

 January 8, 2021

Good morning Commissioners:

Welcome to the first newsletter of the New Year, 2021. This letter is slightly different from previous newsletters with only a couple of items in the Outside the NWAC section. As we start the New Year there is significant information in the Inside the NWAC section that you and your staff members, and administration need to review. New year, first letter, and we are off….

**OUTSIDE THE NWAC**

The Division II Administrative Committee approved a recommendation to reduce bracket and field sizes for the 2021 Division II winter and spring championships. The reductions were made to alleviate expected budget shortfalls, specifically as the Division II budget for the 2020-21 fiscal year faces challenges due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The field and bracket size reductions of the 18 Division II 2021 winter and spring championships vary by sport, with 12 of them being reduced by 25%. The Division II Championships Committee and the Division II Planning and Finance Committee each approved the recommendations. The reductions were made because of financial, logistical, or practical concerns with operating that sport’s championship.

The Division I Council granted a blanket waiver allowing all transfer student-athletes to compete immediately this season if specific criteria are met. In order to be eligible for the waiver, the transfer student-athletes must meet the following conditions:

* They must be enrolled full time at the school for the fall 2020 term.
* It must be the first transfer from a four-year school.
* The student-athlete must have left their previous school in good standing academically and not facing disciplinary suspension.
* Both the head coach and the student-athlete must certify that impermissible recruiting did not take place.

The waiver applies only to students who transferred from another Division I school, not transfers from other NCAA divisions or schools outside the NCAA. The regular transfer waiver process is available to non-Division I transfer student-athletes.

“The Council continued its trend of voting in favor of maximum flexibility for student-athletes during the pandemic,” said Council chair M. Grace Calhoun, athletics director at Pennsylvania. “Allowing transfer student-athletes to compete immediately will provide additional opportunities to student-athletes during this continued difficult time, and perhaps allow games to be played that otherwise might not have been.” Applicable to all sports, providing immediate eligibility for these students could help teams if their rosters are impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

**INSIDE THE NWAC**

As you many of are aware on Tuesday Governor Inslee announced his “Roadmap to Recovery” plan for Washingtonians.  That plan has some significant changes and we are presently looking at those changes and how we will respond.   Late Wednesday afternoon I was able to secure for Aaron and myself **30 minutes** with Jon Snyder, Senior Policy Advisor to Governor Inslee. In response to the Governor’s plan, you will find the following information updating NWAC protocols.

Based on Governor Inslee’s “Roadmap to Recovery” plan and the continuation of restrictions imposed by the Governor in November, 2020, there is no indoor athletic activity for “high risk” sports.   This means for NWAC member colleges there is no type of athletic activity for basketball until the Governor’s restrictions are loosened.   This restriction currently prohibits “high risk” indoor competition in both Washington Phase I & II, and prohibits “high risk” indoor practice in Phase I.  There is belief that as we continue into the next weeks that those restrictions may be loosened.   While there is no guarantee, the opportunities to compete in March and April seem possible.

For winter and spring quarters 2021, NWAC member colleges will continue to comply with NWAC Health and Safety protocols. <https://nwacsports.com/documents/SportsMedicine/12-15-NWAC_Covid_Policies_Final_Approved_12_14_20.pdf>

NWAC member colleges may choose, at their own discretion, to open fitness centers for student-athletes who are members of the athletic teams to train and condition, provided member colleges comply with NWAC Health and Safety protocols. Additionally, fitness center protocols as provided in the “Roadmap to Recovery” should be followed.

* NWAC is to not use K-12 metrics when looking at the amount of cases per 100k, etc.  Mr. Snyder has been pretty consistent in his message in our Monday meetings that Higher Ed is its own entity and should really not use K-12 metrics.  He reiterated this with Aaron and me on Wednesday.  He has said that NWAC may look at K-12 as one of a few indicators for bringing students back on campus for classes.
* The major issue for NWAC member colleges is the inability to test student-athletes on a consistent basis (i.e. 2-3 times a week).  We are not talking about a temperature check, what we are talking about is an antigen type test a couple of times a week.  Institutions that have been able to source rapid tests as well as PCR test athletes prior to games as outlined in NCAA protocols have been granted to perform high risk indoor activities.  Aaron and I met last week with representatives from PRIVIT and Idaho Coach Management regarding testing opportunities for our member colleges. We are working on getting the company necessary information so that we can provide financial numbers to our member colleges.
* **The new metrics for the State of Washington are established in both Phase I and Phase II of the new plan.  The metrics used for a region’s phase will be calculated on Friday 1/8 and will be effective January 11.  The metrics for each region will be updated on the Risk Assessment Dashboard every Friday.**
* The SMAC will be looking to update the NWAC RTP Health and Safety Manual.
* I am working with the Washington State Board of Community and Technical Colleges on language regarding the NWAC updates that will be posted on their website.

As stated above, Aaron and I met with representatives from PRIVIT and Idaho Case Management to discuss possible testing, health management and organization for our member colleges. Our office is working on providing PRIVIT numbers so that we can get a better picture of what the costs are to do antigen testing for our student-athletes. Frankly it is a long shot, but we are trying to look for options. As we get more information we will pass it along.

During this time and with so many variables when it comes to compliance and eligibility, I have been working with an ad hoc committee to address scenarios as they arise. This ad hoc committee originally consisted of four commissioners has recently expanded to eight commissioners thus allowing two representatives from our four regions. Recently this committee along with the Executive Board worked on the following scenario:

**(Q)** If a member college suspends their seasons for winter and spring quarters 2021 and the NWAC has competition in March/April, can student-athletes who signed a LOI, transfer and compete at another college within the same year?

