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# Do BCS National Championships Lead to Recruiting Violations? A Trend Analysis of NCAA Division I (FBS) Infractions

Editor's Choice Award

Robert S. Clark & Paul J. Batista

## KEYWORDS:

NCAA, BCS, Bowl Championship Series, Recruiting, Violations, Infractions, Athletic compliance

## ABSTRACT

*With the NCAA suggesting increased severity of sanctions for NCAA rules violators (Wieberg, 2008), an area of great concern to athletic directors is the institution's violation of Article 13 of NCAA Division I legislation while recruiting prospective student-athletes. While researchers state that NCAA violations are on the rise (Mahony, 1999; Jordan, Greenwell, Geist, Pastore, & Mahony, 2004), very little research has been conducted to ascertain the number of NCAA recruiting violations committed, and by whom. The purpose of this study was to describe the nature of recruiting violations, including major and secondary violations, conference affiliation of institutions committing major violations, then to analyze major recruiting violations of Division I Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS) institutions. A trend analysis was conducted by examining the frequency and distribution of NCAA major infractions from 1970 to 2007, with a specific focus major recruiting infractions from 1987 through the current construct of the Division I-A (Football Bowl Subdivision) conference structure of 2007. The results of this analysis provide athletic administrators with regional and sport-specific findings regarding major recruiting infractions. It also informs athletic compliance directors of focal points and monitoring strategies based upon sport, region, and conference in an effort to curtail future NCAA recruiting violations.*

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## Introduction

Issues of unethical behavior are concerns not only for academic endeavors in higher education, but also for NCAA athletics departments. Authors involved in research of ethical behavior in higher education suggest the need for research regarding NCAA violations, with specific emphasis on illegal recruiting inducements in collegiate athletics (Kelley & Chang, 2007). This is due in large part to growing public suspicion and criticism of ethical behavior at universities (Knight & Auster, 1999). To discover the source of these criticisms, researchers of unethical behavior in higher education assert that external pressures placed on university employees often encourage

ethical lapses (Goodstein, 2002; Howe & Moses, 1999; Kelley & Chang, 2007). Some university employees simply place their personal and professional needs before ethical behavior in the higher education workplace (Agle & Kelley, 2001; Howe & Moses, 1999). Though reasons vary for ethical lapses, researchers posit that discovering the motivation of ethics violators can lead to preventive measures of unethical behavior. To determine such measures, the nature of the ethical breaches must first be established (Hill, Kelley, Agle, Hitt, & Hoskisson, 1992), and then examined according to whom and where these ethical lapses occur (Anderson, Louis,

& Earle, 1999; Goodstein, 2002; Iyer, 1999; Kelley & Chang, 2007; Morgan, Korschgen, & Gardner, 2001). The purpose of this study is to identify who commits major NCAA violations—specifically major recruiting violations—to facilitate application of research principles to discover the reasons for ethical violations of NCAA legislation.

### **Foundational Literature on NCAA Violations**

With NCAA violations on the rise (Mahony, Fink, & Pastore, 1999; Jordan, Greenwell, Geist, Pastore, & Mahony, 2004), particularly recruiting infractions (Jubenville, Goss, & Wright, 2008), many researchers suggest reforming NCAA legislation to restore integrity to college athletics (Sage, 1990; Stoll & Beller, 1995; Uhler, 1987). Such NCAA legislation is contained in Article 13 of the NCAA Bylaws and prohibits certain recruiting actions of coaches, institutional administration and staff members, current student-athletes and prospective student-athletes. Some examples of recruiting limitations during the recruiting process contained in Article 13 include: frequency and mode of coaches' contacts (in-person, by mail, electronically, or by telephone) to prospects, types of offers and inducements that can be provided to prospects, permissible activities on visits to a university campus, types of recruiting materials used by a university, permissible forms of entertainment of prospects, and permissible recruiting activities in conjunction with university summer camps or clinics. Despite the NCAA Legislative body's restructuring of recruiting legislation annually, recruiting violations account for 66.23% of the total major violations in the NCAA since 1987 (LSDBi 1, 2008). Major legislative reform can occur after the NCAA is given sufficient information regarding at least three unresolved questions of recruiting violations. Previous

research has attempted to address some of these issues but has left three questions unresolved.

*1. Do identifiable trends exist among NCAA violations?* The Knight Commission (2001) states that over half of NCAA Division I programs were placed on NCAA sanctions or probation, leading to reductions of scholarships, television coverage, and/or post-season participation. According to this evidence, violation of NCAA legislation seems to be normal behavior compared to compliance with NCAA bylaws (Knight Commission, 2001; Mahony et al., 1999). Jubenville et al. (2008) found that the number of institutions that committed major NCAA violations did not increase significantly after recruiting certifications examinations were required to be taken by coaches before they could recruit. Thus, the modality of recruiting certification did not significantly alter the trends of major recruiting violations in football and men's basketball (Jubenville et al., 2008). With the increasing trend of unethical behavior, Mahony et al. (1999) found that Division I programs have committed more NCAA violations than Divisions II and III, but infer that this difference is attributed to the lack of scrutiny of Divisions II and III for rules violations by NCAA enforcement personnel as compared to Division I. Thus, the correlation between levels of competition within Division I and NCAA violations has not been examined by previous research in the field.

