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COLLEGIATE ATHLETICS RECRUITING: MARKETING A NEW GAME PLAN

by
Emily Douglas Evans

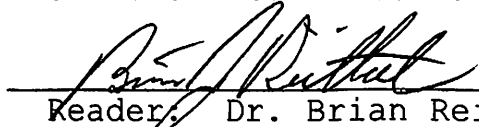
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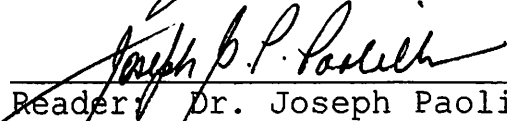
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ABSTRACT
EMILY DOUGLAS EVANS: Collegiate Athletics Recruiting:
Marketing a New Game Plan
(Under the direction of Dr. Victoria Bush)

For my thesis, I took an in-depth look at the collegiate recruiting process, in light of recent scandals and rule changes that, if implemented, could prevent confusion and future scandals. I conducted interviews containing open-ended questions with 18 college coaches, 15 Ole Miss supporters (alumni and non-alumni), and 15 current student-athletes. In addition, a quantitative survey was given to 80 current Ole Miss student-athletes, representing both men's and women's sports. All groups interviewed and surveyed cited gray areas that still exist in NCAA (National Collegiate Athletics Association) rules and gave suggestions for how the recruiting process could be simplified and/or improved. To prevent future scandals, the NCAA should continue to re-vamp the process, publicize the anticipated changes, and promote a greater awareness of the rules and procedures to all publics of colleges and universities.

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CHAPTER I: Recruiting Overview

Why is recruiting important?

"Let's face it. Recruiting is a cutthroat business now. If you don't recruit, you don't win. If you don't win, you don't have a job."—Jamie Newberg, national recruiting editor for TheInsiders.com (Barnhart)

Recruiting is a vital aspect of all sports because being competitive is essential to the success of any college athletics program. The only way to remain competitive is to consistently attract the best players, convincing them that your school is the best and only school for them. The recruiting classes of today, in every sport from football to rifle, will be the teams of tomorrow.

What is involved in recruiting?

A student-athlete is considered to be a recruit when contacted by any representative or person affiliated with a school, in an attempt to persuade the student-athlete to attend that school. Elements included in the recruiting process are:

1. When the recruit is given an "official visit," which is an all-expenses paid trip to the campus.

2. When a coach arranges to visit a recruit in person.
3. When the recruit is transported to the campus by a representative of the school.
4. When there is more than one telephone call to the recruit by a coach.

("Information")

What should student-athletes expect?

It is important to note that the recruiting process is just as difficult, if not more so, for recruits as it is for the schools recruiting them. The NCAA Student-Athlete Advisory Committee was put into place to help eliminate some of the possible confusion recruits may experience. The committee advises that recruits ask four types of questions during the duration of their recruitment. These questions cover the topics of athletics, academics, college life, and financial aid. Among these questions are:

- What is the typical game plan?
- What percentage of players graduate in four years?
- What is the normal day like for a student-athlete in my sport?
- How long will my scholarship last?

("Guide")

CHAPTER II: ETHICAL PROBLEMS WITH RECRUITING

Why are ethical issues important to recruiting?

"Ethical concerns are really at the heart of what the NCAA and college sports are all about. College sports is not a business. It's about educating young men and women in the field and in the classroom, and that has serious ethical implications."—Miles Brand, NCAA President (Aron)

There are stringent, specific rules set forth by the National Collegiate Athletics Association, the governing body of college athletics. One "small" slip without perfect compliance can be devastating to a program. This is why ethics issues have been brought to the forefront of recruiting.

Sometimes, rules are inadvertently violated because there are so many complex regulations governing every facet of recruiting. It is next to impossible for university officials to maintain control of their alumni and boosters at all times; however, this is no excuse for lack of education. Ole Miss has pamphlets and detailed information on several websites, spelling out what is considered acceptable and unacceptable behavior for boosters. Also, coaches of various sports regularly speak at alumni

gatherings to remind alumni and boosters of recruiting rules.

Ethics also matter in recruiting because whether coaches behave ethically or unethically, it sends a message to a university's public. Even though one minor incident should not necessarily cast aspersions on an entire school, it often does, as in the case of last year's University of Colorado sex scandal. Since perception is reality, the last thing university officials want is to be perceived as not playing by the rules, regardless of whether this perception is correct or incorrect.

According to a statement by Purdue University's athletics department, *"The recruiting process is a vital part of a successful intercollegiate athletics program, and the vast majority of coaches and member institutions diligently adhere to ethical recruiting practices. While the rules which govern this process may appear complicated at times, these rules have been put in place to assure that all institutions have a fair and equal chance to promote their academic and athletic programs to prospective student-athletes."* ("The Recruiting")

Recent scandals in the recruiting world have caused the NCAA to scrutinize recruiting rules; in turn, the NCAA formed a task force to look into possible rule changes

and/or additions. Recommendations by the task force were announced in April of 2004. The task force includes athletics officials from member schools, and its sole concentration centers on ethics in recruiting ("Task"). Recommendations made by the task force included ensuring that recruits are transported in basic commercial transportation during official visits, barring universities from using special vehicles to transport recruits, requiring recruits to be housed in basic accommodations during their visits, defining clearly acceptable entertainment of the recruit by his/her host during recruitment, and banning hostess programs.

("Recommendations")

What should be done when non-ethical behavior occurs?

NCAA President Myles Brand said, *"Given the information that is coming to light on some recruiting practices, the task force is charged with taking immediate action to address the issue. Some of what has been alleged is morally reprehensible and has no place in college sports. Institutions are responsible for the conduct of their student-athletes and staff, and at no time should anyone associated with collegiate athletics involve themselves in activities that erode moral character or that*

call into question the academic and athletics mission of the school." ("Task")

In the Gray

Sometimes, ethical problems in recruiting are not the results of failure to comply with the rules. In many cases, ethical dilemmas arise due to what many people involved view as gray areas in which the rules are unclear and ambiguous. Almost all coaches interviewed expressed that many gray areas exist in their sports and that most schools interpret them the best way they know how, but usually to their advantages.