**(A)** Yes (Winter/Spring Quarters, 2021), the student-athlete may transfer, receive aid, and compete at another NWAC member college within the same year. The college has chosen to not compete due to the pandemic which is an extenuating circumstance.  The SA must have left their previous school in good standing and the SA must initiated first contact with School B.  If School B is found to have made first contact, this is a code violation and subject to a penalty.   If the SA transfers from school A (chosen not to compete) to school B (plans to compete) and the season gets canceled or there is a reduction in contests played, the SA would not be allowed to transfer back to school A or another member college without having to sit three quarters.

**Summary:** There was much dialogue between the committee members and the Executive Board on this scenario. Within both groups the majority supported the answer provided above. Points of emphasis on the decision were:

* Not much athletic grant in aid may be available to a transfer SA mid-year.
* Most rosters would likely be filled mid-year.
* Simpler to have the GIA involved with the transfer up front as opposed to entertaining petitions.
* Timing of transfer is limited as best and does not make sense.
* The reality of transferring mid-year to get competition (this year limited at best) seems unwise.
* There are no guarantees the school the SA transfers to will compete.
* Not allowing GIA is a potential equity issue as low income SA’s if not granted GIA could not afford to cover the costs of winter and/or spring quarter.
* Most institutional scholarships are already tied up and some FFA may be limited by winter and spring quarters.

Speaking of compliance and eligibility issues, a reminder to join us next week for two compliance and eligibility zoom meetings (see attachment)

**Meeting #1** 1/11/21 w/ Dr. Brenda White, NAIA Director of Legislation

Join Zoom Meeting 1:30pm

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81167423311?pwd=V0VkdjNaRHNwcEpFQ1pMcVVOOUtFQT09>

**Meeting #2** 1/13/21 w/ Laura Dahlby Nicolai, CWU Associate Athletic Director of Compliance (DII)

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/87933317005?pwd=WE8rMU5WN0R6YzhndDNjWDVWRlYrUT09>

These two meetings will give you and your staff member’s great opportunities to get up to speed on compliance and eligibility issues to help you better serve student-athletes.

The NWAC Virtual Fireside Chats will resume later this month. Please stay tuned for the information and share it with your student-athletes. These chats provide great opportunities for our SA’s to work through the difficult situations they find themselves. Topics focus on mental health, social justice, and other issues. It is too important to pass up.

We continued to be committed to acknowledging our student-athletes. Following is a link in which we are asking you to share with your coaches and other staff members to nominate SA’s for Student Athlete of the Week. Using the core NWAC values of Character, Competition, and Community, we need you to nominate those student-athletes who exemplify those core values. Nominations can focus on work in the community, academic achievement, family matters, social work, and athletics. Please pass this along to your coaches and let’s acknowledge our student-athletes in a variety of areas, as the NWAC is more than games! **Submissions must come via athletic commissioners and please have a photo ready for submission.**

<https://nwacsports.org/documents/forms/Student-Athlete%20of%20the%20Week%20Nomination>

**Conclusion**

With the arrival of 2021, one cannot help but take a look back to 2020. Looking back I see much frustration, uncertainty, disgust, divisiveness, worry, and doubt. Honestly the negative aspects of 2020 could roll on and on. But as I look back I am quite thankful for people that help make this conference special. People like:

**Bobby Lee** who stepped into a difficult situation and provides leadership, integrity, and trust.

**Traci Hilligoss** who continues to seek answers to help student-athletes and provides reason when reason is needed.

**Aaron Kilfoyle and our athletic trainers** who have provided us a glimmer of hope as we try to keep our student-athletes as safe as possible during this pandemic.

**PageCarol Woods** who has a passion to impact the whole student-athlete through dialogue, listening, and providing a safe forum for our student-athletes to discuss at times, painful experiences.

**Scott (Father) Rogers** who really has things going on at CBC. Their facilities are immaculate (new gym is being built) and he has worked with his administration to get coaches on campus full-time.

**Our Executive Board** who has stepped up big time. They have been engaged and have not shied away from making tough decisions.

**Kathie Woods, Rick Ross, Brad Baker, and Kirc Roland** as region chairs have done a great job fielding a barrage of questions in which the answers are unknown or at best changing daily.

**Garet Studer, Kathie Woods, Rick Ross, Jeremy Eggers, Jim Martineau, Kirc Roland, Barry Janusch, Cassie Belmodis, and John Dunn/Laura Rosa**, as sports chairs continue to lead and navigate their respective committees and are hit from all sides with questions, concerns, and complaints.

In his work with organizations around the world, Simon Sinek noticed that some teams trust each other so deeply that they would literally put their lives on the line for each other. Other teams, no matter what incentives are offered, are doomed to infighting, fragmentation and failure. Why?

The answer became clear during a conversation with a Marine Corps general. "Officers eat last," he said. Sinek watched as the most junior Marines ate first while the most senior Marines took their place at the back of the line. What's symbolic in the chow hall is deadly serious on the battlefield: Great leaders sacrifice their own comfort--even their own survival--for the good of those in their care.

Too many workplaces are driven by cynicism, paranoia, and self-interest. But the best ones foster trust and cooperation because their leaders build what Sinek calls a "Circle of Safety" that separates the security inside the team from the challenges outside.

During these past 10.5 months it is evident not only with the people mentioned above as well as many of you, sacrifices have been made for those in our care (student-athletes). Thank you! I encourage you to keep up the good work and continue to strengthen the circle, so those in our care survive and thrive.

Until next time,

Marco