

NCAA Convention

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NASHVILLE, Tenn. (AP) — The student walked into the office of Nevada trainer Marc Paul with some news: She was pregnant.

Thanks to the school's new policy, Paul knew how to spell out her options — medical, athletic and academic.

“Even though we think we have a pretty good policy in place, we have to take each case individually and take each case step by step,” Paul said Wednesday.

Dealing with pregnant athletes is among the items on the agenda at the NCAA convention that opens Thursday at the Gaylord Opryland Resort and Convention Center. There will be a vote on whether to override the ban on coaches text messaging recruits. Also on the program: whether Canadian schools can join Division II, limiting male practice players in Division III basketball and discussing whether to create a new division.

Georgia president Michael Adam has proposed an eight-game playoff for the Football Bowl Subdivision, and NCAA president Myles Brand has agreed to take the suggestion to the Division I board Monday. Division I delegates also will vote on modifying financial aid for baseball players and changing competition rules in men's and women's golf.

Last spring, ESPN reported that seven Clemson athletes had abortions in recent years because they feared losing their scholarships. A Memphis track athlete said she lost hers when she became pregnant.

The NCAA allows pregnant athletes to apply for an extra year of eligibility that would not count as a redshirt year. But there were no national guidelines about pregnancy.

“It is good that this is on the agenda because of the increased number of female student-athletes of course who are finding themselves in this position,” Virginia State athletic director Peggy Davis said.

Davis said her school kept pregnant athletes on scholarship. Nevada dealt with cases individually, and Paul said the university developed a comprehensive policy over the summer. The discussions included a former athlete who had three children while competing and her husband, also an athlete.

“She provided us invaluable information and insight because she'd been through it so many times,” Paul said.

Nevada's policy was distributed to athletes last fall and is included in the handbook. All athletes at Virginia State are informed of their options at the beginning of the academic year, and the policy is listed on the school's Web site.

Paul said they have received calls from other schools with questions, and Nevada officials are trying learn how others deal with this matter.

“It's a sensitive subject, highly confidential subject, but it needs to be the right policy for each school,” Paul said. “That's one of the things people really need to realize. There's no cookie-cutter approach to this stuff. There are so many schools — private, public and faith-based institutions — you can't really come up with one policy across the board that fits every school.”

This will be the NCAA's biggest convention yet with 3,158 having registered in

December, up from 2,696 at the 2007 convention. More presidents and chancellors are expected as well, with 279 coming, up nearly 80.

College coaches have not been able to text-message recruits since Aug. 1, and a vote to override that ban is expected Saturday.

Athletes opposed allowing unlimited text messages. The American Football Coaches Association favors texting, while the National Association of Basketball Coaches split on the topic.

“We do not have a majority of coaches who support any change to the present status, which is no text messaging,” NABC executive director Jim Haney said.

Division II delegates will be voting to eliminate text messaging except when a student has signed a letter of intent or has a written offer of financial aid. Division III will be voting on banning text messaging completely.

Another subject concerns rapidly growing Division III, the NCAA’s largest division with about 450 members. Some would like to freeze membership.

Schools like Susquehanna in Pennsylvania, which has built a new football stadium among other facilities, switched conferences in football last year and started a new league to join others who share the same academic and athletic standards.

John Fry, president of Franklin and Marshall and chair of the Division III president’s council, has been studying a proposal to either break up Division III or add a Division IV. Discussions during this convention will lead to a proposal to be voted on at the 2009 convention.

“I don’t want Division III to turn into a club that’s exclusive,” Fry said. “Rather than try to do this with caps and moratoriums and just hang onto the status quo, I’d rather project ahead five, 10 years and say ‘What is the right way from a membership standpoint to expand access to the NCAA?’”