*2. Do NCAA violations create benefits for rules violators?* Although the NCAA does not condone unethical behavior and rules violations, the effectiveness of its enforcement methods and the subsequent effects are disputed among researchers. Hegarty and Sims (1978) found that by increasing the severity of NCAA enforcement penalties, the number of violations will decrease. In contrast, through a case study of university football programs, Humphreys & Ruseski (2006)

found the existence of financial incentives to programs that violate NCAA legislation. While recruiting infractions bring sanctions that limit the number of scholarships offered by athletic programs, winning games becomes financially rewarding, regardless of any negative perceptions created by sanctions (Humphreys & Ruseski, 2006). Winning programs fill stadiums with money-paying ticketholders, application rates of universities increase with football wins (which then increases the prestige of the university's athletic program), increases overall university revenue, and brings more talented student-athletes to the institution in each recruiting class (Humphreys & Ruseski, 2006; Chressanthis & Grimes, 1993). Greater incentive to violate NCAA legislation also exists for schools not traditionally considered to be athletic powerhouses because of the aforementioned financial benefits that can be attained and can easily exceed the NCAA sanctions placed upon infracting universities (Fleisher, Shughart, Tollison, & Goff, 1988). This research addresses the dilemma of whether highly competitive Bowl Championship Series (BCS) affiliated conference schools, which are permitted to compete for football national championships due to BCS status, will be more likely to commit recruiting infractions than Non-BCS conference affiliated institutions. Furthermore, this research investigates whether a correlation exists between BCS and Non-BCS conference schools in the commission of major recruiting violations.

### Research Questions

The following research questions were developed from the review of the previously published literature and represent the currently unresolved issues of previous research.

1. According to the current conference alignment of the BCS, what conferences are

committing the most NCAA violations, and where are they located?

2. Are BCS conference affiliated universities more likely to commit recruiting violations than non-BCS conference institutions?

3. What trends exist in recruiting violations since 1987, and do feasible explanations for these trends exist?

### Methods

#### *Data collection*

The NCAA has compiled a database of all major and secondary NCAA infractions that is utilized in athletic departments across the United States. The NCAA Legislative Services Database (LSDBi) contains the written cases of each major infraction of NCAA legislation from 1954-present and lists the institution responsible for the violation, the date of infraction, and the nature of the infraction. For this study, data were collected from LSDBi for all major violations from 1970 to 2007. However, the LSDBi has only recorded major recruiting violations since 1987 and secondary violations since 2002. When collected, data were organized by year and the current conference affiliation of the institution committing the violation. For example, although the University of Texas committed a recruiting infraction while its conference affiliation was the Southwest Conference, the violation was recorded under the current conference affiliation for the Longhorns (the Big 12 Conference). Data were then entered into a spreadsheet document to double-check for accuracy then it was subsequently entered into the data program Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) for analysis.

#### *Data Analysis*

This study examines the institutional impact level of major infractions, focusing primarily upon major recruiting infractions in NCAA Division I Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS)

conferences. Data for both major violations and major recruiting violations are organized by institutions currently affiliated with the following BCS conferences: the Atlantic Coast (ACC), Big East, Big Ten, Big 12, Pacific 10 (Pac 10), and Southeastern (SEC). The following non-BCS conferences violations data were organized in the same manner as the aforementioned BCS conferences: Conference USA, Mid-American (MAC), Mountain West, Sun Belt, and the Western Athletic (WAC). BCS conferences are generally reputed to be the higher level of competition, while non-BCS conferences are generally considered to be a relatively lower level of competition (BCS, 2007). A trend analysis by univariate analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to measure the means of major violations (more severe), and secondary violations (less severe). Data were smoothed by time periods in efforts to analyze the trends of the violations (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007).

## Results and Discussion

Findings and implications of this study were analyzed categorically. First, findings of secondary violations in the NCAA will be presented and discussed. Then, the findings of all major infractions that have occurred from 1970 through 2007 will be analyzed. Next, major recruiting violations will also be discussed in relation to yearly trends by conference and an analysis of BCS conferences and non-BCS conferences. This section will be concluded by a trend analysis of recruiting violations in connection to the university bowl changes and heightened competition among BCS schools.

### *Secondary Violations*

NCAA Bylaw 19.02.2.1 states that secondary infractions are “isolated and inadvertent in nature” as they provide only a minimal recruiting advantage (NCAA, 2007). Secondary

violations, considered less severe than major violations, are typically self-reported by athletics departments or conferences. Secondary infractions are divided into Level I, or those that could jeopardize eligibility of the student-athlete, and Level II, or those that often have minimal eligibility enforcement implications (NCAA, 2007). The NCAA began recording secondary infractions in 2002, but it does not mention the specific universities involved, consequently omitting the conference affiliation of that school. Since secondary violations began to be reported, secondary recruiting violations have increased dramatically from 216 in 2002 to 999 in 2007, an increase of 362.5%.

