

Freshmen may be ruled ineligible for competition

By Rita Heimes
 ■ The Daily Iowan
 U. of Iowa

When U. of Iowa President Hunter Rawlings announced last year that the university would declare its freshman athletes ineligible to compete in inter-collegiate athletics, even if other schools in the Big Ten conference or the NCAA did not, the outcry was immense.

Coaches, athletic directors and fans feared that the university would be unable to land top high school recruits if Iowa were the only school to enforce the measure.

Proponents of ineligibility say it would allow freshman student athletes to adjust to their first year of college and concentrate on academics without the

pressures of athletic competition.

"If some athletes are involved in their sports 40 hours per week . . . they can't give a fair shake to academics, and they have no chance for any other kind of university life," said Christine Grant, director of women's athletics at Iowa.

But even if the measure passed nationwide, some coaches and athletes would remain opposed to freshman ineligibility because of the loss of a year of competition it forces on the student athlete.

This argument is strongest among "minor" sports, also referred to as "non-revenue" or "Olympic" sports. Athletes in these sports say that taking a year off from competition would damage their skill level, which generally peaks during the college years.

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ATHLETICS VS ACADEMICS

SAT standoff . . . Pennsylvania State U. researcher Donald E. Sheffield, who studied 350 Penn State freshmen student athletes and 350 freshmen non-athletes, said that not only are SAT scores a deceptive criterion for freshman eligibility, but freshmen should be banned completely from Division I and II competition. Sheffield said he believes first-year college athletes become so engrossed in athletics that academics become a second priority. He said SAT scores should only be used as a college admission criterion and not a device for determining freshman college sports eligibility, adding that many athletes also take SAT prep courses, which can raise their scores by 100 points without increasing their intelligence. "As long as freshmen are allowed to participate in sports programs, they will continue to turn in a mediocre academic performance," he said. "Student athletes will invest as much time as possible to do whatever physical training it takes to establish themselves on a team." Shorty Stoner, Penn State's baseball coach of nine seasons, disagreed with Sheffield's assertions. "Our freshmen have done very well, both academically and athletically," Stoner said. "If it wouldn't have been for freshmen we would have been in a bind." ■ Tom Esterly, *The Daily Collegian*, Pennsylvania State U.

Athletics

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"I think that anytime you bring in quality teams or schools in the conference you do nothing but strengthen your media interest and television contracts," Alford said.

The networks look at potential audience when hammering out contracts, thus huge conferences with glamorous teams can secure big money deals for their members.

Florida State U., an independent with a strong football program and alumni following, was a prize in the conference war and was thought to be leaning toward the SEC.

The Seminoles announced intentions to sign with the Atlantic Coast Conference, though, leaving the SEC with South Carolina as its final member to balance the addition of the Razorbacks.

Following the Seminoles' move, Florida's other major independent, Miami, announced plans to join the Big East conference in everything except baseball this fall.

Several events besides the CFA situation precipitated this summer's flurry of activity on conference expansion, most notably the acceptance of Pennsylvania State U. into the powerful Big Ten and the flight of the U. of Notre Dame from the CFA's proposed television package.

The Big Ten, which dominates mid-western athletics and academics, stretched its boundaries eastward in search of a larger television market in addition to gaining a quality institution and athletic department, conference officials said.

