

National Fastpitch Coaches Association
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NCAA Division I Coaches Take a Stand Against Early Recruiting

LOUISVILLE, Ky. -- The NFCA has announced that its Division I membership has submitted a response to the NCAA on current early recruiting proposals in the legislative cycle. DI college softball coaches have asked for all recruiting contact to begin September 1 of a prospective student-athlete's ("PSA") junior year.

An Energetic Debate at Convention

Input from coaches associations was sought by the NCAA. The topic of early recruiting was vigorously discussed at the NFCA Convention in Las Vegas in December. An overwhelming consensus emerged from the Division I membership: early recruiting is not good for softball; we need to do something now. As University of Michigan head coach Carol Hutchins acknowledged, "we are spiraling in a poor direction."

The NFCA DI coaches discussed multiple early recruiting proposals, which were introduced by the Student Athlete Experience Committee ("SAEC"), as well as the relatively recent "lacrosse proposal" which was passed by the NCAA in April 2017.

The Details of the SAEC Proposals

First, the initial point of focus at the DI softball caucus was the series of proposals brought forward by the SAEC. The SAEC is part of the relatively new NCAA governance structure, charged with overseeing NCAA bylaws that affect the student athlete intercollegiate experience. This group was also involved in the NCAA student time demands legislation that went into effect this year.

One SAEC proposal set a date for when unofficial visits could begin. These are visits to college campuses taken by a PSA and her family at their own cost. The SAEC identified that the first day of classes of a PSA's sophomore year be used. Currently, no start date exists for unofficial visits. The SAEC also proposed that recruiting conversations at camps and clinics not take place until the opening day of classes of a PSA's sophomore year.

The SAEC also suggested a change in date for official visits. These trips to campus are arranged for and paid for by an institution; PSAs are allowed to take a maximum of five official visits. The SAEC proposed official visits be moved from senior year to the opening day of classes of a PSA's junior year. In theory, this could help shift the financial burden of recruiting visits from PSAs and their families to the institutions, by allowing official visits to take place earlier. Some question if this will actually be helpful for families if recruiting contact is allowed to begin in the sophomore year.

While the effort here is to attempt to slow down this process by pushing back moments of recruiting contact into the sophomore year; loopholes in the SAEC recommendation still exist. The SAEC did not address incoming telephone calls. This means that recruiting communication initiated by telephone from a PSA to a collegiate coach remains permissible at any point in time.

A Look at the Lacrosse Legislation

The approach taken by lacrosse differed from the SAEC proposal in that lacrosse legislation sets September 1 of junior year as the start date for all recruiting contact: unofficial visits, correspondence,

telephone calls, and recruiting conversations at camps and clinics. The clean, streamlined legislation was well-received. Many in the lacrosse community cite the “bright line” for all recruiting contact at a later more appropriate age for PSAs as exactly what was needed to address the problem of early recruiting.

The Votes: Consensus for Change

The merits of all the proposals were debated, as well as what was in the best interest of softball. A straw poll (one vote per institution) was taken in the NFCA DI caucus and the results were overwhelming: 200-3 in favor of the lacrosse proposal, over the SAEC proposal, making September 1 of junior year the desired start date for all recruiting contact.

A follow-up survey was sent to all DI softball coaches in mid-December to capture the vote in writing. The rate of participation was an astounding 95%. The results were compelling: 80% support moving forward with September 1 of junior year as the beginning of recruiting contact for softball, with 84% of coaches favoring the structure of the lacrosse proposal over the SAEC proposal.

Coaches recognize that this change would be a major shift in softball recruiting, away from current trends with middle-schoolers verbally committing to colleges.

NCAA Action is Necessary

Everyone agrees that the only way any change will happen with early recruiting is with NCAA legislation. Outreach efforts from the NFCA to the NCAA SAEC and DI Council members began immediately after the Convention concluded.

NFCA President and University of Tennessee co-head coach Karen Weekly underscored the need for action, “The biggest problem facing college softball today is early recruiting, but it is not going to change unless the coaches and the NCAA work together to make it change.”

The DI softball coaches have built consensus around a solution to the problem of early recruiting and they have asked the NCAA to amend these SAEC proposals to include that all softball recruiting contact begin on September 1 of junior year.

What You Can Do

To express your support, please consider signing our NFCA petition to stop early recruiting. More information can be found at

https://nfca.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=7620&Itemid=158