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Division III conferences play their own game of musical chairs

NCAA might call an audible on texting

By Gary Brown
NCAA.org

The NCAA may be ready to hit "send" on the following message about how texting factors into recruiting rules: "Time 2 chng."

Without being prompted by a centralized or Association-wide task force, Divisions I, II and III are independently reaching similar conclusions about erasing rules that just four years ago drew a line in the cyber sand.

- Division I is considering proposals to include all forms of electronic correspondence (such as email and texts) to be sent to recruits during specified periods.
- In Division II, the Presidents Council and Management Council as part of the division's desire to "ease administrative burden" are sponsoring a common and much earlier date at which all off-campus and electronic contact, including telephone calls and text messaging, could begin.
- The Division III Presidents Council is endorsing the idea that text messaging from athletics department staff to prospects should be regulated in the same manner as email, for which there are no restrictions on the timing or amount.

All three divisions could adopt changes by January.

Should unlimited text messaging be allowed in the recruiting process?

- Yes
- No

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Key points

- Divisions I, II and III may eliminate restrictions on texting in recruiting
- Changes in technology and use of texting prompt possible reversal of rules implemented four years ago
- SAACs to be asked for feedback

Related topics

- [DI Leadership Council supports text deregulation](#)
- [DI wrestles with phone contact parameters](#)
- [Texting timeline \(PDF\)](#)

That's a far cry from 2006-07 when the Student-Athlete Advisory Committees scored an important victory by shutting down a proposal that would have done pretty much the same thing. Now some of the student-athletes themselves are the ones saying they'd like the flip-flop.

Why the 180? Because almost everything about communication has changed except the rules regulating it.

The NCAA often takes heat for rules that are outdated or out of touch, particularly when it comes to technology. The way these proposals are being couched, though, is to allow all electronic communication, thus negating the need to revisit the issue anytime some new application comes along.

As forward-thinking as those proposals might be, it doesn't mean the ones they would replace were considered backward at the time.

In 2006, the Ivy League sponsored a proposal to limit electronic correspondence to recruits to email and the now-seemingly-ancient fax machine (does anyone even spell out "facsimile" anymore?). The proposal was more than an idle thought – student-athletes were getting dinged in the pocket whenever they got pinged in the palm.

It wasn't just Ivy student-athletes raising the cost concern, either. Athletes in all three divisions were starting to regard texting as a fiscal and social nuisance.

"Texting wasn't typically free then, so prospects would get charged for *receiving* a text, not just sending one," said former Mills rower and Division III SAAC member Kirin Kahn.

"So if they weren't initiating the contact,

DII proposal is easier and earlier

In Division II, email currently is permitted after Sept. 1 of a prospect's junior year, but texting isn't until the prospect has signed a National Letter of Intent or another written commitment, or has received a financial deposit.

During the Division II Management Council's summer meeting, though, members became energized over a more seamless approach.

there was a fear that they would be forced to pay for these unsolicited recruitment attempts."

For elite-level athletes, that could get expensive in a hurry. Of course, that's mitigated nowadays since most phone plans come with unlimited texting. Research from the Pew Internet and American Life Project in fact shows more than three-fourths of teens own cell phones and that one in three send more than 100 texts daily. Almost 90 percent of teens text now, compared with about 50 percent five years ago.

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"In many cases, our prospects are texting our coaches now," said Petrina Long, a senior associate AD at UCLA and former chair of the Division I recruiting cabinet.

But costs and technology trends weren't the only concerns in 2006. A primary pause then – and now – is simply whether texting is appropriate in the recruiting process.

When the Ivy League proposal was adopted and then subjected to an override vote at the 2008 Convention, Division I SAAC vice chair Kerry Kenny stressed the "unprofessional" nature of texting when he urged Division I members to squash the override attempt.

"We believe that text messaging and instant messaging are both highly unprofessional in the recruiting process," Kenny said then. "You wouldn't use text messaging to contact an employer when searching for a job, and it's unlikely that an employer would contact you with a text message to offer you the job."

That sentiment remains active today, prompting Division I Legislative Council chair Shane Lyons to caution that while there's some momentum behind this year's Division I proposal, it's not likely to be a slam dunk.

"This probably won't just go seamlessly through the process," said the associate commissioner of the Atlantic Coast Conference, citing a split among members of the American Football Coaches Association as an example. "There will be a lot of discussion from a lot of constituents about whether this is a direction we should be taking."

A 'professional' method?

Kahn said deregulating texts might not matter so much to the elite-level athletes who know they'll be inundated with scholarship or financial aid offers, but the prospect who's just hoping to be wooed might be underwhelmed by digital communication.

"As odd as it might sound, there's still something almost sacred about the ways we are contacted and how exciting it is to get those letters and phone calls. That formality of the process is part of the excitement and the appeal of being recruited," she said.

DIII says yes to texts, no to Facebook

Division III might not have a texting proposal on the table were it not for a member conference that pushed the idea.

