

Evaluating the Effectiveness of Major Infractions Penalties in NCAA Division I Athletics

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**Session 10: Governance
Presentation (25-minute)**

Thursday, May 31, 2007

3:00 PM - 3:25 PM

The National Collegiate Athletic Association's (NCAA's) rules manuals for its three major divisions of competition total nearly 1,200 pages of rules, bylaws, and guidelines. These rules are so complex that most NCAA athletic programs have a full-time staff person devoted to assuring the program is in compliance with NCAA rules, with many Division I athletic programs employing multiple such employees. The NCAA itself has an enforcement staff, primarily comprised of investigators with legal backgrounds, charged with enforcing the organization's rules and a Committee on Infractions responsible for penalizing schools that run afoul of those rules. Clearly, the NCAA and its member institutions take their rules, and violations of those rules, quite seriously.

The stated mission of the NCAA's enforcement division is - to reduce violations of NCAA legislation and impose appropriate penalties if violations occurred-" (www.ncaa.org). Examples of penalties given by the NCAA include postseason bans, television bans, reductions of scholarships, and/or recruiting limitations, such as how many off-campus visits coaches can make, with the ultimate sanction being the so-called - death penalty-", where a team is forced to cancel one or more entire seasons of competition. Little evidence exists, however, as to how effective NCAA penalties are in causing an appropriate hardship or loss upon the penalized team and in the ability of these penalties to deter other programs from breaking the organization's rules.

Several studies were identified related to the impact of penalties in NCAA Athletics (Fleischer, Goff, & Tollison, 1992; Grimes & Chressanthi, 1994, Otto, 2000; Padilla & Baumer, 1994; Parker, 1995; Perry, 2002), finding mixed results regarding such an impact. None of these works, however, accounted for the severity of penalties imposed, creating a substantial gap in this body of literature. Without controlling for penalty severity, it is difficult to truly assess how successful NCAA penalties are in placing a significant hardship upon institutions violating the organization's rules. To conclude that NCAA penalties are effective, these penalties must lead to a subsequent decrease in team performance or the NCAA is not effectively penalizing programs or deterring programs from violating rules in the future. Additionally, this magnitude of the decrease in team performance must correlate with the severity of the penalties imposed for the NCAA to claim that its penalties fulfilling the mission of the NCAA enforcement program to reduce or deter rules violations from occurring and appropriately.

This study focused on NCAA Division I-A football and Division I men's and women's basketball. These contexts were chosen for their importance as revenue sources for most athletic programs and their high-profile natures. The population was delimited to schools receiving major penalties from the NCAA between 1988, the year after the infamous Southern Methodist University football "death penalty" decision, and 2000. Using the NCAA's infractions database, subject programs receiving major penalties in the three aforementioned sport programs between 1988 and 2000, were identified for inclusion in the study. Information about the penalties imposed upon these subjects was sent to three practitioners, each of which was senior-level administrators in NCAA Division I-A athletic programs. The practitioners were asked to categorize each of the penalties into three groups based on severity: high, moderate, or low, with penalized schools' names' withheld to control for any potential bias. Upon completion, the schools were categorized into high, moderate, or low severity groups for each sport based on rating agreement of at least two of the three experts. Control groups were also established for each of the three sports for comparison purposes.

Winning percentage data was collected for each subject for a time period of ten consecutive years, including the five years immediately prior to the imposition of the major penalties and the five years immediately thereafter. A random start date within the period studied as selected for subjects in the control groups. Three (one per sport) 4 x 10 mixed-design analyses of variance (ANOVA), or mixed between-within subjects ANOVA, were used to investigate if differences existed in all subject sport programs across the ten-year period (within-subjects aspect of the ANOVA), including the five seasons before the penalty start date and the five seasons after that date, and to examine if differences existed between the four penalty severity groups, the high, moderate, and low severity groups as well as the control groups, across the ten-year period studied (between-subjects aspect of the ANOVA). A significance level of $Y=.05$ was established a priori for each test. It was determined that Bonferroni post-hoc tests would be used to compare groups in the event significant results were found with the mixed-design ANOVA tests.

Initial results showed little effect of penalties on subsequent team performance for NCAA athletic programs receiving major penalties. Further results will be presented and the theoretical and practical implications of those results will be discussed at the conference.

2007 North American Society for Sport Management Conference (NASSM 2007)

References

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