DO BCS NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIPS LEAD TO RECRUITING VIOLATIONS?
A TREND ANALYSIS OF NCAA DIVISION I (FBS) INFRACTIONS

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Purpose
The purpose of this study was to identify the frequency and severity recruiting infractions of NCAA Division I Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS) institutions according to their locations and conference affiliations. This study examines the influence of the Bowl Championship Series (BCS) structure on issues of athletic compliance related to the recruitment of student-athletes. Furthermore, this study also addresses a crucial step of curtailing future ethical misconduct in higher education institutions that commit recruiting violations by identifying the rules violators on the institutional level (Kelley & Chang, 2007).

Issues
Recruiting remains one of the most influential factors of the success in intercollegiate athletics. One West Virginia coach said that recruiting is the “lifeline of [an athletic] program” because “it’s not the X’s and O’s; it’s the Jimmys and Joes” that lead programs to status as perennial winners (O’Neil, 2008). This belief about the importance of recruiting became factual as Langlett (2003) found that football programs that are perennial winners are able to attract higher quality recruits, thereby increasing the future quality of team performance. Not surprisingly, individuals within NCAA institutions may violate recruiting rules in order to increase the likelihood of successfully recruiting top talent to their university. This work will identifies who, where, and some reasons why these recruiting infractions occur.

Summary
A trend analysis measured the averages of all major violations (more severe) and secondary violations (less severe) from 1970 to 2007, with a specific focus major recruiting infractions from 1987 through the current construct of the Division I (FBS) conference structure in 2007.

The findings confirm that secondary violations have increased from 2000 to 2007. Additionally, BCS-affiliated conferences commit significantly more major violations than non-BCS conferences, with 76.4% of all major recruiting violations from 1987-2007 and with the Southeastern Conference (SEC) at the forefront, followed closely by Big Ten and the Big 12. In relation, the SEC, Big Ten, Big 12, and Pac 10 lead the nation in number of Division I (FBS) football national championships from 1987-2007. This trend of increased major recruiting violations in
in conjunction with football championships also followed disputed or co-national championships. In 1990, 1991, 1997, and 2003, BCS affiliated universities in the same conference as the football national champion(s) were found to have increased major recruiting violations in the year of, or year immediately following, a disputed or co-national football championship. However, the violators were not winners of the national championships, but instead were other BCS conference members. In conjunction with the BCS conference trends, the geographical regions of the South and Midwest, which include the SEC and the Big Ten, accounted for 63% of the nation’s major recruiting violations from 1987-2007. Thus, according to the results of this study, where NCAA Division I (FBS) football national championships are won, major recruiting violations are likely to follow.

Analysis

The findings in this study should be particularly applicable to intercollegiate athletic administrators seeking to prevent or curtail recruiting violations from occurring on their campus. This study holds that BCS-affiliated conference athletic administrators at institutions in the South or Midwest that are not winning a national championship in football should beware that coaches at their schools could be more apt to violate NCAA recruiting rules. This study also informs athletic administrators that secondary violations are increasing, which also lead to more severe sanctions as multiple secondary violations could escalate to major infractions. Furthermore, this information could be used to inform the NCAA that the current structure of recruiting rules enforcement does not curtail recruiting violations, but, in fact, those that violate recruiting rules will be more likely to win BCS national championships.

Implications

The purpose of this study is to identify who commits major NCAA violations—specifically major recruiting violations—to discover the foundational reasons for ethical violations of NCAA legislation. Without the knowledge of what institutions and conferences are committing major recruiting violations, it becomes much more difficult to pinpoint individuals within the institutions that commit these violations. Thus, athletic compliance directors can utilize the results of this study to build policies and procedures at their institutions, and recruiting coordinators could utilize knowledge of these trends to enhance monitoring and educational efforts to curtail future institutional recruiting violations.