Violations of Article 13’s recruiting bylaws account for 47.03% of all secondary violations on the NCAA Division I (FBS) level. From 2002-2003, secondary recruiting infractions increased 299.54% from 216 to 863 reported cases. This increase can be mostly attributed to the beginning of the reporting system and the enhanced awareness of the responsibilities of athletics directors and conference commissioners’ duties to self-report secondary violations. Also, secondary violations and secondary recruiting violations increased steadily from 2004 through 2007, with the peak in occurring in 2006 (see Table 1). These data provoke questions as to what events transpired in the NCAA between those years to cause the increase.

Because the structure of the BCS only exists in Division I (FBS) football, the football-specific systemic changes that occurred in the BCS during the era of self-reporting secondary violations is of great importance. In 2002, the quality-of-wins formula was adapted to the BCS computer formula, which awarded points to teams that played games against BCS opponents and was used to decide who participates in the BCS championship game and BCS bowl games. Quality-of-wins is based upon the ranking of the opponent

defeated, which is decided mostly by members of the media, and the opponent's conference affiliation (BCS, 2007). In 2003, the first disputed football national championship since the formation of the Bowl Championship Series occurred when Louisiana State University (LSU) defeated the University of Oklahoma in the BCS Sugar Bowl Championship game to claim the BCS national championship, while the University of Southern California (USC) defeated the University of Michigan in the Rose Bowl to clinch the Associated Press' debated national championship (BCS, 2007). That same year, secondary recruiting violations vaulted to their second-highest point since measurement of this statistic began.

Controversy regarding the naming of the Division I (FBS) football national champions continued in 2004. In reaction to the LSU-USC disputed national championship, the BCS developed the Harris Interactive University Football Poll designed to allow former university football coaches and media members decide the football rankings in Division I (FBS). In the 2004-2005 season, the Associated Press withdrew from the BCS formula and decided to name a national champion each year without the influence of the BCS computer formulae (BCS, 2007). That year also proved to be otherwise noteworthy along championship lines. First, Auburn University (a member of the SEC, a BCS conference) compiled an undefeated football season but was not ranked first or second in the BCS polls and therefore could not compete in the BCS championship game (BCS, 2007). Second, the University of Utah (a member of the non-BCS Mountain West conference) compiled an undefeated football season and received a BCS bowl bid but not an opportunity to play in the championship game (BCS, 2007). Following these two situations of increased competition for the BCS championship, the BCS Committee created a new poll called the Harris Interactive

Poll to help determine the two teams playing for the national championship in football as voted by former university football coaches, former players, and members of the media. Immediately after this increased football championship controversy in 2005, both secondary violations have steadily increased, and major recruiting violations (discussed later) peaked in 2006. Since the addition of quality-of-wins in the BCS formula in 2002 and the subsequent increased level of competition in the sport of football, both secondary and secondary recruiting violations steady increased from 2004-2007.

#### *Major Violations*

Major violations in all Division I (FBS) sports (both male and female) were collected from the LSDBi, including all major violations committed by both BCS conferences and non-BCS conferences. Data for 258 major violations that occurred from 1970 through 2007 were retrieved from the LSDBi Database and smoothed into four periods of time based upon similar outputs of major violations. Time 1 represented the years between 1970-1982. Time 2 represented the years from 1983-1989, which included the NCAA's imposition of the death penalty on Southern Methodist University in 1987, which effectively disbanded its football team (McNabb, 1987). Time 3 represented 1990-1996, the years prior to the establishment of the Bowl Championship Series in football. Time 4 represented 1997-2007, the Bowl Championship Series era of university athletics (BCS, 2007).

Analysis of major violations data provides the background to differentiate between the BCS and non-BCS conferences in the analysis of major recruiting violations. This analysis revolves around two major factors.

First, approximately 77% of the major violations committed each year in NCAA Division I (FBS) are committed by schools affiliated with a BCS conference (F[3,115]

=5.902,  $p < .05$ ), while approximately 33% are committed by schools affiliated with non-BCS conferences ( $F[3,115] = 3.318$ ,  $p < .05$ ). This confirms that level of competition influences major violations in NCAA Division I (FBS) athletics. Additionally, the level of competition is determined by who can compete and ultimately win the football national championship as determined by the BCS. Historically, BCS conference affiliated institutions have been given preferential treatment for opportunities to be considered for the football national championship. To further illustrate this competitive-level correlation, only one non-BCS conference member (Brigham Young University in 1984) has won a football national championship since 1970. As such, a relationship exists between the frequency of major infractions and the opportunity to compete for a national championship.

