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NCAA bans text-message recruiting

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SPORT AND SOCIETY FOR H-ARETE
NCAA bans text-message recruiting
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Every day in every way my admiration for the National Collegiate Athletic Association soars to new heights. Who could not but admire the latest blow delivered by this august organization on the behalf of the purity of intercollegiate athletics?

The NCAA Management Council has recommended that the NCAA place a ban on all electronically transmitted correspondence, including text messages, between coaches and recruits. This policy position, should it be given final approval, is breathtaking in its scope and significance. One day it will be considered by sport historians as the turning point in the struggle to contain corruption in intercollegiate athletics even though it exempts faxes and e-mails from the edict.

Florida head coach Urban Meyer, who is credited with perfecting, if not actually initiating, text messaging to unprotected high school football players, is yet to comment on this new roadblock facing his ongoing effort to repeat as BCS champion. One can only imagine how much this action will be deplored by Pope Urban of Gainesville. As to the alternative use of e-mails and faxes, they seem a poor alternative, as they are so 20th century, and Urban is so 21st century.

The earliest this ban actually could go into effect is August of 2007. Enterprising high tech coaches have another three to four months to text away. One can only imagine the urgency with which they will be mass texting in every direction. One can only imagine how many high school, middle school, and red-shirt preschoolers will be permanently scarred in this interim period of free-fire texting.

It is good to know the NCAA is alert to the sort of abuse emanating from the new technologies. It is also reassuring that the NCAA is not just a reactive organization, but also proactive: Discouraging evil and encouraging good.

In the encouragement category, word came yesterday that the NCAA Post-season Football Licensing Subcommittee (yes, there really is such a subcommittee) has given its approval to thirty-two bowl games for the 2007 football season. These are the same thirty-two memorable and epic contests that were held to conclude the 2006-football season. And who will ever forget the

stunning Brut Sun Bowl? Or the Papjohns.com Bowl? Certainly not the 1.6M collective fans that attended these two classics and the other thirty bowls. The participating universities and conferences that divided up the \$217.6M in payouts will also recall these bowls with a certain degree of warmth. For those universities that lost between a half-million and a million and half-dollars each by sending their football teams to the "less glamorous" of the bowl games, the warmth may not seem as fuzzy.

But then it's not about the money.

Jeff Hathaway, chairman of the NCAA Post-season Football Licensing Subcommittee, put it so well when he saluted the bowl organizing committees who did so much to "create a positive experience for the student-athletes." Indeed, this is the true mission of bowl games. There is after all nothing any more positive than an experience in Shreveport or Detroit in December, or getting battered in a half empty stadium a few nights before Christmas.

The other ongoing and encouraging development can be seen in the first results of the NBA's rule that no basketball player can be drafted until a year after his class graduates from high school. For the most part this has meant that basketball players coming out of high school have been forced to go to college. This great and glorious victory for education also means that most players are now completing that year of involuntary servitude in which they have contributed mightily to the ongoing cash flow to the NCAA through the mechanisms of March Madness.

The fact that many of these student athletes, known among college coaches as the one-and-done players, are now announcing for the NBA draft should be of no concern to the NCAA. Mission Accomplished, Mr. Stern. These players have now been subjected to the "raincoat theory of education," having been "exposed" to college. Such "exposure" for one year is something akin to a drive-by education, and the hope is that these student athletes sustain nothing worse than a minor brain damage from a general education class.

It is reported that Greg Oden, a one-and-doner who has just declared for the NBA draft, was able to broaden his knowledge of the liberal arts and develop new perspectives on life during his spring term at THE Ohio State University. His study of the History of Rock 'n Roll and Sociology 101 will no doubt serve him well during those long road-trips on the NBA circuit. Indeed his stay in Cleveland will be a much richer experience when he

spends several hours at Cleveland's Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum. As for the lessons of Sociology 101, those who have had that course universally report that they are now much more adept in identifying the self-evident.

No doubt in the years ahead we will look back and marvel at this farsighted decision by David Stern and the NBA forcing the young hoopsters to experience college. We will rejoice at the continuation of the Bell Helicopter Armed Forces Bowl a.k.a. the Lobbyist Bowl, the Emerald Bowl, the R&L Carrier New Orleans Bowl, and all those other "positive experiences" in the life of the student athlete.

As for the ban on text messaging? Hold the phone, the jury is still out.

On Sport and Society this is Dick Crepeau reminding you that you don't have to be a good sport to be a bad loser.

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