Athletic/Academic Divide

In 2003, the *Christian Science Monitor* called for college athletics to be "reclaimed for all," citing an "academic-athletic divide." The largest gap between athletics and academics was seen at schools that offer no athletic-based scholarships and were selective in admission requirements. Recruited athletes benefited from admission advantages. In Ivy League schools, athletes were five times as likely as non-athletes to be admitted with equal SAT scores. Recruits were weaker academically than were non-recruits. Close to 80% of male, Ivy League football, hockey, and basketball recruits and almost 75% of these students in the New England Small College Athletic

Conference fell into the lowest third of their classes (Bowen).

The authors went on to recommend the following:

- Athletes should be representative of the student bodies at their schools.
- Opportunities to participate in college sports should be available to everyone.
- Athletes should participate in a wide range of campus life, by being involved in diverse activities.
- Competitors should avoid being overly obsessed with poll rankings and national championships. (Bowen)

Changing a Committed Recruit's Mind

Just as insidious as softening academic requirements for recruits is the practice of competing schools attempting to coax a recruit to attend their schools when s/he has previously committed to another institution. No NCAA rule prohibits a school from recruiting a player after s/he has verbally committed to go elsewhere. Verbal commitments, in the world of recruiting, are non-binding. The only substantial agreement is the National Letter of Intent, a signed contract provided and governed by the NCAA (Dienhart).

Coach Phil Fulmer of the University of Tennessee said, regarding when coaches should step away, *"It depends on the individual you are recruiting and how solid you think that commitment is. A kid is entitled to change his mind. If he's strong enough in his commitment...a coach should back off."* (Dienhart)

Negative Recruiting

Negative recruiting occurs when a competing school makes a pitch, not FOR its own program, but AGAINST someone else's. Baylor coach and executive director of the American Football Coaches Association Grant Teaff said, *"There is a gray area here because what is one man's fact is another man's negative recruiting. If you tell a recruit that Texas Tech is way out there in West Texas and there's not a whole lot around it, is that negative recruiting or is that just a fact? It can get a little tricky."* (Barnhart)

One of the worst types of negative recruiting happens when competing schools try to emphasize race as being an issue. This hits close to home because it happened with Ole Miss offensive lineman Chris Spencer. After he committed to Ole Miss, another school's coach tried to persuade him to reconsider by using race. Spencer said, *"He said people at Ole Miss were a bunch of racists. He*

told me I would never be able to compete in the classroom, and I'd flunk out. Then he told me that the white kids would never speak to me. It was amazing." But after sticking with his commitment and coming to Ole Miss, Spencer said, "People throw all this stuff on Ole Miss, but if the recruit ever gets to our campus, he realizes those people were lying to him. That's when the other school loses credibility." (Barnhart)

CHAPTER III: Coach Interviews

Methodology

Interview contacts were generated by consulting the Ole Miss athletics staff directory, which is available online. In addition, I had previously made valuable contacts through my former high school headmaster. I tried to primarily focus on assistant coaches, thinking that head coaches may be both busy and unavailable this time of year, especially. I did manage to conduct interviews with some head coaches, however.

Eighteen interviews were conducted via e-mail and over the telephone. Through e-mail, I completed interviews with coaches of men's and women's golf, track, men's and women's tennis, track, rifle, women's basketball, and football. Over the phone, I conducted interviews with coaches of men's basketball, strength and conditioning, soccer, track, volleyball, and football.

Questions for Coaches

1. What recruiting rules and guidelines do you follow for your sport?
2. Do you feel these guidelines help or hinder recruiting? Why?

3. Do you believe that competing schools follow these guidelines? Why/why not?
- 4a. Are there any "gray areas" in these guidelines that result in questionable recruiting tactics by schools? If so, what are they?
- 4b. What ethical issues do you face when it comes to recruiting?
5. What are potential recruits' perceptions of Ole Miss?
6. What are the reasons why recruits don't choose Ole Miss?
7. How important do you feel future placement in professional sports is to your recruiting process?
8. How do alumni and boosters help in recruiting?
9. What is the university's role in recruiting?
10. What do you feel can be done to improve the recruiting process?

Results

1. What recruiting rules and guidelines do you follow for your sport?

Most coaches cited NCAA and SEC rules, and many felt that the SEC rules were stricter than those of the NCAA. Many of the coaches interviewed said the best way to get through the huge rulebook was by approaching the staff of the compliance office and persistently asking questions to eliminate any confusion.

"We all work under the rules of the NCAA. The rulebook is about 200 pages thick, and there are many interpretations to the rules that are not in the book. We have to consult with NCAA rules experts at our office (Compliance) nearly every week."
Golf coach

"We get 7 evaluations of a player before they come to Ole Miss. Three can be actual contacts after July 1 entering the player's senior year. Summer is unlimited for evaluations. We can't write a player until September 1 of her junior year. We can call the player after July 1 of her junior year, but a player can call us whenever they want to."

Soccer coach

"There is a contact period and an evaluation period. The contact period is in December and January of a player's senior year. That is when we can have off-campus contact with a player. The evaluation period is when we cannot initiate contact with a player. Also, we get one call in May of a player's junior year, one call per week in September of a player's senior year, and unlimited calls during the contact period."

Football coach

2. Do you feel these guidelines help or hinder your recruiting? Why?

Coaches, overall, felt that the rules simultaneously help AND hurt recruiting, but they all expressed that rules are intact to create equality among schools. While not agreeing with all the rules, the coaches seemed to respect the rules and understand their functions. (See Table I.)

"Many of them are very helpful to make an even playing field for big and small universities that have different budgetary allowances. But many of them are so detailed on seemingly insignificant regulations they actually seem to be a disadvantage to the recruits, their families, and/or the coaches."

Track coach

"They are put there to level the playing field. In that way, it hinders the wealthy, larger schools. However, it helps the smaller ones who may not have as much money in their recruiting budgets."

Former track and football coach

"Everyone has to follow the same rules, so we are all at the same advantage or disadvantage."

Rifle coach

3. Do you believe that competing schools follow these guidelines? Why/why not?

This question did not have a clear answer. Most coaches said that it just depended on the school. They also voiced concerns that many rules were open to interpretation, and that while Ole Miss coaches may view a rule in a certain way, other schools may interpret the rule in a completely different manner. Coaches emphasized that many people in their profession are under immense pressure to win and to pull in the best recruits, and this is why so many are tempted to break the rules.