Second, discrepancies exist among the BCS conferences in terms of frequency of major violations (see Table 2). Of the six BCS conferences, the Big 12 ( $M=4.853$ ,  $SD=.924$ ) ranks the highest in terms of mean violations per year and mean violations per team per year. Subsequent BCS conferences with higher means of major violations include the Pac 10 ( $M=4.1$ ,  $SD=.916$ ), Big Ten ( $M=4.0$ ,  $SD=1.343$ ), and SEC ( $M=3.833$ ,  $SD=.972$ ). In contrast, the Big East ( $M=1.375$ ,  $SD=.642$ ) averaged the least major violations within the BCS conference structure, followed closely by the ACC ( $M=2.667$ ,  $SD=.878$ ). By close examination of Table 2, the Big East actually has lower mean scores than the WAC ( $M=1.889$ ,  $SD=.683$ ) and Conference USA ( $M=3.250$ ,  $SD=.913$ ). This can be largely attributed to the conference change of the Big East in 2003, where five non-BCS teams were added from Conference USA (Big East, 2007). With the change in conference structure and lower level of competition, lower means existed

for non-BCS conferences when compared to the traditional powerhouse conferences (ACC, SEC, Pac 10, Big 12, and Big Ten) within the BCS.

Although the Big 12, Pac 10, Big Ten, and SEC have the highest mean violations per team member per year, these conferences also have the most football championships won from 1970 to 2007. From the 1970 to 2007 seasons, teams from the Big Ten, Big 12, Pac 10, and SEC combined for 35 football national championships or co-national championships, a mean of 8.75 championships per conference. The Big East only had one team (University of Pittsburgh) win a national championship during that same span. Statistical significance ( $F 2.622$ ,  $p < .03$ ) is also found through similar comparisons of the Big East and Big Ten by the marginal means of violations. Therefore, a significant relationship exists where BCS conferences that win national championships in football often commit major violations of NCAA legislation ( $F[3,115] = 5.902$ ,  $p < .05$ ). The only anomaly was the ACC, which had nine national championships from 1970-2007 but committed a lower mean than the all other BCS conferences except the Big East. Nevertheless, this study supports theory that football championships are influenced by NCAA violations (Humphreys & Russeski, 2006).

Significant differences of major violations were found among non-BCS conferences. From 1970-1987, Conference USA's estimated marginal means ( $M=3.250$ ,  $SD=.913$ ) are significantly higher than the remainder of the non-BCS conferences ( $F[3,115] = 3.318$ ,  $p < .05$ ). This is attributed to SMU, which committed several major violations while it was a member of the former nationally powerful BCS equivalent Southwest Conference. Although minor peaks occur in Time 1 with the Sun Belt Conference ( $M=.923$ ,  $SD=.446$ ) and Time 2 with the Mountain West Conference ( $M=1.778$ ,  $SD=.589$ ), these differences are not statistically

significant enough to infer any correlation to the remainder of the non-BCS conferences. Therefore, this study finds a correlation between level of competition and major violations in non-BCS conferences.

#### *Major Recruiting Violations*

By smoothing data of the years of major recruiting violations, nine time periods follow the changing structures of Division I (FBS) football bowl championship structures from 1987 through 2007. In 1992, the Bowl Coalition began to match the first- and second-ranked football teams belonging to all major (now known as BCS) conferences except the Pac 10 and Big Ten. By 1995, the Bowl Coalition changed to the Bowl Alliance System, which permitted two-at-large (non-conference) teams but still did not include teams from the Pac 10 and Big Ten. In 1998, the Pac 10 and Big Ten joined the ACC, Big East, Big 12, and SEC as the only major conference institutions eligible to compete for the football national championship in the Bowl Championship Series, thus creating the BCS and non-BCS conference affiliation dichotomy. Time 1 is representative of 1987-1988, the years immediately following the SMU death penalty (McNabb, 1987). Time 2 represents 1989-1993, the years prior to the formation of the Bowl Coalition, the first two years of the Bowl Coalition, and seasons in which football co-national champions were named in 1990 and 1991 (BCS, 2007). Time 3 represents 1994, the final year of the Bowl Coalition (BCS, 2007). Time 4 represents 1995-1996, the first two years of the Bowl Alliance System in university football (BCS, 2007). Time 5 represents 1997-1999, the last year of the Bowl Alliance that had co-national champions in 1997 and the beginning of the Bowl Championship Series (BCS, 2007). Time 6 represents 2000-2001, when the BCS introduced the computer ranking effect of quality-of-wins based upon the level of competition and ranking of the

opposing team. Time 7 represents 2002-2003, when LSU and USC shared a disputed national championship (BCS, 2007). Time 8 represents 2004, which introduced the hall of fame coaches' Harris Interactive University Football Poll in reaction to the LSU-USC national championship debate (BCS, 2007). Time 9 represents 2005-2007, which included the Associated Press Poll withdrawing from the BCS formula, non-BCS conference teams (University of Utah, Boise State University, University of Hawaii) securing BCS bowl bids, and the addition of one game (the BCS National Championship Game) added to the BCS structure (BCS, 2007). The correlation between major recruiting violations and the years in which they occurred will be discussed after the presentation of the data.

