



# Playing by the Rules

*Sometimes, having a copy of the rule book just isn't enough.*

John Hardt's desk is covered with yellow Post-It notes. On each one is written a question regarding the interpretation of a National Collegiate Athletic Association rule. Later in the day, he'll call the NCAA headquarters in Kansas City to verify his answers.

It's mid-April, and Hardt has been on the job only 16 days. He wears a starched button-down shirt, rep tie, and braided leather suspenders—a contrast with the orange sweaters and sweatshirts that are *de rigueur* in the athletic department. His work space consists of little more than the desk and a couple of tables, all blanketed with papers and notebooks. He's far from settled, but already the new SU compliance coordinator's telephone is ringing off the hook.

An alumnus wants to know if a neighbor's son can still come over for dinner now that he's being recruited by SU's lacrosse team.

A professor wants to make sure he's following proper procedure for allowing an athlete to drop or add a class.

"There's a heightened sensitivity to what can and can't be done," says

Hardt, a 30-year-old former college football player who was the senior compliance representative in the NCAA's compliance division before joining SU in March. "People want to make certain nothing they're doing is

The 493-page NCAA rule book is accompanied by two separate volumes of interpretations. And that's only the beginning.

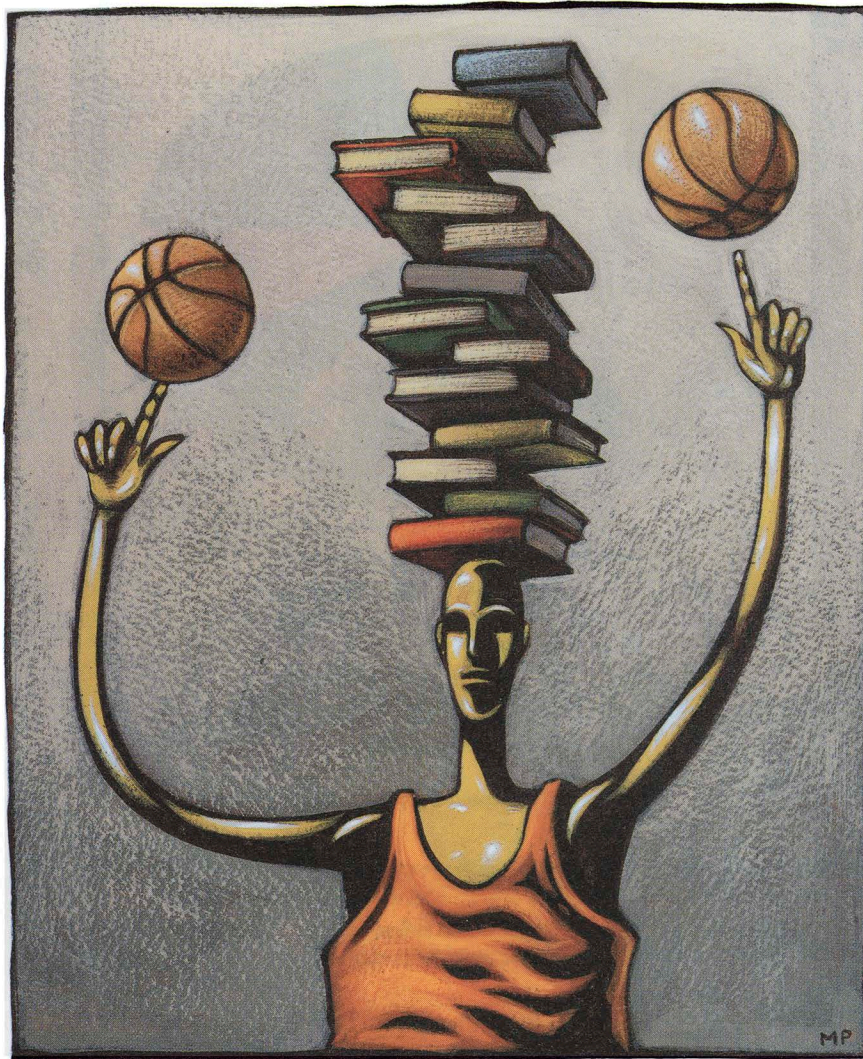
According to head coach Jim Boeheim, questions arise not about the existence of a specific rule, but what the current interpretation of that rule is.

"For example," he says, "we're allowed to give awards at the end of the year, but how much can we spend on them? And what types of awards? And what if a player already got an award from the Big East? Can we still give him an award? It gets very complicated."

The issue of compliance with NCAA regulations has grown so dramatically and has become so all-encompassing that it's nearly impossible to incorporate all that needs to be done within an existing staff, says athletic director Jake Crouthamel.