"Some schools do; some don't follow all the rules. Coaches' careers are at stake, and there is much temptation to get an 'edge' over another school or coach."

Golf coach

"I think some do and some don't. To me there are two types of 'not following.' One is intentional and the other is simply that many of the rules can be interpreted in various ways without any intent to be devious. Therefore, we might be interpreting it one way and our competitor another."

Track coach

"I would say that 90% of our competitors follow these rules, but there are always a few outlaw schools that will break these rules to get an advantage in recruiting. The NCAA is very inconsistent with how they punish schools that violate the rules, so many feel that they can roll the dice and make the NCAA really work to find them guilty."

Football coach

4a. Are there any "gray areas" in these guidelines that result in questionable recruiting tactics by schools? If so, what are they?

Coaches in every sport from rifle to football acknowledged that there is a plethora of gray areas in recruiting. Most of them have learned to accept

this, and they attributed the lack of clarity to having too many rules and that the rules in place are sometimes very vague. Several coaches expressed concerns that competitors try to use these gray areas as loopholes to do something not exactly right. (See Table II.)

"One big gray area is contact with student athletes during non-contact periods. Some coaches probably allow themselves to cross that line and communicate with the recruits by just so happening to bump into them."

Basketball coach

"Sure, there's lots of gray area rules. I can't specifically name them because the NCAA rulebook is an inch thick, but coaches always seem to find a way to press through 'iffy' situations."

Track coach

"Well, there is an old saying in recruiting that states, 'If you ain't in the gray, then you ain't recruiting.' Most coaches are excellent in finding the gray areas or loopholes in these rules, and there are some to find. Until the NCAA finds a way to define these rules in a clearer way, coaches will always find ways around them. Recruiting is too competitive these days not to."

Football coach

4b. What ethical issues do you face when it comes to recruiting?

One ethical problem consistently mentioned was trying to do anything possible to sign a recruit. The main ethical issue was complete honesty in dealing with recruits. Coaches talked about the importance of leveling with recruits and honestly telling them when/if they might be allowed to start. Several coaches said they did not have ethical problems simply because they refuse to do anything questionable.

"I do not really face any ethical issues, as I am not going to cheat, so there is not anything to question. I feel like we need rules and have always gone by them both in spirit and practical application. I just think

we have too many rules and too many waivers and situations that affect what is legal and not legal, and I think rules should be simple, not trying to

cover everything because nothing will keep a cheater from cheating. Ethics cannot be legislated."

Track coach

"I am a very honest person and am myself in the entire recruiting process. You must make sure this is the right place for an athlete and that they will contribute to your team and its chemistry. Like I said before, rules are put in place for a reason, and I follow them. I may have to call the compliance office a lot to ask questions, but I don't want to break any rules." *Golf coach*

"Any time there are rules and guidelines, you face lots of ethical issues. But right and wrong is all laid out for you, and when you know the rules, there really shouldn't be any ethical questions."

Basketball coach

"To continue to follow the rules, even if sometimes it is tempting to cross the line to insure you sign a specific prospect."

Tennis coach

5. What are potential recruits' perceptions of Ole Miss?

Coaches cited successful athletics programs, the beautiful campus, friendly people, solid academics, and the charm of Oxford. From the coaches' perspectives, both Oxford and Ole Miss have lots to offer to recruits. (See Table III.)

"Most of the perceptions are good; however, you will always have the recruit who listens to the negative aspects about Ole Miss. The racism issue has died down, and we do not face it as much anymore. Recruits are smarter than that, and it can be a big turn off if other schools constantly use racism. The perception of Ole Miss has improved greatly over the past several years."

Football coach

"Well, race used to be a big thing, but it is not as big of a deal now. Many recruits base their whole perceptions of Ole Miss off their experiences with the main person recruiting them. A lot of kids today don't have a clue about Ole Miss."

Former football and track coach

"It's just according to where they're from. Some may think Ole Miss is too rural and too small, but others like that. They also see Ole Miss as a big family."

Strength and conditioning coach working with multiple sports

"We have a perception problem, not a reality problem. We face a lot of stereotypes about us that are not true. When we get them on campus and allow them to see and hear for themselves most are amazed that we 'are not what they thought we are.'"

Track coach

6. What are the reasons why recruits don't choose Ole Miss?

Among the reasons: Oxford is too small and too far away from home; they were recruited harder by another school; a recruit's simple, personal preference. (See Table III.)

"Intangibles. Each recruit is different. The longer you're in recruiting for sports, the clearer it becomes that each athlete chooses a school for different reasons: pretty girls or good school, party or boring atmosphere; SOMETHING tips the scales."

Track coach

"There is a multitude of reasons why someone may choose not to go here. Usually, in the case of volleyball, they want a more competitive program. Also, they would like to be in a bigger city with a more cosmopolitan environment."

Volleyball coach

"We have our work cut out for us when we compete for recruits against schools with bigger basketball traditions. Also, sometimes we are not in close proximity to a recruit's hometown."

Basketball coach

7. How important do you feel future placement in professional sports is to your recruiting process?

The answers to this question generally depended on what sport was involved. While baseball, basketball, and football coaches thought the chance to play pro was a huge selling point, golf, tennis, and track coaches did not think it was a very important issue. Women's sports coaches in volleyball, soccer, and rifle responded that it was not at all important because in these sports, professional leagues do not exist. (See Tables IV and VI.)

"The vast majority of our athletes will not make a living playing professional sports, so you have to make sure they are graduating and are prepared for the working world."

Tennis coach

"Huge! A shot at the pros is one of the biggest factors in making someone's decision. Last year, we had seven guys drafted to play Major League Baseball. 1,500 players get drafted every year, which is way more than in other sports."

Baseball coach

"Not really important, as far as women's soccer is concerned. Most of the recruits for our sport don't really even think about that."

Soccer coach

"It's very, very important. The odds are, most kids won't get a shot at the pros, but you can sell an 18-year-old on that chance."

Former football and track coach

8. How do alumni and boosters help with recruiting?

Coaches in all sports agreed that, for the most part, alumni and boosters should keep a low profile with recruiting and not be very involved, whatsoever. The coaches were concerned that too much booster involvement leads to major rules violations. Coaches agreed that the NCAA definitely limits how much alumni and boosters can help and concurred that this is for the best.

"A lot of boosters get too involved and get programs into trouble, but they can help just by supporting the school and the program."