This study found a significant difference between BCS and non-BCS conferences in terms of frequency of major recruiting violations from 1987-2007. BCS conference schools accounted for approximately 76.4% of the major recruiting infractions that occurred each year in NCAA Division I (FBS) ( $F[5, 72] = 2.622, p < .05$ ). Based upon the means of recruiting violations per team member from 1987-2007, the SEC ( $M = .857, SD = .853$ ) committed the most major recruiting violations within the BCS conferences, followed closely by the Big Ten ( $M = .762, SD = .831$ ) and Big 12 ( $M = .762, SD = .645$ ). The Big East Conference ( $M = .429, SD = .598$ ) and ACC ( $M = .429, SD = .746$ ) committed the least major recruiting violations among the BCS conferences, followed by the Pac 10 Conference ( $M = .476, SD = .750$ ). Therefore, the BCS conferences were dually stratified with the Big Ten, Big 12, and SEC as the group that most often defied Article 13 of the NCAA Bylaws and the ACC, Big East, and Pac 10 as the more compliant BCS conferences (see Table 3). With the identification of which BCS conferences are committing most major recruiting violations,



analysis of the factors that lead to these violations becomes important.

BCS conference recruiting violations. The smoothed years provide statistical significance ( $F[4, 72] = 3.340, p < .05$ ) suggesting that the structure of the bowl system is one reason for major recruiting violations. As a result, the importance of these years will be examined, since data yielded several peaks in some BCS conferences.

The SEC committed the first notable peak of major recruiting infractions in 2004, the year following the LSU-USC disputed national championship in football. During that year, both the Pac 10 and SEC peaked in major recruiting violations. As a result of this finding, the question regarding the possible correlation between major recruiting violations and disputed national championships arose.

Since the NCAA began recording major recruiting violations in 1987, football has endured co-national champions in 1990, 1991, 1997, and 2003. The first years of analysis in question are 1990-1993. In 1990, the University of Colorado (Big 12) and Georgia Tech (ACC) were named co-national champions. In 1991, the University of Washington (Pac 10) and the University of Miami (ACC) were named co-national champions. ACC member institutions committed two major recruiting violations in 1990 and two more in 1993, which are both years that ACC members Georgia Tech and Florida State won the football national championship. From 1990-1993, no major recruiting violations occurred in the Pac 10 Conference, but major recruiting infractions happened in the Big 12 in both 1990 and in 1991, the year following the Colorado national championship. When co-national champions are named in football, major recruiting violations increased in the conferences whose teams won, with the exception of the Pac 10 in the years of 1990-1993.

A similar occurrence happened from 1997-

1999. The University of Michigan (Big Ten) and the University of Nebraska (Big 12) were named co-national champions in football. From 1997-1999, Big Ten Conference members committed two major recruiting violations, and Big 12 members committed three. The anomaly of this situation is that the SEC committed four major recruiting violations during this time span immediately following football national championships won by the University of Florida in 1996 and the University of Tennessee in 1998. However, disputed or co-national championships may not be the only cause of major recruiting violations, as other teams within the national champions' conferences commit many of these violations.

These major recruiting violations that occur within a conference are not necessarily the teams crowned national champions. For example, when USC and LSU won the 2003 disputed national championship, the schools that committed major recruiting violations were Washington and Oregon of the Pac 10, and Arkansas, Auburn, Georgia, and Mississippi State of the SEC. Consequently, as one BCS conference member excels and wins a national championship, the level of competitive pressure increases within the conference of the champion, and major recruiting violations increase within BCS conferences. By increasing the levels of competition within a BCS conference, the frequency of major recruiting violations increases.

Another important factor to note that as quality wins were added to the BCS championship formula, the estimated marginal means of each conference (except the ACC) increased. In 2002, 2003, and 2004, NCAA major recruiting violations averaged seven per year, exceeding the NCAA mean of 4.9 infractions per year. After 2004, the BCS Committee eliminated the strength of the computer rankings (BCS, 2007), essentially reducing the effect of quality wins on the

ranking of BCS teams. As a result, major recruiting violations decreased from the 2002-2004 mean of seven violations per year to 3.69 recruiting violations in 2005-2007. Thus, the correlation once again exists between major recruiting violation frequencies and level of competition.

*Non-BCS conference major recruiting violations.*

Non-BCS conference schools are not guaranteed a berth into the BCS postseason structure unless a team is undefeated or wins the conference and is ranked above a BCS conference champion. Although a BCS bowl berth is plausible (e.g. Utah, Boise State, and Hawaii), a non-BCS conference-affiliated university has not won the Division I (FBS) football national championship since Brigham Young University in 1984. Accordingly, the level of competition in the non-BCS conferences explains the significantly lower frequencies of major recruiting violations compared to the BCS conference universities ( $F[4, 72] = 5.902, p < .01$ ). Major violations of Article 13 are mostly committed by Conference USA ( $M = .286, SD = .463$ ), followed by the WAC ( $M = .238, SD = .436$ ) and the Mountain West ( $M = .190, SD = .402$ ), whereas the Sun Belt Conference ( $M = .143, SD = .359$ ) and MAC ( $M = .095, SD = .301$ ) least often commit major recruiting infractions. When comparing the marginal means of major recruiting violations in non-BCS conferences, no significance was found due to the lower frequency of major violations of Article 13.

