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OPINION

editorials, letters, commentary and perspective

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University athletes victims of NCAA doctrine

OUR OPINION: The NCAA stumbled in its decision to suspend two Oregon basketball players

The recent suspensions of Oregon women's basketball players Renae Fegent and Natasha O'Brien were definitely surprising in their magnitude. As a result of the NCAA's Nov. 22 declaration, O'Brien lost a year of college eligibility and Fegent is now in the midst of a milder four-game punishment.

As far as the NCAA is concerned, however, the decision was simply business as usual. There is no doubt the punishment, especially O'Brien's, was excessive. This level of sanctions is new to the University and terribly shocking. But for the National Collegiate Athletics Association, this type of penalty fits the crime perfectly.

The crime in question took place when both O'Brien and Fegent played in the Australian Women's National Basketball League, a semi-pro organization in their home country. Fegent was part of the league in 1992 while O'Brien played in 1995 before coming to Eugene.

Because O'Brien accepted a \$3,000 stipend for living expenses from the league and standards for foreign athletes are stricter now than in Fegent's case, O'Brien received a much harsher penalty — including a refund of the stipend.

But the players' participation in the AWNBL was no different than U.S. athletes playing in competitions like the Olympic Trials. For the trials, U.S. collegiate athletes receive stipends for housing and other expenses similar to O'Brien's — with NCAA approval. And playing in the AWNBL is considered part of the selection process for the Australian national team — like the Olympic Trials.

Should foreign athletes of exceptional skill be denied the chance to play on their country's national teams just because they plan to play for an American college in the future? Of course not. But according to NCAA law, that is precisely the rule that Fegent and O'Brien bent —

and now they are dealing with the consequences.

The NCAA's reluctance to recognize foreign leagues and competitions is unfair and detrimental to attracting players from across the world. Many foreign players would rather play for their own countries than come to the U.S. collegiate ranks anyway. But nonetheless, the two shouldn't be mutually exclusive.

Most foreign leagues, especially those in Australia — a country where the popularity of basketball rivals its popularity in the United States — are similar in quality to American leagues. There is no reason the NCAA should ignore their relevance while approving the American equivalent.

And the magnitude of the punishment was obviously extreme. While Fegent's suspension is manageable, a year of eligibility will not be easily overcome by O'Brien. Was a \$3,000 stipend for room and board equal to an entire season of playing time? Admittedly, both players broke the rules — no matter how unfair those rules are. The University admitted this. But their violations hardly measured up to the NCAA's decision.

The University's Faculty NCAA Representative, Jim O'Fallon, voluntarily investigated O'Brien's involvement in the league and consequently that of Fegent as well. And soon after learning of the stipend and other details, the University reflexively declared both players ineligible. Soon after, a petition to restore eligibility was filed with the NCAA. Two weeks later, the NCAA made its stunning decision.

The University was honest in its handling of the situation. After learning of the violations, they reported them immediately and took all appropriate action. Unfortunately, the University, as well as Fegent and O'Brien, were fighting against an oppressive brick wall — NCAA regulations. And in the end, they were all victims of an excessive judgment on something that shouldn't be a crime in the first place.

This editorial represents the opinion of the Emerald editorial board.



CHRIS HUTCHINSON/Emerald

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LETTERS

Internet surpasses idiots

I found your Nov. 20 editorial hurtfully misleading to new Internet users. You lead with the warning, "it's a common fact that the Internet is full of idiots." This "common fact" is undefendable prejudice pretending to be objectivity. The ambiguous, insulting phrase, "full of idiots," is poor company in any sentence about "facts." The Internet is full of people, including yourself. The usual proportion act like idiots, so what's your point?

The "respected journalist," Pierre Salinger, reported as news some false information he found on the Internet. Perhaps out of sympathetic defensiveness, the editors drew the lesson that "the Internet is a place for cowards and those too lazy to seek genuine publication for their 'works.'" Many others, including myself and certainly other journalists, saw the same source for the story and recognized the signs that it was false. That Salinger failed to do so shows where the fault truly lies. The lesson is simply, "don't blindly believe everything you read — in any medium."

Space doesn't permit me to individually address the other sensationalistic examples of net-evil given. I'll just say they shared the trait of taking high shock-value incidents and falsely representing them as dominating the online world.

The correct lesson to learn is that the Internet isn't dominated by some mysterious "them" which we should fear, it's just full of the normal mix of people, interacting more freely than ever before, but no more to be feared or trusted than the strangers you see every time you visit the grocery store.

David Duncan
Springfield

No respect

Recently, my friend and I were eating a late dinner at Burger King on Franklin Blvd. Usually, when we go there the atmosphere is easy-going — at least for Burger King standards. On this night, however, I saw something that I was bothered by.

Two girls were sitting in a booth next to us, talking amongst themselves. A few minutes later, a group of guys came in the restaurant. Out of all the empty seats to choose from, they decided to sit in the corner booth beside the girls. I don't know exactly what they were saying, but from what I could hear, it sounded very disrespectful. The girls looked less than happy as they soon got up and left.

I continue to see a lack of respect toward women among many males. What makes men think they are going to get anywhere

by being so rude? Even though this scene could be perceived as minor in comparison to other crimes against women, it still falls under the same category of harassment. It's no wonder Saferide exists. It's no mystery that women think twice about walking alone at night.

This letter won't prevent this from happening again. I wish it were that simple. The bottom line is this: Just because you are male, it doesn't give you the right to disrespect women. Treating women with the dignity they deserve is the least you can do.

Brian Watson
Undeclared

LETTERS POLICY

The Oregon Daily Emerald will attempt to print all letters containing comments on topics of interest to the University community.

Letters to the editor must be limited to no more than 250 words, legible, signed and the identification of the writer must be verified when the letter is submitted.

The Emerald reserves the right to edit any letter for length or style.