Baseball coach

"The only way they can legally help is to give money to the Loyalty Foundation or to build new facilities. Also, they can call the recruiting coordinator to recommend good high school players they may know."

Former football and track coach

"Not much. They can call a kid and sell a school's academic programs, but too much involvement can cause big problems and be the death of a coach's career."

Football coach

"They should not talk to recruits, and they really need to stay out of it. Our coaches talk to them at alumni meetings to make sure they know the rules and regulations."

Football coach

9. What is the University's role in recruiting?

From their responses, it was clear that athletics personnel recognize and appreciate the school's role in the recruiting process. None of the coaches had anything even slightly negative to say about what the University does. The coaches praised the admissions office, the professors, the academic support staff, the compliance department, and the academic and athletic programs offered.

"The University and its staff play a huge role in our recruiting process. When prospective student-athletes visit they have a great time meeting everyone involved with our athletic department. Our staff is great to work with. Oxford is a beautiful town, and we love to show off what we have to offer."

Golf coach

"The role is very significant. Mississippi College students want to play football while getting their education. We always talk to kids about academics before we talk to them about the football program."

Football coach

"Presenting Ole Miss, showing hospitality, and placing the recruiting budget at a decent level."
Basketball coach

"The University plays a very active role through mail-outs we send to kids and conversations we have with them about the campus. The University has lots of integrity, and the campus is great."
Basketball coach

10. What could be done to improve the recruiting process?

Nearly all the coaches interviewed saw room for improvement in the recruiting process, either on the University's part, or on the part of the NCAA. A couple of the coaches would like more money for their departments--volleyball and football. A tennis coach said that the brochures dispensed by Ole Miss do not do the campus justice in terms of its beauty. Many coaches would like to see more rule enforcement and a simplification of the rules by the NCAA. (See Table V.)

"We need to really maximize our office. We need more staff and more money in the recruiting budget, which is around \$300,000. This is one of the smallest, especially in the SEC."
Football coach

"Ole Miss just needs to keep making its facilities better. The NCAA should crack down more on rule breakers and impose harsher penalties when the rules are broken. Too many people get caught breaking the rules and just get a slap on the wrist."
Strength and conditioning coach

"Many of our recruits have not had the opportunity to grow up in Mississippi and visit Oxford and Ole Miss. The brochures published by the university could be improved by providing, through photographs, a better view of the beauty of the Ole Miss campus and the town, as well."
Tennis coach

"In any organization, there is always room for improvement. Athletics is a multi-billion dollar business. One way the NCAA could improve is to do more enforcement and hold schools more accountable.

Right now, the percent of getting caught doing something wrong is low."

Football coach

"It is so complex that there is not a simple, easy answer. I think we try too hard to make all schools equal when in reality with or without rules there are the haves and the have nots. I would simplify the rules. Have no exceptions to the few rules I had, and outside of the 'purchase' of players and those kinds of abuses, loosen it up a little bit and not try and prevent everything you can imagine from happening. If I were a cheater I would want a lot of rules so the honest people would be tied up trying to keep them, while I did what I wanted."

Track coach

**CHAPTER IV: INTERVIEWS WITH SUPPORTERS AND STUDENT-
ATHLETES**

Methodology

Interviews were conducted via telephone with 15 supporters of Ole Miss, both alumni and boosters, and with 15 current student-athletes, all from Ole Miss except one. The two sets of interviewees were asked two distinct, yet related, sets of questions.

Questions for Supporters

1. Why do you support Ole Miss athletics?
2. What are your perceptions of the recruiting process?
3. What are your perceptions of Ole Miss?
4. How could recruiting be improved or simplified?
5. What role do you believe alumni and boosters should have in the recruiting process?
6. What ethical problems do you think exist in recruiting?
7. As an alumnus or booster, have you ever encountered any recruiting rules that you found to be vague or confusing? If so, what?
8. How do you think the recruiting process or the rules of recruiting have changed over the years?
9. How were you educated about NCAA rules?
10. How could the NCAA better educate alumni and boosters about NCAA rules?

Questions for Student-Athletes

1. Besides Ole Miss, what schools recruited you?
2. Why did you choose Ole Miss?
3. As a recruit, what were your perceptions of Ole Miss?
4. How could Ole Miss improve its image to attract great recruits?
5. Describe some specifics of your recruiting experience.
6. Did you encounter any questionable recruiting tactics while being recruited?
7. How could recruiting be improved or simplified?
8. How were you educated about NCAA rules?
9. Have you encountered any gray areas in the rules; if so, what?
10. How could the NCAA better educate recruits and their families regarding the rules of recruiting?

Answer Summary—Supporters

Why do you support Ole Miss athletics?

Most respondents referred to family connections that tied them to Ole Miss. Alumni were passionate about being loyal to their alma mater.

"It's in my blood. I played football there, and I got a great education while I was doing it. I want to support Ole Miss to repay what it did for me."
Former Ole Miss football player

"It's my alma mater, and that's where my heart lies."
Former Ole Miss football player

"I believe in the college itself. It's very prestigious. I started supporting Ole Miss before I set foot on the campus, but once I came up there, I

fell in love. The campus has an air about itself that I just can't describe."

Ole Miss supporter (non-alumnus)

What are your perceptions of the recruiting process?

Supporters view recruiting as a necessary evil. Though they see the purpose and functionality in the recruiting process, supporters concur that some type of reform is needed to clean up the obvious problems that exist.

"Overall, the process is the best it can be. It is designed to benefit student-athletes, schools, and coaches; however, in major schools (especially SEC), recruiting is crooked."

Ole Miss alumnus

"Schools must recruit, and most do what they can to attract good recruits. Decisions should lie with the coaches. Scandals taint the process, and some schools go to more extremes than others."

Former Ole Miss football player

"I don't think the process is that bad. What's bad is those of us who let our lives rest on the whims of 17 year olds."

Ole Miss supporter (non-alumnus)

What are your perceptions of Ole Miss?

Though Ole Miss supporters realize that their own views may be skewed somewhat by their love of Ole Miss, they seem to have taken notice of how far Ole Miss has come. Many cited improvements to programs and facilities.

"It's first class, but I'm looking through red and blue glasses. Ole Miss has lots to offer."

Ole Miss alumnus

"It is probably the most well known school I've ever been associated with. It has a great reputation."