*Major Recruiting Violations by Geographical Region.*

Another aspect of understanding the nature of major recruiting infractions is to recognize where these violations occur geographically. The United States Department of State and its Diplomatic Embassies (2007) state that the nation is divided into six geographical regions: South, Mid-Atlantic, New England, Midwest, Southwest, and West. Since the geographical structure of BCS and non-BCS conferences

does not follow the geography of the State Department (2007), this geographical model provides a means of describing where major recruiting violations take place. By identifying where NCAA recruiting violations occur, tactical preventative techniques could be established by athletic administrators to curb future recruiting violations (Anderson, Louis, & Earle, 1999; Goodstein, 2002; Iyer, 1999; Kelley & Chang, 2007; Morgan, Korschgen, & Gardner, 2001).

From 1987-2007, 98 major recruiting violations occurred in Division I (FBS). The frequency of violations, categorized by percentages of the total major recruiting violations, formulates three divisions among the regions of the nation. In the first division, universities in the South account for 35%, while universities in the Midwest committed 28% of all Division I (FBS) major recruiting violations. Combining these two regions, 63% of the major recruiting violations in the nation happened at universities in the South and Midwest. In the second division, universities in the Southwest (16%) and West (15%) account for 31% of all major recruiting violations in Division I (FBS). Major recruiting violations in the West and Southwest combined do not reach the number of major recruiting violations in the South. In the third subdivision, universities in the Mid-Atlantic account for 6% of the recruiting violations in Division I (FBS), and universities in New England did not commit a major recruiting violation from 1987-2007. Accordingly, the combined number of major recruiting violations in the Mid-Atlantic and New England regions does not equal the number of infractions in the West or Southwest. The assessments of these findings utilize the influence of football championships on athletic programs (Depken & Wilson, 2004).

The level of competition influenced the geographical analysis of major recruiting violations. While the South accounts for

the greatest percentage of major recruiting violations, it also has tallied 11 football national and co-national championships from 1987-2007, comprising 55% of the Division I (FBS) football championships (NCAA, 2007). The next closest in number of championships from 1987-2007 is the Midwest with five, or 25% (NCAA, 2007). Both the West (20%), and the Southwest (15%), trail the South and Midwest in Division I (FBS) football national championships (NCAA, 2007). From these same years, no universities from the Mid-Atlantic or New England won national championships in Division I (FBS) football (NCAA, 2007). Therefore, from 1987-2007, the South and Midwest won more football championships than the West and Southwest, and the West and Southwest won more football championships than the Mid-Atlantic and New England (NCAA, 2007). With an exception of the Southwest and West changing positions in terms of national championships in football, the percentage of major recruiting violations directly follows the means of football national championships in geographical regions of the United States. Thus, as more recruiting violations occur in a particular geographical region (exceeding at least 6% of total major recruiting violations), more national championships in Division I (FBS) football will be won in that region (see Table 4). Hence, universities in the South will typically commit more major recruiting violations and win more championships in football than the rest of the nation.

### Limitations

Although it examines data provided by the NCAA, this study contains some limitations. From 1970-2007, the conference structures of Division I (FBS) have changed immensely. The creation of the Mountain West Conference from the WAC and the consolidation of the

Big 8 with four schools from the Southwest Conference to form the Big 12 Conference are only two such examples. To simplify the structure of this study, data were taken for each team in the current form of their conference, which may not depict the actual conference with which the institution was affiliated at the time of the infraction. For example, SMU was a member of the Southwest Conference at the time of the death penalty, but in this study the infractions were recorded under Conference USA, the current conference of SMU.

Other limitations of this study are present. Since this study does not focus upon the individual characteristics of student-athletes, issues of gender and sport were examined on surface levels and should be examined in more detail in future research. Thus, all recruiting violations were taken into account, regardless of sport or the gender of the student-athletes and coaches involved, and these variables could be examined in future research. Also, the names and conference affiliation of institutions involved in secondary violations was not available on the LSDBi Database of the NCAA, thus the data was unable to be coded respective to the analytical conference construct.

### Future Directions

Further research regarding NCAA recruiting should investigate the frequency of major recruiting violations that occur based upon the sports involved, gender of the rules violator(s), the termination of coaches involved in major recruiting violations, and the institutional expectations of rules compliance. These issues could be investigated by both qualitative and quantitative methods in order to understand the institutional generalizability of findings and the individual perspectives that exist within NCAA member institutions. Furthermore, this study should be extended to NCAA

Division I Football Championship Subdivision (FCS), Division II, Division III, and NAIA intercollegiate recruiting rules. In due course, future research should seek to identify other variables in addition to conference affiliation, sport, gender, and geographic region in order to formulate policies and procedures that could curtail future recruiting violations from occurring.

