, the NCAA identified thirty-seven institutions for college basketball public recognition awards for the 2005-06 academic year. These programs were in the top 10% of all college basketball programs in the nation. All of these teams had at least a 984 APR score.

In 2006 APR results indicated that 3.5% of Division I teams failed to meet the APR cut-off score. Failing to achieve the minimum score were men's teams at 6.3%, and women at 1.1%, (“National APR Averages, 2006). Division I college basketball included thirty- seven teams below the cut-off score for 11.3%. This was the second highest sport next to baseball. The basketball average APR was 927. Average APR for male student-athletes was 943, while female student-athletes were 969.

APR legislation, although needed for better academic progress, can have severe implications for first and second year Division I college basketball coaches. Since the APR will eventually include a rolling four-year window, this will have a dramatic effect on new head coaches during the early parts of their tenure at a new program that has been sanctioned by the NCAA under the APR legislation. New head coaches will be affected by their predecessor's success or lack of success with APR scores and graduation rates. APR implications will have both positive and negative effects for the NCAA and institutions alike. Regardless of the nature, these effects will bring instant accountability to all of those parties involved.

The NCAA office personnel will be the first line involved in the academic reform. While their intentions are good in nature, they will ultimately be judged by the success of the institutions with positive APR scores and institutional athletic achievement. The NCAA was created by the institutions to provide guidance and compliance. The positive aspects of the NCAA is that they are trying to improve academic achievement in intercollegiate athletics. However, not having the entire program established and explained to all institution members before implementation of the program may cast a negative light on the NCAA as it continues to exist as the universal and most visible figure in intercollegiate athletics. “As of the summer of 2006, the NCAA had not even determined the later penalties process for continued offenders,” (“NCAA Backgrounder,” 2006). The entire process should have been developed before installing the system. There are teams already not complying with standards in the first penalty phase. These institutions obviously will push for lighter additional penalties down the road since they are already involved in the penalty process. Also, the perception of the NCAA will be in

question when down the road; they possibly have to levy penalties against some of the marquee basketball programs in the nation. Additionally, the NCAA could face political pressure to the APR program from administrators as well as CBS television executives who finance the multi-billion dollar NCAA Tournament.

The specific conference offices will be negatively affected by having institutions and teams in their conference involved with academic shortcomings. No conference wants their teams to receive negative publicity in academics through media sources. There will be increased scrutiny toward a conference if multiple sport teams gain penalties. Conferences will be forced to assist the institutions in analyzing their programs in attempts to comprehend the lack of success. This could cause friction between conference executives and institutions' Directors of Athletics and other athletic department personnel. With penalties accruing for teams, obviously this could translate to less team depth and create the possibility of a downward spiral of the program. These teams will no longer be on a level playing field with other teams in the conference or in the NCAA. While hopefully the problem can be solved quickly to return to regular status, these isolated teams are sure to suffer on the athletic playing field and could result in less wins for specific programs and coaches. There could also be an isolated incident down the road of a team being banned from postseason play. This could hurt a conference as well as the teams in financial windfall. "Six of the eleven members of the Mid-Eastern Athletic Conference, made up of historically black schools, face sanctions under the latest NCAA academic progress report," (Carey, 2006). Obviously these shortcomings and negative press can and will only hurt the MEAC's perception to the public. On the positive side, conferences can push greater academic progress and hopefully increased graduation rates from all of the participating institutions since the program is mandated by the NCAA.

Division I institutions in general will be affected by a domino effect from the President's office to the Director of Athletics to the entire athletics department. This is a core area where the likelihood of APR success will be determined. No President or high ranking school official wants academic shortcomings at their respective institution. There will be greater emphasis from the top placed on academics among student-athletes. This will be passed down to the Director of Athletics and the entire athletic department. However, there are situations where some schools could be put in difficult situations. Some schools do not have the financial resources or academic centers to assist student-athletes as needed. This has been a problem at some low Division I schools and historically black colleges and universities. "Other schools have million-dollar academic centers and the support staffs you'd ever want, yet we are still doing more with less than they do with more, said MEAC Commissioner Dennis Thomas" (Carey, 2006).