Ole Miss alumnus

"We're on the upswing. The majority of our alums are involved. We have top of the line facilities now."

But some athletes seem to have a problem with Ole Miss. Blue chip recruits don't seem to share the perception I have of Ole Miss. I think it's heaven, but what others think is different, and I don't know why."

Former Ole Miss football player

How could recruiting be improved or simplified?

Many supporters felt that improving the recruiting process should fall squarely on the shoulders of the NCAA. They called for more accountability, more enforcement of rules, and strict penalties for both coaches AND players involved in scandals.

"I think football is so much more complicated than track and other sports. It's such a big money sport, and so much pressure is put on coaches."

Former Ole Miss track athlete

"The rules should be enforced. There should be more accountability that follows coaches wherever they go, and athletes should be banned from their sports if they do something wrong. The process is as good as it can be."

Ole Miss supporter (non-alumnus)

"The NCAA should streamline the process and get back to the basics of making things black and white."

Ole Miss alumnus

What role do you believe alumni and boosters should have in the recruiting process?

Answers to this question were from one extreme to the other. Some supporters called for more involvement, but most thought the only acceptable involvement for boosters should be recommending local high school players to recruiting coaches. Supporters want to be involved, but overall, they realize that the wrong people having too much input leads to serious problems and possibly major violations.

"Mind their business! They should let the coaches handle things."

Ole Miss Alumnus

"They should be allowed to be more hands-on, but the rules are against that. The NCAA is too strict."
Ole Miss Alumnus

"None. The more involved they get, the more trouble they cause. Alums should just give money to support schools and programs."
Former Ole Miss football player

What ethical problems do you think exist in recruiting?

Every supporter interviewed acknowledged that there are major ethical issues today in recruiting. The main things that were mentioned included bribery, greed, and instances of coaches making promises they cannot keep.

"I wonder what some kids are promised. From stories I've heard, what recruits are shown and allowed to do, there is too much emphasis on drinking, partying, etc."
Former Ole Miss football player

"Lying, cheating, buying, stealing. It's out of hand, and it won't stop until players have to pay penalties too."
Ole Miss alumnus

"There are alums and boosters who take care of players with vehicles and stuff like that."
Ole Miss supporter (non-alumnus)

As an alumnus or booster, have you ever encountered any recruiting rules that you found to be vague or confusing? If so, what?

Most interviewees did not know specific ambiguous rules, but many expressed feelings that there is confusion in the general process. Others offered suggestions of how rules seen as too harsh could be relaxed. (See Table II.)

"Some kids are in tough situations because they don't have enough money. There should be a legal way to make sure these kids have a little spending money to live on."

Former Ole Miss football player

"An alum or booster cannot buy a player a Coke from a vending machine, yet the alum can buy and cook as much steak and lobsters at that alum's home as they want for a player."

Former Ole Miss football player

"I'm sure there is some confusion involved, but if people don't know something, they should seek information at the NCAA website or by calling school officials in the compliance department. Ignorance of the rules is no excuse for breaking them."

Ole Miss alumnus

How do you think the recruiting process or the rules of recruiting have changed over the years?

The general theme of answers for this question was that rules have gotten more stringent in a response to numerous violations. Supporters are concerned that changes have been reactive rather than proactive. Most of those interviewed believe changes have been good and needed.

"They've changed for the better by putting limits on the number of scholarships given out and on the number of visits recruits can take."

Former Ole Miss football player

"It's gotten much stricter. Scholarships are so limited. Too much time is devoted to finding the best athletes as opposed to the best students."

Former Ole Miss football player

"Just on the surface, I think the rules are stricter, but people are still trying to break them, like in the Albert Means situation. It's always going on, but it's hard to get to the bottom of who knew what."

Ole Miss supporter (non-alumnus)

How were you educated about NCAA rules?

The vast majority of individuals interviewed get their knowledge of NCAA rules from the media. Several said that they would not have been aware of certain rules if those rules had never been broken and called to public attention. The only people who had first-hand, reliable information about the rules were student-athletes while at Ole Miss.

"Just by reading the papers and hearsay. 99% of the people are the same way, in that they don't know the rules until the rules get broken."

Ole Miss alumnus

"All I've ever learned about the rules has come from someone else breaking them. The media only reports when something goes wrong somewhere."

Ole Miss alumnus

"By myself because I had to write about people who were breaking the rules, but I wouldn't know if I wasn't a sportswriter."

Ole Miss alumnus

How could the NCAA better educate alumni and boosters about NCAA rules? (See Table V.)

Among feasible suggestions:

- Public service announcements on television during college sporting events
- NCAA representatives stationed at fan club meetings such as the Quarterback Club
- Mass e-mails and newsletters to all season ticket holders/major contributors
- Detailed rule packets sent to high schools, recruits, and colleges
- Regular articles in alumni journals

"Every alumnus should be sent something to inform them of changes in NCAA rules. Also, the NCAA should do more press releases. The NCAA should fund schools sending updates out to their alums."

Former Ole Miss football player

"There are too many rumors and too much gossip. I don't think there is any certain way to break down rules for the average person. The rules are very hard to understand, and compliance directors should send letters to schools to update them on changes and remind them of things."

Ole Miss supporter (non-alumnus)

"That's tough because the NCAA polices after the fact. During Saturdays, the NCAA should run commercials and announcements to caution potential student-athletes about rule breaking. During football games on tv, there is a very captive audience."

Former Ole Miss football player

Answer Summary—Student-Athletes

Besides Ole Miss, what schools recruited you?

Student-athletes in sports like golf, soccer, and women's basketball were recruited by a wide variety of schools outside the South. Football and baseball players were recruited mostly in the Southeastern Conference.

"Baylor, New Mexico, Texas, Texas A&M, Oklahoma, and Kansas State."

Men's golf player

"Memphis, Denver, NC State, South Carolina, Auburn, MSU."

Soccer player

"Alabama, Auburn, MSU, and Marshall."

Football player

Why did you choose Ole Miss?

Student-athletes have an overwhelmingly positive view of Ole Miss. From coaches, to atmosphere, to campus beauty, to being in a good location, it is no secret why the student-athletes interviewed chose Ole Miss. (See Table III.)

"The coaches were great. They were really honest with me."