## Conclusion

In summary, this study offers athletic administrators data regarding the conference affiliation of those that commit major violations of Article 13 of the NCAA Bylaws. As previously reported, it represents a crucial step in curtailing ethical misconduct in higher education (Anderson, Louis, & Earle, 1999; Goodstein, 2002; Iyer, 1999; Kelley & Chang, 2007; Morgan, Korschgen, & Gardner, 2001). This research also confirms the findings of Mahony et al. (1999) that both major and secondary violations are steadily increasing. However, according to current NCAA Division I (FBS) conference alignments, schools from BCS-affiliated conferences are more likely to commit major violations because they are the only ones permitted to win football national championships, and thus the stakes are higher under the Bowl Championship Series structure. BCS-conference schools committed 76.4% of all major recruiting violations from 1987-2007 with the SEC at the forefront, followed closely by the Big Ten and the Big 12. Paradoxically, the SEC, Big Ten, Big 12, and Pac 10 led the nation in number of Division I (FBS) football national championships from 1987-2007. This trend of increased major recruiting violations in conjunction with championships also followed

co-national championships in football. In 1990, 1991, 1997, and 2003, seven out of the eight BCS conferences involved in the football national championships had increased major recruiting violations in the year of or the year immediately following the football national championship. Ironically, the rules violators were not the winners of the championships, but instead were other BCS conference members. In conjunction with the BCS conference trends, the geographical regions of the South and Midwest, which include both the SEC and the Big Ten, account for most of the nation's major recruiting violations.

With the inception of the Bowl Championship Series and its auxiliary pressures of quality wins in both the Harris Interactive Poll and computer rankings, the level of competition among BCS conferences has increased. This increase has also heightened the frequency of both secondary and major recruiting violations among BCS conference institutions since 1998. If the BCS permits non-BCS conferences to compete for football national championships, major recruiting violations could increase among non-BCS conference universities. According to the results of this study, where national championships are won, major recruiting violations might follow.

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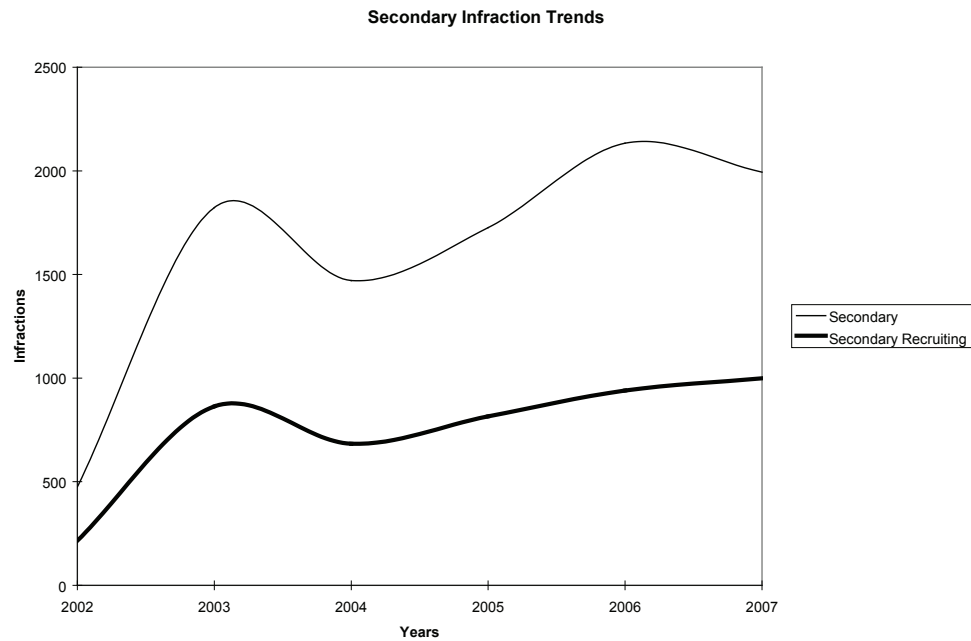
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**Table 1**

NCAA secondary violations (2002-2007)



**Table 2**

All Major infractions by conference type (1970-2007)

Source	df	F	p
Between Subjects			
BCS Conferences	3	5.902*	.025
Non-BCS Conferences	3	3.318*	.021
Error	115	(.905)	

Note: Values in parenthesis represent mean square errors.  
\*p<.05 \*\*p<.01

**Table 3**

Major recruiting infractions by conference type (1987-2007)

Source	df	F	p
Between Subjects			
BCS Conferences	5	2.622*	.025
Non-BCS Conferences	4	5.902**	.000
Bowl Structure Years	4	3.340*	.020
Within Subjects			
Years (Bowl Structure)	4	2.087*	.048
BCS Conferences	5	1.858	.058
Bowl Structure Years X BCS Conferences	40	1.023	.105
Bowl Structure Years X BCS X Non-BCS Conferences	4	5.902**	.000
Group Error	72	(.507)	

