

The following NCAA Sports Wagering Education Newsletter article was written by Chad Hawley, associate commissioner of the Big Ten Conference.

## **Sports Gambling Is Here; The Question Is How To Deal With It**

Every so often, sports gambling becomes a front-burner issue within the mainstream. I believe we are in one of those periods now in the wake of the scandal involving NBA referee Tim Donaghy and the investigations that have recently touched football and men's basketball at the University of Toledo. As if on cue, this fall the NCAA will release the results of its latest survey regarding gambling behavior among student-athletes. In between these front-burner moments, sports gambling is never really "off the stove." Seen or unseen, it is happening just as sure as lights are blinking in Vegas. The question isn't how to stop it; instead, the question is what to do about it in light of its inevitability. In that regard, I offer a three-step approach to thinking about and addressing sports gambling on your campus.

**Step One:** Understand that sports gambling is occurring on your campus. I like to say that if it's happening in Boone, it's happening everywhere. Boone, a small mountain town in northwestern North Carolina, is home to Appalachian State University—my alma mater and where I played soccer in the mid-90's. Known for Christmas tree farms and "leaf lookers" in the fall, Boone is a far cry from larger metropolitan areas that through the years have been associated with sports gambling scandals—places such as Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Detroit, and Chicago. Nevertheless, there is no doubt in my mind that sports gambling is alive and well at Appalachian. How do I know? I recall an away trip where a teammate stopped to use a pay phone in the lobby of our hotel as we were boarding the bus to go play our match—he had seen something of interest on ESPN's College Football Gameday, so he needed to make a last-minute call to his bookie. There was another occasion where students (including some student-athletes) at a party were openly gambling on upcoming NFL games. Again, if it's happening in Boone, it's happening on your campus.

**Step Two:** Provide both rules-based and consequence-based education. It is obviously important to educate student-athletes regarding the rules. Despite the ubiquity of the "Don't Bet On It" campaign, it is certain that there are still student-athletes who do not realize that it is impermissible to gamble on professional sports or sports other than their own, or that it is not permissible to enter pay-to-play fantasy leagues. Moreover, many student-athletes probably do not know that sports wagering is illegal in every state but Nevada.

While rules-based education is important, equally as important is providing consequence-based education. If you take as certain that some student-athletes are gambling now, it is also certain that even when you inform these student-athletes that gambling is impermissible, some will continue to gamble. Student-athletes should understand that there are consequences to gambling, and the least we can do is put them in a position to make a decision while understanding what the consequences may be.

Some of the consequences are as follows:

*Social and personal welfare consequences.* Student-athletes need to understand that gambling is an addictive activity that in its worst manifestation, can result in personal ruin—not just for the problem gambler, but for those around him. It may be true that not everyone who gambles will become a problem gambler, just as it is true that not everyone who takes a drink becomes an alcoholic. But the casual drinker and the alcoholic have something in common—they each had a first drink. The same is true for a casual gambler and a problem gambler—they each had a first bet. Without passing judgment as to whether gambling is "right" or "wrong," it is important that student-athletes understand that the decision to gamble comes with risks greater than just the amount wagered.

*Punitive consequences.* Rules and laws are fairly meaningless if there is no punishment for breaking them. Student-athletes should understand that if they are caught gambling on sports, they will be withheld from competition. They should also understand that if they gamble on sports outside the state of Nevada, they risk a criminal conviction, which could vary—depending on the severity of the situation—from a fine and/or probation to significant imprisonment.

*Consequences related to the integrity of the game.* Within the arena of competitive sports, there may be no greater sin than intentionally affecting the outcome of a game such that the game is not “on the level.” Student-athletes—particularly in the sports of football and men’s basketball—should understand that gambling puts them at risk for finding themselves in a situation where they are asked to affect the outcome of a game.

**Step Three:** Let the student-athletes know there is support available. As mentioned above, gambling addiction in its worst manifestation can result in personal ruin. This bears a similarity to other addictive activities such as drinking and using drugs. Consequently, I agree with Dr. Tim Otteman, an assistant professor at Central Michigan University, who advocated in last month’s guest column that institutions should incorporate gambling into educational programming that already addresses issues such as drinking and drug use. Accordingly, student-athletes who believe they have a problem gambling should know where to find support, whether it be local or through a national entity such as the National Council on Problem Gambling ([www.ncpgambling.org](http://www.ncpgambling.org)). Annual gambling education presentations are easy opportunities to provide such information.

Like it or not, sports gambling is here and around us and it is not going anywhere. That does not mean we should throw in the towel on providing rules education, enforcing rules, or mitigating the damage problem gambling can cause. While there is probably no “right” way to address the issue, there is certainly a “wrong” way, and that is doing nothing. The steps above provide a suggested framework for doing something.

As coaches and staff members, please continue your efforts to reinforce the message the compliance staff has been sending and to educate our student-athletes regarding the dangers of gambling. The NCAA is making this a high priority this year, so we must do our part to reinforce and educate.

Please remember that the NCAA gambling prohibition also applies to all athletics department staff members.

Please contact the compliance office if you have any questions.