The athletics academic personnel come to the forefront of being involved in this situation. These individuals are considered the academic experts on campus by administrators and coaches. These individuals could receive enormous pressures if cut-off scores are not maintained or increased. There will be an objective accountability for academics personnel with dismissals or demotions from athletics department personnel to help get the program back in compliance. Coaches also will desire to be actively involved in selecting academic personnel that work with their specific program.

The specific athletics program will be directly affected by having to deal with the negative repercussions. Loss of scholarships will reduce player availability. This will be further scrutinized with injuries or other player defections occurring during the season or off-season. This will require the team

to maintain the level of previous success while being short-handed. Although the problem may be able to be overcome for a short period, the percentages do not favor continued success while having fewer scholarships. In major revenue sports like football and men's basketball, many athletic programs cannot afford to encounter "down seasons" since the success of these programs' and the associated popularity usually generates monies for the other athletic programs. The program could entail tremendous setbacks from which it will not bounce back, especially if banned from postseason play down the road or other restrictions occur.

The student-athletes will be affected by having fewer scholarships. This will decrease the amount of available scholarships for desiring student-athletes. The shortage of scholarship players available will decrease the student-athletes' chances of being successful. This will be magnified if and when team injuries occur during the season.

The fans will be affected by their sport having a diminished opportunity for being successful. Fans want to win and win now. Most fans are not very understanding of any other situations that affect winning and losing. When losing occurs, fans usually become dissatisfied quickly with their team and their head coach. This could begin a public outcry of disenchantment toward the institution, the athletics program, and the sport head coach.

The sport head coach will be affected in daily and yearly operations. This is of great concern to new head coaches during their first and second year of directing a program. South Carolina State recently hired Jamal Brown as its' new head coach ("Former South Carolina St.,"2006). South Carolina State was penalized with the loss of two scholarships during the spring of 2006. Therefore, in Brown's first season he will have to compete with only eleven scholarships while his opponents can have the maximum of thirteen. Other similar situations include Hampton University and their new head coach Kevin Nickelberry, Arizona State and their new head coach Herb Sendek, and Prairie View A&M University and their new head coach Byron Rimm II. These coaches will be affected by shortcomings of the previous head coach. Moreover, this will delay the maximum amount of progress by these new head coaches in turning these basketball programs around quickly. Most head coach contracts are from three to four to five years in nature. New Idaho head coach George Pfeiffer was awarded only a three year deal, while Arizona State University awarded Herb Sendek with a five year deal. "The idea of longer-term contracts for coaches tied as much or more to various measures of athletes' success in academics than to win-loss measures might seem to be a reform that could here help," (Lawry, 2005). There must be a realistic understanding by Directors of Athletics of the extra time needed by college basketball head coaches when inheriting a program with APR problems.

Of the utmost importance in this process, is that it becomes imperative that new first and second year college basketball coaches be given more time to turn around a program with APR restrictions. If this aspect is overlooked, then the new head coach will simply become a transitional coach for the next head coach. His sole job will be simply getting the program back to a level playing field with other conference schools. Contracts need either to be extended for a longer period of time or, after the first or second year of the program, a rollover contract should be implemented. One example of this is New Mexico State University and Head Coach Reggie Theus. Theus, in his first season, led New Mexico State to a 16-14 record, and a 10 game improvement. However, New Mexico State lost two scholarships for the upcoming 2006-07 season. After the season, New Mexico State restructured his contract from the university that will provide a new five-year rolling term," (New Mexico State University

2006). This was an act of good faith by New Mexico State Director of Athletics Dr. McKinley Boston. Similarly, at Prairie View, Rimm faces a daunting rebuilding task. "The turnaround process will take ample time because he (Rimm) has to bring in the student-athletes, build his system, and raise the APR rate of the men's basketball program, said Charles McClelland, Prairie View A&M University Director of Athletics" ("Byron Rimm II Named," 2006).

Hopefully, all Directors of Athletics will understand the purpose and the implications of the APR on their basketball team and the livelihood of their new college basketball coach. As all parties of the academic and athletic community seek to provide the best opportunities for student athletes, the ripple effect from establishing these rules may in fact limit many athletic programs from becoming viable contenders at the Division I level. The APR could have far-reaching repercussions for institutions and athletic programs alike that exist well after the individuals responsible have exited the program.

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