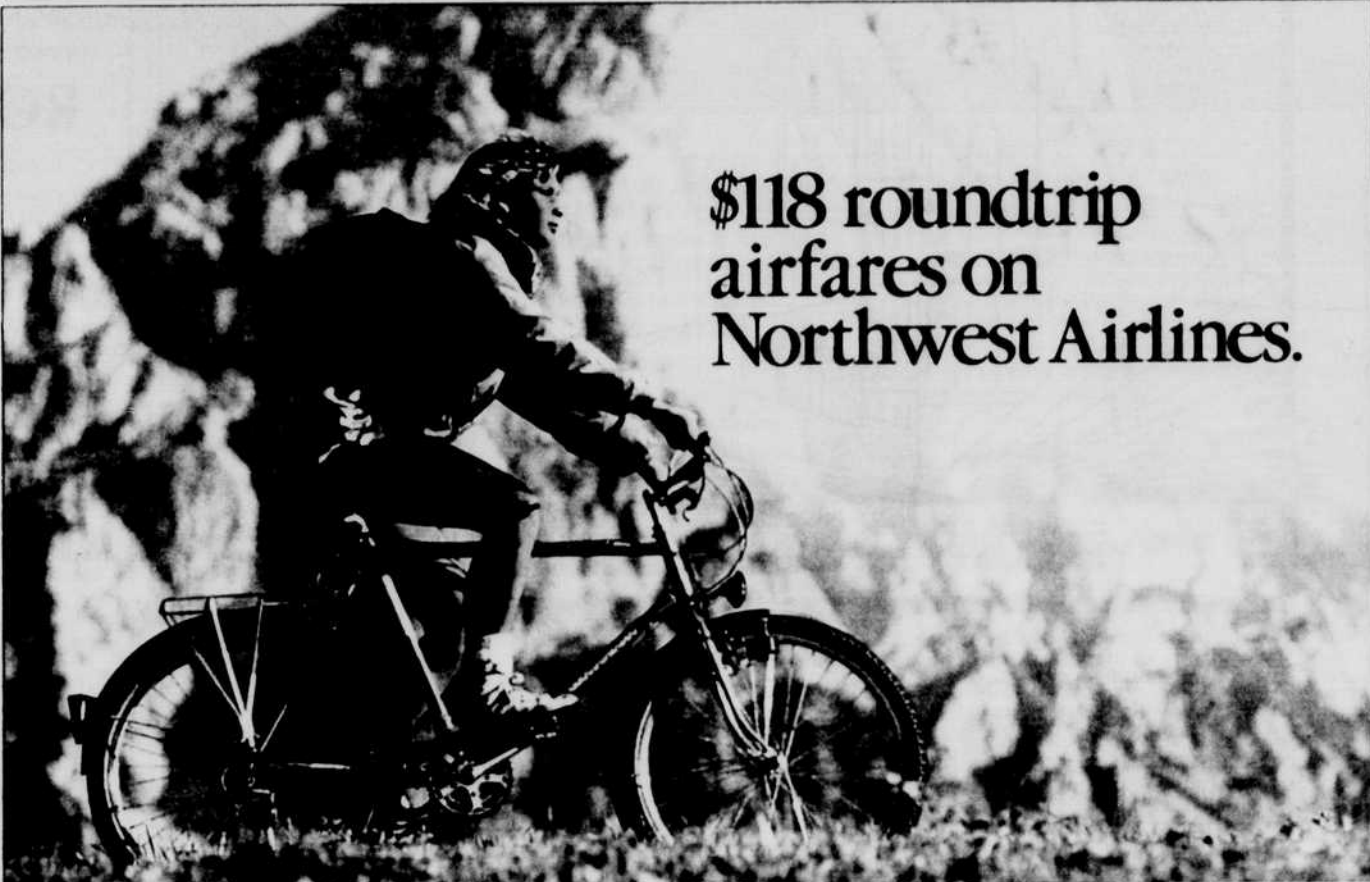
The Fighting Irish arranged their own deal with NBC last winter, selling the rights for their home games from 1991 to 1995 for \$38 million.

CFA officials had to scramble to renegotiate a contract for its other 63 members.

The move by Notre Dame in all likelihood will not be duplicated by other independents, said Ole Miss Chancellor Gerald Turner, a major player in the SEC expansion decision.

Notre Dame's contract did force institutions to re-evaluate their positions, though the possibility of growth is nothing new.

"About every 10 years we try to review the situation and see if there's a need for expansion," Turner said. "In 1979, they decided not to, but this time we saw a definite need."



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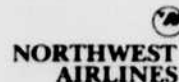


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