Council members were reviewing proposals from the membership and came upon one from the St. Louis Intercollegiate Athletic Conference to deregulate electronic correspondence during recruitment.

The SLIAC's proposal still needs a co-sponsor, and it also includes lifting the prohibition on correspondence through social-networking platforms to align more with their Divisions I and II counterparts.

While the Division III Management Council (and the DIII SAAC) likes the texting component, members stopped short of buy-in on the social-networking element.

Current Division I and II rules do not have the same prohibition on social networking as Division III. Divisions I and II currently are permitted to use features/applications of social networking (or any other service/platform) that has an email-like feature (such as the message application in Facebook), so there isn't the need in the DI or DII proposals to make the same distinction the DIII proposal does.

That distinction is based once again on privacy issues. Just as some people worry that texting is an informal chat among friends, social networking certainly is, even though it involves the same medium. But Council and SAAC members alike felt the social-networking door was too wide to leave open.

Emory Athletics Director and Management Council member Tim Downes said, "Division III has been consistent differentiating between social communication and information sharing. Texting has moved more from being a social communication device to a real-time communication method, which

That led to proposals that would not only combine parameters for emails, texts and phone calls but would also move them up a year.

The changes would move the off-campus, in-person recruiting contact date from June 15 before a prospect's senior year to June 15 before the prospect's *junior* year. The decision to recommend the legislation followed votes to sponsor legislation that would eliminate restrictions on the number of off-campus contacts and that would permit unlimited electronic contact of all sorts beginning June 15 before the prospect's junior year.

The big news there is that the change would permit Division II coaches to have off-campus recruiting contacts a year earlier than their Division I peers.

As for texting, Management Council members, along with members of the Legislation Committee, are aware of the potential for coaches to abuse the provision for unlimited communication, either electronic or by telephone. They concluded, however, that the rule might be self-policing since any coach making use of unwanted texts or phone calls would almost certainly alienate prospects.

"It gives the recruiting process a sense of importance that some SAAC members are afraid would be lost if the process gets too casual. That's why many of us are concerned about texting being a first point of contact between a coach and a prospect."

Kahn said texting – especially then but even still today – is regarded more as a chat among friends than it is as a way to connect professionally.

Greg Turner, associate director of programs for iHoops, said recent surveys with basketball prospects indicate a similar sentiment. To many of them, texting is a peer-to-peer communication and not one that should be invaded by the "adults."

To put that in perspective, Ivy League Deputy Executive Director Carolyn Campbell-McGovern said back then, students thought "it was kind of creepy" that their parents were using text messaging.

"We likened it to our days as high school students when we left notes in each other's lockers as a way to communicate among friends," she said. "But we certainly would have thought it was creepy for a teacher or a coach to do that. And that's the same way student-athletes are talking about texting. It's an informal way for them to chat with their friends, but it's not intended to be a first exchange with someone you're going to have a mentoring relationship with."

On the flip side, some coaches and administrators say teenagers don't even answer their phones anymore – only texts get their attention.

Then there's the whole monitoring discussion that comes with "electronic correspondence."

Few Division I or Division II compliance officers would say that today's restrictions are easy to monitor. A look down the lane of violations bears that out. At least nine schools have been penalized for major infractions involving texting since the current rules were adopted. Even just recently, a Division III school suspended a football coach for crossing the texting line.

In addition, all three divisions have tweaked the rules twice since they were adopted in an effort to make the electronic landscape – now complicated further because texts and emails look alike – more manageable.

Supporters of the overhaul say the monitoring concerns will dissipate with electronic correspondence all under one rules roof since there is little to distinguish a text from an email at a time when smartphones send and receive both in the same way. Institutions in fact have been permitted to send an unlimited number of emails to prospective student-athletes for several years and there have not been any concerns regarding frequency or intrusion.

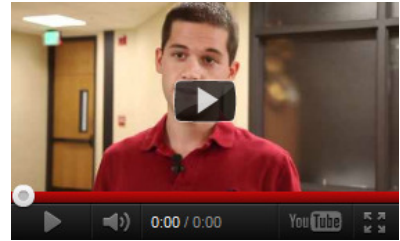
makes the Management Council proposal more feasible.”

But the Ivy’s Campbell-McGovern, for one, is interested in hearing more than the “it’s easier to monitor” argument from the deregulators.

“We need to hear from current students, too,” she said. “The SAAC members who brought this to our attention before are sort of the ‘previous generation’ now when it comes to this issue. Current students were all recruited without text messaging, so it would be interesting to hear from them whether that made a difference. Would adding it back make it better or worse?”

Division I SAAC vice chair Eugene Daniels said his primary concern is what’s best for the prospective student-athlete.

“We’re willing to listen and learn and figure out what we can do to make the recruiting process a little easier for coaches, but we want to make sure it stays ethical for the prospect,” he said.



Division I SAAC Chair Scott Krapf shares his thoughts.

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