Football player

"The reason I DID NOT choose Ole Miss was because I just felt like I could never fit in there."

Football player (non-Ole Miss)

"It felt comfortable. I had three cousins who played here. Also, I wanted to stay within the SEC. Another plus is that I can be on a deer stand within 5 minutes!"

Football player

As a recruit, what were your perceptions of Ole Miss?

As recruits, student-athletes possessed both positive and negative perceptions of how Ole Miss might be. On the negative side of the spectrum, there were fears that Ole Miss might be a racist institution. On the positive side, recruits found the Ole Miss campus to be friendly, pretty, and family-oriented.

"Ole Miss is a good soccer school. I thought I'd have to dress up a lot more than I really do."

Soccer player

"I thought it was really pretty, being that I'm from near Las Vegas, Nevada. People were nice and very talkative."

Women's basketball player

"I thought it might be racist, but it was totally the opposite of that."

Football player

How could Ole Miss improve its image to attract great recruits?

While student-athletes agreed that recruits will go where they feel comfortable and are given opportunities, many said that Ole Miss should increase recruiting budgets and continue to upgrade facilities. Another resounding message was that Ole Miss should simply win consistently.

"I thought it might be racist, but it was totally the opposite of that. They need to make sure recruits know that their perception of Ole Miss might not be true."

Soccer player

"More money should be budgeted for programs. Bigger schools have many boosters, and for some reason, Ole Miss is cheap with money. Some facilities are below average."

Golf player

"Recruiting should be standardized across all sports. The internet should be better used. Overall, though, players are going to go where they think they can actually play."

Cheerleader

Describe some specifics of your recruiting experience.

Student-athletes mentioned different aspects of their weekend recruiting experiences involving meeting with academic advisors, going to sporting events, and spending time with their potential future teammates. Most student-athletes freely spoke about going out to experience Oxford night life.

"I partied and got to meet people. I talked to coaches and players a lot and watched their reactions. The visit gave me a huge clue of how going to school here would really be."

Football player

"As far as Ole Miss, I thought it was strange to be so far from a big city. I went to couple of classes and to church. I went to parties, dinner at the coach's

house, and met with administrators. I had lots of meetings with people in the administration."

Women's basketball player

"Here, I stayed in the dorm with a girl I knew from Memphis. I went out with the soccer girls and got to experience the team's camaraderie."

Soccer player

Did you encounter any questionable recruiting tactics while being recruited?

Student-athletes admitted to experiencing things that were not in accordance with NCAA rules. The consensus among the student-athletes was that rule breaking and shady dealings were not part of their recruiting experiences at Ole Miss. Most said they found working with Ole Miss coaches to be straight-forward and easy.

"Certain schools go against the rules depending on who a recruit is. Some schools take recruits on shopping trips and have special privileges for certain recruits. Some of my friends talked about crazy stuff like briefcases full of money being shown to them. Clemson offered me an SUV—an Escalade for only \$200/month. I couldn't make my decision based on that."

Football player

"I'm sure that happens with football players, but not so much with golfers. LSU gave out golf balls, shoes, and stuff like that. That's illegal."

Golf player

"No, everything was done by the book. Ole Miss coaches were class acts and were careful to do what was right."

Baseball player

How could recruiting be improved or simplified?

Like in the eyes of supporters, student-athletes view recruiting as a flawed, yet necessary, process. Many believe that recruiting is as good as it can be, but most were willing to offer suggestions of how the process could be better. (See Table V.)

"Instead of having national signing day, a kid should be able to sign with a school whenever he wants to. It would cut down on broken commitments and bad feelings."

Football player

"I think it's good. Contact rules are good, but things may need to be stricter because coaches take advantage of younger players to try and persuade them to choose their school."

Soccer player

"I'm not sure if it can. It may be necessary the way it is. One thing is for sure, a letter from a school does not provide nearly enough information."

Female basketball player

How were you educated about NCAA rules?

High school and college coaches play a huge role in educating recruits and student-athletes about the rules. For this reason, it is overwhelmingly important for school officials to ensure that the individuals in these positions are credible and have integrity.

"Our club coach held a question and answer session for his players. My dad was great about researching everything."

Soccer player

"The coaches talk with you a lot about it. They tell you what to do on your visits, but you aren't given a manual or anything."

Golf player

"At first, I didn't know much until I got to Ole Miss."

Football player

Have you encountered any gray areas in the rules; if so, what?

Student-athletes were split on this issue. Some cited examples confusing rules or items that were subject to interpretation. Others took the stance that rules are rules, and everything is pretty much black and white.

With a subject as serious as NCAA rules, there should never be any question about what would be considered violations. (See Table II.)

"Not really. There are so many altercations with football, but the NCAA has really tried to make everything idiot-proof."

Baseball player

"It's very confusing as to what supplements athletes can take because the list is always being changed as new things are discovered and added."

Cheerleader

"Well, giving privileges to athletes is always questionable. What is a 'privilege'—a car ride?"

Soccer player

How could the NCAA better educate recruits and their families regarding the rules of recruiting? (See Table V.)

Among suggestions:

- More parental involvement
- Complete rule manuals in every high school
- High school assemblies for recruits
- Letters from NCAA to high school athletes
- NCAA representatives assigned to regions, districts, and high schools
- Informational packets sent to high schools
- Q and A website sponsored by NCAA

"Lately, parents haven't been coming to visit with the prospects, and that's bad. They really need to be there to supervise and learn the rules. A guardian or family representative should always be there."

Football player

"In high school, the NCAA should send representatives in to meet with high school recruits. That person would be the designated contact between the NCAA and that high school."

Soccer player

"Through high schools. Recruits should be taught what to expect. Just like with the ACT, SAT, or drug awareness programs, the NCAA needs to get the word out."

Football player

Student-Athlete Quantitative Survey

The survey located in the appendix, page 58, was distributed to current student-athletes at Ole Miss. It was stressed to them that the survey should be totally anonymous and that under no circumstances would names be used. Surveys were distributed via personal contacts representing the eight sports in question.