"The fact that we are requiring strict adherence to so many rules has created a whole new profession in

athletics administration," Crouthamel says. Nearly half of all Division 1-A schools have a full-time employee, such as Hardt, devoted to NCAA compliance. It seems to be a necessary step if a school wants to ensure full compliance in every possible situation.



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going to jeopardize the integrity of the institution or the eligibility of a student athlete."

The problem isn't so much knowing the rules and following them, but understanding how the rules can be interpreted to fit various situations.

At Syracuse, heightened awareness of NCAA compliance is at least partly a result of the internal investigation of the men's basketball program.

For nearly a year and a half, the basketball program—and perhaps the University itself—has been operating in a fish bowl, while teams of lawyers, administrators, and faculty scrutinized highly publicized charges of NCAA violations lodged by a local newspaper in December 1990.

The University's investigation lasted 13 months and totaled more than 7,000 man-hours. It covered the accounts of 15 years. Some 30 current and former players were interviewed. It was exhaustive and, to many involved, exhausting. When it ended in February, investigators had found several violations, ranging from participation in unauthorized pickup games to student-athletes receiving free or reduced-price meals at a local restaurant.

The most significant finding to SU administrators was that there was no systemic intent to violate NCAA rules.

"The violations we found are unacceptable, but they were isolated incidents," says Chancellor Kenneth A. Shaw. As a body, he adds, they are more indicative of the parties involved not having a full understanding of the rules than of a program out of control, which is often seen as important to the NCAA.

A copy of the University's report now rests in the hands of NCAA investigators. They are conducting their own investigation and a response is expected sometime this summer.

Jim Boehem is hoping for the best. "Looking at everything, I think there's remarkably little that went wrong," he says. "In a lot of cases there will be an investigation of a program over a two-year period, and they'll find 10 to 15 violations. We're talking about 15 years. More than 30 players."

He believes the athletic department will do an even better job of compliance now, with the hiring of a director of compliance.

"It's a very important step," Boehem says. "At least if an honest mistake is made, we can document that we're trying not to make a mistake. I don't think the NCAA is there to punish you for every little rule violation.

**INTERNAL REPORT**

*The following NCAA violations were uncovered by Syracuse University's internal investigation of its men's basketball program, a 13-month process that ended in February. NCAA investigators are now considering the report. Their response is hoped for early this summer.*

**Recruiting**

- An individual obtained basketball tickets from the SU coaching staff, arranged for transportation for a prospective student-athlete to attend games, and gave the same student-athlete merchandise that displayed the University's trademarks.
- During 1988 and 1989, several incoming freshman players spent parts of their summers in Syracuse, receiving free meals, housing, and transportation from enrolled student athletes and boosters. Some incoming freshmen also participated in unauthorized pickup games.
- A walk-on athlete was employed as a referee for four days (and paid \$80) at Coach Jim Boehem's basketball camp.

**Extra Benefits**

- A few boosters continued on their own to provide home meals for players after an NCAA ban on the practice was implemented by the athletics department in 1986.
- Boosters bought meals for players.
- A local restaurant owner gave players free or reduced-price meals at his restaurant.
- Several players and managers received \$50 in Christmas cards from a local booster.
- Two student-athletes received free legal services relating to traffic tickets from an attorney they were introduced to by an assistant coach.
- A former University employee, while still employed, directed maintenance workers to provide services to athletes not generally available to other students.
- Seven current and former athletes from several sports were found to have made telephone calls from hotel rooms at University expense while traveling.

**Academics**

- A student-athlete was allowed to repeat a course improperly.

**Additional Matters**

- A student-athlete played a pickup one-on-one basketball game with a non-player for a \$100 wager and apparently won and accepted the money.

In addition, investigators found SU officials improperly calculated how scholarships were counted toward allowable limits in lacrosse and wrestling from 1987 to 1991, and football in the spring semester of 1988.

—R.G.L.

Compliance, at best, is very difficult."

Which is why there is John Hardt, who has already become an important resource in his short tenure.

Off the top of his head, Hardt says his two morning callers are in the clear.

"There's an awful lot that can go on when there's a pre-existing relationship," he says of the alumnus with the lacrosse recruit next door. "And as long as athletes are following the same drop and add schedules as other students,

there shouldn't be a problem."

But the questions still get written down on Post-It notes and stuck to the top of his desk for confirmation when he calls the NCAA later on.

"Even if I think I know the rules interpretation, I still call to double-check and verify," he says, "because you can never be too sure."

—RENÉE GEARHART LEVY