

Unattached Student-Athletes

HISTORY: The Northern Sun Intercollegiate Conference (NSIC) has received inquiries pertaining to student-athletes who compete as an individual/not representing the Institution (NCAA Bylaw 14.7.3.4); also referred to as unattached student-athletes. The following information was put together at the request of NSIC member institutions.

Bylaw 14.7.3.4 Competition as Individual/Not Representing Institution. It is permissible for a student-athlete to participate in outside competition as an individual during the academic year in the student-athlete's sport, as long as the student-athlete represents only himself or herself in competition and does not engage in such competition as a member of or receive expenses from an outside team.

Bylaw 14.7.3.4.1 No Competition Between Beginning of Academic Year and November 1—Wrestling. In Wrestling, a student-athlete shall not participate in outside competition as an individual between the beginning of the Institution's academic year and November 1.

Associated NCAA Staff Interpretations

1. **Title:** Student-Athlete Receiving Coaching or Instruction from an Institution's Coach While Competing as an Individual

Date Published: November 20, 1998

Type: Staff Interpretation

Item Ref: 1

a. Student-Athlete Receiving Coaching or Instruction from an Institution's Coach While Competing as an Individual: (I/II/III) The membership services staff determined that a student-athlete who receives coaching or instruction from his or her institution's coach while competing in an individual competition is considered to be representing the institution and, therefore, would utilize a season of competition. [References: NCAA Bylaws 14.02.6 (intercollegiate competition); 14.7.3.5 (competition as individual/not representing institution); 17.02.8 (intercollegiate competition); staff interpretations, 02/21/97, item a, and 09/22/89, item g; and Official interpretation, 05/08/95, item 1]

2. **Title:** Open Event and Competition

Date Published: February 21, 1997

Type: Staff Interpretation

Item Ref: a

a. Open Event and Competition: The legislative services staff confirmed that a student-athlete who is not eligible for intercollegiate competition (e.g., nonqualifier, partial

qualifier) may participate in an open event involving noncollegiate competitors and collegiate competitors (including an open event in which the collegiate competitors receive expenses from and/or score points for their respective institutions), provided the student-athlete pays his or her own expenses to the competition, does not wear the institution's uniform or score points for the institution. However, an event that is only open to collegiate competitors is considered intercollegiate competition (as opposed to an open event). Thus, a student-athlete who is not eligible for intercollegiate competition may not participate in such an event. [References: NCAA Bylaw 14.02.6-(a) (intercollegiate competition) and 05/08/95 Official interpretation, item 1].

NCAA Education Column

Title : Competing Unattached in Individual Sports

Item Ref : 1

Date Published: November 17, 2005

Q: Is it permissible for an institution to provide expenses (e.g., meals, entry fee, lodging) for a student-athlete to compete unattached, when that student-athlete is not representing the institution in competition (e.g., ineligible or "redshirting")?

A: When a student-athlete competes unattached (i.e., competes as an individual, representing only himself or herself) in any competition, the institution may not provide any expenses to the participating student-athlete. The student-athlete is considered to be representing the institution in outside competition when provided expenses from the institution. This includes the institution providing transportation (e.g., individual riding on team bus to competition) to an unattached participant.

Q: May an unattached student-athlete wear the uniform of the institution?

A: No. Wearing the uniform of the institution constitutes representation of the institution; therefore, the student-athlete, by rule, would not be considered to be competing unattached if he or she were wearing the institution's uniform. If the student-athlete triggers NCAA Bylaw 14.02.6 (intercollegiate competition), the student-athlete must be eligible to represent the institution in outside competition.

Q: Is the institution permitted to provide athletics training support prior to and after the match for student-athletes who are competing unattached?

A: No. As a general rule, such expenses may not be provided by the institution when the student-athlete is competing unattached. The provision of such services constitutes the receipt of expenses related to the competition. If the trainer (or other service provider) has been designated by the competition host to provide services to all participants; however, such services may be provided to the unattached student-athletes.

Q: Is it permissible for institutional coaches to provide coaching and instruction to an unattached student-athlete during competition?

A: No. A student-athlete who receives coaching or instruction (e.g., technique, comments related to performance, suggestions) from his or her coach while competing in an individual competition is considered to be representing the institution. As a result, the student-athlete must be eligible to represent the institution and such participation would constitute the use of one of the four seasons of competition. Further, institutional coaching staff members may not direct participating student-athletes to engage in coaching or instructional activities with student-athletes from the same institution who are competing unattached. [Note: A coaching staff member may engage in coaching activities with a student-athlete during the student-athlete's participation in established national championship events (including junior national championships and Olympic, Pan American, World Championships, World Cup and World University Games qualifying competition.)]

Q: Is it permissible for a sports club to provide expenses (e.g., travel, meals, lodging, uniform) to an individual competing unattached?

A: A student-athlete is permitted to receive actual and necessary expenses from an amateur team only when representing such a team in competition. If a student-athlete receives expenses from a club team, he or she would be representing that club team, as opposed to being considered unattached. It is important to note that in Division I sports other than basketball, a student-athlete may not represent an outside team (note exceptions in Bylaw 14.7.3.1) in competition during the academic year, except during vacation periods outside of the declared playing and practice season. In NCAA Divisions II and III, a student-athlete is permitted to represent an outside team at any time provided the competition takes place outside the declared playing and practice season. Thus, if the student-athlete is competing unattached (i.e., not representing the institution or any other team), all expenses must be self-funded, unless an exception exists (e.g., national team competition). Please note that Divisions I and II coaching staff members shall not be involved in any capacity, including coaching or as an administrator, during the academic year, with a club team that includes student-athletes from their own team. In Division III, an institutional coaching staff member may not be involved with a wrestling club team that includes their own student-athletes at any time, including outside the academic year. [Bylaws 12.1.1.1.4.3 (Divisions I/II/III); 14.7.1 and 17.30.9.1.2.1 (Divisions I/II); 14.7.1.3 (Division I); 14.7.1.1.1 and 14.7.3.4 (Division II); 14.7.2.5 and 17.30.8.1.1 (Division III)].

Q: May an unattached student-athlete's institutional affiliation be identified in any manner (e.g., in a program, by an announcer)?

A: Identification of the unattached student-athlete's institutional affiliation, in and of itself, does not constitute representation of the institution in intercollegiate competition; however, it is advisable that the unattached student-athlete's participation is clearly defined as being independent of the institution in order to avoid any confusion related to the student-athlete's participation.

Media Releases

Q: May an unattached student-athlete's institutional affiliation be identified in any manner (e.g., in a program, by an announcer)?

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Interpretation Received

The NSIC sought additional clarification from the NCAA staff on a scenario not specifically addressed in the 2005 educational column. Additional clarification is as follows:

Q: Can a coach of a student-athlete who is participating unattached as an individual (NOT representing an institution) register the SA for the open event?

A: Institutional involvement in the registration process is a benefit. In order to be considered an unattached SA, the individual should register on his or her own.

The NSIC understands that in some sports numbers are assigned to student-athletes to track marks throughout the season/career. In the past, coaches have stated that the need to input those numbers during the registration process requires coach's involvement. As specified in the response, registration by a coach is a benefit. Assistance (e.g. providing the required information) is not a benefit, provided student-athlete completes the registration process.

At the January CCACA meeting, the NCAA staff informed the group that the NCAA Legislation Committee will discuss this topic in the near future, and look to provide clarification.