Methodology

Eighty surveys were returned, with the results summarized in a table. Sports surveyed included men's and women's basketball, baseball, football, track, men's and women's tennis, men's and women's golf, and soccer. A total of 24 females and 56 males were surveyed. Those surveyed rated the importance of eight different aspects of Ole Miss when making their recruiting decisions, from 1 through 5, with 1 being least important and 5 being most important. Next, they rated whether or not they agreed that certain issues were problems in recruiting. Again,

the scale was 1 through 5, with 1 being "very strongly disagree" and 5 being "very strongly agree." Finally, respondents rated what they believed would be effective ways to improve the recruiting process, from 1 through 5, with 1 being "not effective at all" and 5 being "extremely effective." The results of the survey are summarized on the following page in a spreadsheet.

Results of the Quantitative Student-Athlete Survey												
	Football	Baseball	Men's Golf	Women's Golf	Men's Basketball	Women's Basketball	Men's Tennis	Women's Tennis	Men's Track	Women's Track	Women's Soccer	Overall Average
OLE MISS ASPECTS: HOW IMPORTANT?	Campus	4.8	4.5	4.1	4.3	4.0	4.6	4.4	4.8	4.0	4.4	4.4
	Academics	4.1	3.3	3.6	5.0	3.8	4.6	3.8	4.0	4.0	4.4	4.1
	Coaches	4.5	4.1	3.6	4.3	3.4	5.0	4.0	4.3	5.0	4.8	4.4
	Social Life	3.7	4.3	4.0	5.0	3.0	4.5	3.6	3.8	4.0	4.5	4.1
	Size	3.0	3.5	4.0	4.0	4.6	3.0	4.2	4.0	1.0	2.8	3.5
	Racial Issues	3.9	3.5	3.0	4.3	4.0	1.8	4.2	3.5	3.0	2.0	3.3
	Facilities	1.6	2.2	4.7	5.0	4.2	3.6	4.4	1.3	1.0	2.9	2.9
	Location	2.9	2.9	3.1	3.3	4.0	2.4	3.0	2.5	3.0	2.1	2.8
	RECRUITING PROBLEMS: AGREE/DISAGREE?											
	Drinking	2.8	2.1	2.3	2.7	2.4	1.6	2.2	2.3	3.0	2.7	2.4
	Dishonesty of coaches	2.8	2.0	1.9	2.0	2.8	1.6	1.2	2.0	2.0	2.2	2.0
	Pressure from supporters	3.9	2.9	2.0	1.0	3.4	1.6	2.6	2.8	4.0	1.9	2.5
	Too many rules	4.6	4.9	4.3	5.0	4.4	4.8	4.0	4.0	4.0	3.9	4.4
	NCAA must improve recruiting EFFECTIVENESS OF WHAT MAY IMPROVE RECRUITING	4.7	4.7	4.6	5.0	4.6	4.8	4.6	4.8	4.0	4.5	4.6
	Assigning NCAA reps for each high school	3.8	4.2	3.3	3.0	4.2	4.4	2.6	3.8	4.0	4.0	3.7
	Giving a detailed rule packet to each recruit	3.9	3.6	4.3	3.3	4.0	4.2	3.4	2.5	5.0	4.3	3.8
Sending letters to every season ticket holder	More parental involvement	3.2	2.8	1.9	2.7	2.4	2.2	4.0	1.3	4.0	2.5	2.6
	Harsher penalties for rule breakers	4.1	2.1	2.0	2.7	2.2	2.2	1.8	1.2	4.0	2.0	2.3
	Public service announcements	4.6	4.7	4.4	5.0	4.8	4.8	4.4	5.0	3.0	4.0	4.5
		2.7	2.7	3.7	4.7	2.8	2.8	2.0	1.8	3.0	4.0	3.0

CHAPTER V: Conclusion and Recommendations

Conclusion

It seems that as long as there is competition, there will always be ethical dilemmas and people who try to take advantage of the system. Wherever there are rules, someone will be devious enough to find loopholes in those rules. Though NCAA regulations are sometimes rigid and ridiculous in their content, they are necessary to protect the integrity of college athletics. Of course, there will be problems; most of the coaches I interviewed did not agree with all the rules, but they at least appear to respect them and recognize their inherent value. No institution or process is without its problems; however, it seems that the NCAA is making a good-faith effort to clear up any problems or confusion it has recently encountered regarding the rules and those who abuse them.

Recommendations

Both the University and the NCAA need to persist in their efforts to educate athletics personnel, fans, and recruits of the rules. This is an area in which a school cannot possibly be too careful. There is no such thing as too much education where NCAA rules are concerned. It is

essential that the NCAA clarify the gray areas in recruiting rules, as this would prevent future scandals. When dealing with recruits, coaches should avoid at all costs making promises they cannot deliver. The NCAA should make every effort to condense the rules and make the whole process easier for players, coaches, and fans.

Clearing up the gray

To better educate college athletics personnel, the NCAA should conduct a survey of coaches in every sport and compliance directors at every school asking about gray areas or rules that may be unclear. From the coaches' interviews, it seems that most of the confusion comes with contacting recruits. This should be clarified. Any rules found unclear by a majority of member coaches should either be amended or completely dropped because there is too much at stake to simply leave rules up to interpretation.

Educating the public

The universities must be able to educate the public on what constitutes both legal, as well as illegal, recruitment activities. The NCAA could mandate all member universities to hold seminars for alumni associations, fan bases, and booster clubs on a regular basis. Also, universities could assemble a publication designed to explain the rules of recruiting in layman's

terms for each sport, provide contact numbers for compliance officers, and set up a recruiting hotline created primarily to answer questions pertaining to specific situations regarding recruiting. The informative pamphlets should be made available free of charge at every sporting event. While "marketing your brand" is one of the key concepts of advertising consumer goods, it can be a difficult task when one is attempting to sell an intangible. Knowing that your university is on the cutting edge of establishing ethical codes of conduct, coupled with zero-tolerance of rule breakers within its staff is a public relations victory that any university would be fortunate to obtain in this age of shady tactics and "win at all costs" mentality. Doing things the right way, the legal way, and the ethical way benefits everyone involved in athletics on the college level.

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APPENDIX

TABLES COMPILED FROM INTERVIEW RESPONSES

Table I—Do rules help or hinder recruiting?

Benefits	Detriments
Rules are very good. Everyone follows same rules. Would be chaotic w/out them. Even the playing field. Help smaller schools. Create parity. Protect recruits. Keep everyone in check.	Rules are cumbersome. There are too many. Some are insignificant. Hurt large schools. They are confusing and vague. They are hard to follow. There are many loopholes. Excessively limit contact.

