

SPORTS BRIEFS

NCAA begins new legislation on academics

PHOENIX — NCAA officials believe the historic legislation they approved Thursday will compel student-athletes to hit the books as vigorously as they hit the weights.

The plan will penalize schools whose teams fail to meet academic standards that have yet to be determined.

Schools that fall short of guidelines would draw a warning in 2006-2007.

Continued shortcomings would result in a loss of scholarships in 2007-08 and the loss of postseason eligibility in 2008-09.

No postseason means no postseason revenue. And that could be enough to strike fear in many schools.

"This is a critically important set of legislative measures, the strongest ever passed by the NCAA," NCAA President Myles Brand said Thursday. "It's different because it holds teams as well as institutions accountable."

The so-called "incentives and disincentives" legislation is the final piece

of a three-part package of academic reform.

The first part requires high school students to complete more "core" high school courses to be eligible as freshmen. The number of courses rises from 13 to 14 in 2005-06 before increasing to 16 two years after that.

The second part addresses continuing eligibility, requiring student-athletes to complete 40 percent of their college degree coursework by their second year, 60 by the third and 80 by the fourth.

But those measures were small compared to the massive package approved Thursday.

Up until now, there was no penalty for a school that didn't graduate its athletes. According to recent NCAA statistics, only 21 of the 65 teams that qualified for the NCAA men's basketball tournament graduated more than 50 percent of their players.

Brand said graduation targets for each school would be calculated. Schools will be notified this fall whether they would have been at risk

for penalties if the standards already had been in place.

— Teddy Greenstein
Chicago Tribune (KRT)

Marlins, Miami agree on new ballpark

FORT LAUDERDALE, Fla. — In what was billed as a historic meeting of the minds, the Florida Marlins, Miami-Dade County and city of Miami agreed Thursday on a \$367 million plan to build a new retractable roof ballpark and parking garage southwest of the Orange Bowl. But many details and a funding gap of at least \$30 million remain.

After the three sides put the finishing touches on the agreement, they announced it to city and county commissioners, quickly acknowledging that the plan relies on the anticipated proceeds from the sale of an obsolete Miami Arena. To raise the missing funds, the plan also needs state approval of a sales tax rebate — which remains elusive in Tallahassee, where this year's legislative session concludes Friday.

City commissioners are expected to approve the deal on Thursday; county commissioners will consider it on May 11.

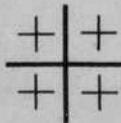
"The key is we have a plan that works, contingent on several factors," County Manager George Burgess said. "It's a way to finance a stadium. There are going to be loose ends that have to be resolved."

Even with all the goodwill expressed Thursday — and a deal two days ahead of the team's self-imposed May 1 deadline — government and team officials said they are unsure if the plan will proceed without the additional funds.

"This is a very important first step," Marlins President David Samson said. "We've got to get state money and we feel with the local component done, we feel there's still a chance for this session. I don't want to talk about what happens if it doesn't come in, because there's a significant gap has to be worked on before the construction can begin."

— Sarah Talalay
South Florida Sun-Sentinel (KRT)

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