Note: Values in parenthesis represent mean square errors.  
\*p<.05 \*\*p<.01

**Table 4**

Major recruiting violations by region

Regions	Percentage of Total Major Recruiting Violations from 1987-2007	Percentage of Total Football National or Co-National Championships from 1987-2007	Percentage of Total Division I Men's Basketball National Championships from 1987-2007
<b><u>South</u></b> (AL, AR, FLA, GA, KY, LA, MS, NC, SC, TN, VA, WV)	35	55	50
<b><u>Midwest</u></b> (IL, IN, IA, KS, MI, MO, NE, ND, SD, WI)	28	25	20
<b><u>Southwest</u></b> (AZ, NM, OK, TX)	16	15	0
<b><u>West</u></b> (AK, CO, CA, HI, ID, MT, NA, OR, UT, WA, WY)	15	20	15
<b><u>Mid-Atlantic</u></b> (DE, MD, NJ, NY, PA, D.C.)	6	0	5
<b><u>New England</u></b> (CT, ME, MA, NH, RI, VT)	0	0	10



# Journal of Sport Administration & Supervision

## A SYSTEMS-BASED THINKING & LEARNING JOURNAL

### DO BCS NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIPS LEAD TO RECRUITING VIOLATIONS? A TREND ANALYSIS OF NCAA DIVISION I (FBS) INFRACTIONS

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#### **Purpose**

The purpose of this study was to identify the frequency and severity recruiting infractions of NCAA Division I Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS) institutions according to their locations and conference affiliations. This study examines the influence of the Bowl Championship Series (BCS) structure on issues of athletic compliance related to the recruitment of student-athletes. Furthermore, this study also addresses a crucial step of curtailing future ethical misconduct in higher education institutions that commit recruiting violations by identifying the rules violators on the institutional level (Kelley & Chang, 2007).

#### **Issues**

Recruiting remains one of the most influential factors of the success in intercollegiate athletics. One West Virginia coach said that recruiting is the “lifeline of [an athletic] program” because “it’s not the X’s and O’s; it’s the Jimmys and Joes” that lead programs to status as perennial winners (O’Neil, 2008). This belief about the importance of recruiting became factual as Langlett (2003) found that football programs that are perennial winners are able to attract higher quality recruits, thereby increasing the future quality of team performance. Not surprisingly, individuals within NCAA institutions may violate recruiting rules in order to increase the likelihood of successfully recruiting top talent to their university. This work will identify who, where, and some reasons why these recruiting infractions occur.

#### **Summary**

A trend analysis measured the averages of all major violations (more severe) and secondary violations (less severe) from 1970 to 2007, with a specific focus major recruiting infractions from 1987 through the current construct of the Division I (FBS) conference structure in 2007.

The findings confirm that secondary violations have increased from 2000 to 2007. Additionally, BCS-affiliated conferences commit significantly more major violations than non-BCS conferences, with 76.4% of all major recruiting violations from 1987-2007 and with the Southeastern Conference (SEC) at the forefront, followed closely by Big Ten and the Big 12. In relation, the SEC, Big Ten, Big 12, and Pac 10 lead the nation in number of Division I (FBS) football national championships from 1987-2007. This trend of increased major recruiting violations in

conjunction with football championships also followed disputed or co-national championships. In 1990, 1991, 1997, and 2003, BCS affiliated universities in the same conference as the football national champion(s) were found to have increased major recruiting violations in the year of, or year immediately following, a disputed or co-national football championship. However, the violators were not winners of the national championships, but instead were other BCS conference members. In conjunction with the BCS conference trends, the geographical regions of the South and Midwest, which include the SEC and the Big Ten, accounted for 63% of the nation's major recruiting violations from 1987-2007. Thus, according to the results of this study, where NCAA Division I (FBS) football national championships are won, major recruiting violations are likely to follow.

## **Analysis**

The findings in this study should be particularly applicable to intercollegiate athletic administrators seeking to prevent or curtail recruiting violations from occurring on their campus. This study holds that BCS-affiliated conference athletic administrators at institutions in the South or Midwest that are not winning a national championship in football should beware that coaches at their schools could be more apt to violate NCAA recruiting rules. This study also informs athletic administrators that secondary violations are increasing, which also lead to more severe sanctions as multiple secondary violations could escalate to major infractions. Furthermore, this information could be used to inform the NCAA that the current structure of recruiting rules enforcement does not curtail recruiting violations, but, in fact, those that violate recruiting rules will be more likely to win BCS national championships.

### **Implications**

The purpose of this study is to identify who commits major NCAA violations—specifically major recruiting violations—to discover the foundational reasons for ethical violations of NCAA legislation. Without the knowledge of what institutions and conferences are committing major recruiting violations, it becomes much more difficult to pinpoint individuals within the institutions that commit these violations. Thus, athletic compliance directors can utilize the results of this study to build policies and procedures at their institutions, and recruiting coordinators could utilize knowledge of these trends to enhance monitoring and educational efforts to curtail future institutional recruiting violations.