Table II—Gray areas

Football	Official visits; "If it ain't in the gray, then you ain't recruiting."
Track	Different ways to interpret the same rule.
Golf	Contacting recruits.
Rifle	Rules are up to interpretation.
Tennis	There are many interpretations.
Volleyball	It is hard to monitor contact with recruits.
Basketball	Limits on contact with recruits.
Baseball	How much money should they spend to entertain recruits?
Soccer	Assisting with Olympic Development Program.

Table III—Why choose or not choose to come to Ole Miss?

Ole Miss Bound!	Thanks, but no thanks...
Beautiful campus Friendly people Quaint Prestigious Good academics Athletic success Good reputation Resolved racial issues Good coaches In the SEC Family atmosphere	Misconceptions about OM Stereotypes about MS Fraternities/Sororities Too far from home Too small Sub-par facilities Personal preference Location Academics too challenging Too country (i.e., rural) Didn't recruit hard enough

Table IV—Importance of future placement in professional sports to a sport's recruiting process

Football	"It's very, very important. The odds are, most kids won't get a shot at the pros, but you can sell an 18-year-old on that chance."
Track	"Relatively important, not huge."
Golf	"It's very important to our sport because we are governed by the U.S. Golf Association."
Rifle	"There is no professional league in my sport."
Tennis	"The vast majority of our athletes will not make a living playing professional sports, so you have to make sure they are graduating and are prepared for the working world."
Volleyball	"Pro volleyball is of very limited importance because there is no professional women's volleyball league in the United States."
Basketball	"It's very important, but we don't try to sell that. Just giving kids the opportunity to play SEC basketball is almost as big."
Baseball	"Huge! A shot at the pros is one of the biggest factors in making someone's decision. Last year, we had seven guys drafted to play Major League Baseball. 1500 players get drafted every year, which is way more than in other sports."
Soccer	"There is no pro league in women's soccer, so we don't use that to recruit."

Table V—What could be done to improve the recruiting process?

Suggestions:

SPORT	Ole Miss should..	NCAA should..
Football	Increase staff and budget, less pressure on coaches.	Define, simplify, relax the rules. More enforcement and accountability.
Track		Simplify the rules.
Golf	No major concerns	No major concerns
Rifle	Better educate about the rules.	Better educate.
Tennis	Continue improving image and academics. Make brochures more picturesque.	
Volleyball	Allot more money to volleyball budget.	Eliminate gray areas and loopholes.
Basketball	Improve dorms and facilities.	Allow more contact with recruits
Baseball		Educate the community and relax rules forbidding contact.
Soccer		Create an early signing period.

**Table VI: Estimated Probability of Competing in Athletics
Beyond the High School Interscholastic Level***

Student-Athletes	<u>Men's Basketball</u>	<u>Women's Basketball</u>	<u>Football</u>	<u>Baseball</u>	<u>Men's Ice Hockey</u>	<u>Men's Soccer</u>
High School Student-Athletes	549,500	456,900	983,600	455,300	29,900	321,400
High School Senior Student-Athletes	157,000	130,500	281,000	130,100	8,500	91,800
NCAA Student-Athletes	15,700	14,400	56,500	25,700	3,700	18,200
NCAA Freshman Roster Positions	4,500	4,100	16,200	7,300	1,100	5,200
NCAA Senior Student-Athletes	3,500	3,200	12,600	5,700	800	4,100
NCAA Student-Athletes Drafted	44	32	250	600	33	76
Percent High School to NCAA	2.9	3.1	5.8	5.6	12.9	5.7
Percent NCAA to Professional	1.3	1.0	2.0	10.5	4.1	1.9
Percent High School to Professional	0.03	0.02	0.09	0.5	0.4	0.08

*http://www.ncaa.org/research/prob_of_competing/

STUDENT-ATHLETE QUANTITATIVE SURVEY

1. What sport do you play?

Basketball Baseball Football Track Golf Tennis

2. Please rate the following on a scale of importance, with 1 being least important and 5 being most important.

Best things about Ole Miss in attracting recruits:

Campus	1	2	3	4	5
--------	---	---	---	---	---

	1	2	3	4	5
Academics					

Coaches	1	2	3	4	5
---------	---	---	---	---	---

Social life	1	2	3	4	5
-------------	---	---	---	---	---

Other

Worst things about Ole Miss that turn recruits away:

Size	1	2	3	4	5
------	---	---	---	---	---

False racial stereotypes 1 2 3 4 5

Facilities	1	2	3	4	5
------------	---	---	---	---	---

Location	1	2	3	4	5
----------	---	---	---	---	---

Other

3. Please rate the following statements on a scale of 1 through 5, with 1 meaning "very strongly disagree" and 5 meaning "very strongly agree."

Drinking is a problem during recruiting. 1 2 3 4 5

Coaches are not always honest during recruiting. 1 2 3 4 5

Supporters put too much pressure on recruits. 1 2 3 4 5

The NCAA has way too many rules; many are unclear.1 2 3 4 5

The NCAA must improve the recruiting process. 1 2 3 4 5

4. Below is a list of suggestions for how the recruiting process could be improved. Please rate them on how effective you think each would be, with 1 being not effective at all and 5 being extremely effective.

Assign an NCAA representative to each high school. 1 2 3 4 5

Provide every recruit with a detailed rule packet.	1	2	3	4	5
--	---	---	---	---	---

Require recruits' parents to attend official visits.	1	2	3	4	5
--	---	---	---	---	---

Contact every season ticket holder of every school.	1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---	---

Enact much stricter penalties for rule breakers.	1	2	3	4	5
--	---	---	---	---	---

Show public service announcements during tv games.	1	2	3	4	5
--	---	---	---	---	---

5. Please list any additional suggestions below for improving the recruiting process.

General information (please circle):

Gender: M F

Class: Freshman Sophomore Junior Senior

Table VII: Scholarship Breakdown by Sport

Sport	Scholarship	Non-Scholarship
(Men's)		
Baseball	31	10
Basketball	13	3
Football	83	45
Golf	12	6
Tennis	9	0
Track	24	22
Total	172	86
(Women's)		
Basketball	15	0
Golf	6	0
Rifle	9	0
Soccer	18	3
Softball	16	1
Track	27	5
Volleyball	10	3
Total	101	12
(Overall)	273	98