

Editorial: Time to reform the NCAA

by John Santana
Reporter

As the 1990-91 college basketball season approaches, one thing is clear. The strongest team in college basketball isn't UNLV, Arkansas or Arizona. It's the infractions committee of the NCAA. In addition to UNLV, the NCAA, earlier this month, hit both Illinois and Missouri with probation, including a ban on postseason play this season.

Illinois received three years probation when many thought the basketball program would receive the "death penalty" which prohibits a school from fielding a team in that sport for a given period of time. Many felt the axe would fall on Illinois because it's football program has been sanctioned by the infractions committee three times in the last six years.

It was alleged that an Illini assistant coach offered one recruit \$80,000 and a Chevrolet Blazer and another recruit \$85,000 if they'd attend Illinois.

The NCAA "failed to find enough evidence" to prove those charges. The most serious violation they found was that three Illini players purchased cars "without meaningful credit histories" at an auto dealership owned by an Illinois booster.

The University of Missouri recently received two years pro-

bation.

Missouri's violations stem from when a scholarship was awarded to an academically ineligible player, as well as when an assistant coach had arranged for the university to buy the player a plane ticket. The NCAA even accused head coach Norm Stewart and several of his assistants of lying to NCAA investigators.

What has really appalled those involved with Missouri basketball is the fact that it was too late for any player to transfer to another school or apply for the NBA draft.

The UNLV case has, without a doubt, been the most publicized. UNLV coach Jerry Tarkanian has accused the NCAA infractions committee of having a vendetta against him. Because the NCAA is an independent, autonomous body with no one to answer to, they have continually abused their power. The UNLV case shows enough evidence to prove this point.

While UNLV conformed to the NCAA sanctions imposed after the Final Four season of 1977, mostly due to the fear of the NCAA's iron fist, Tarkanian blocked an NCAA-imposed suspension with a court injunction. The supreme court ruled 5-4 against Tarkanian last year and thus gave the NCAA the power to reimpose a penalty. Since the only

fair way of enforcing the unserved suspension would be to penalize Tark, the infractions committee decided to punish the school with a two-year probation it served more than a decade ago.

In 1979, the athletic director at Boston College sent a letter to the chair of the infractions committee that said UNLV made every effort to conform to the sanctions, although the NCAA felt UNLV made no effort to comply.

Many Rebel fans claim that the NCAA has not acted in good faith when dealing with Tarkanian. This is true not only in UNLV's case, but also in Missouri's. While the punishment was appropriate in the Missouri case, the timing was very poor. Announcing the sanctions a few weeks after practice had begun when their decision was already made is a clear violation of the NCAA's own constitution and by-laws, which serves to protect and benefit student athletes.

Recently, the NCAA gave UNLV the option to change their penalty (an unprecedented move). UNLV chose to serve their probation by sitting out the NCAA Tournament in 1992 instead of 1991, they will also be banned from television appearances during the 1991-92 season.

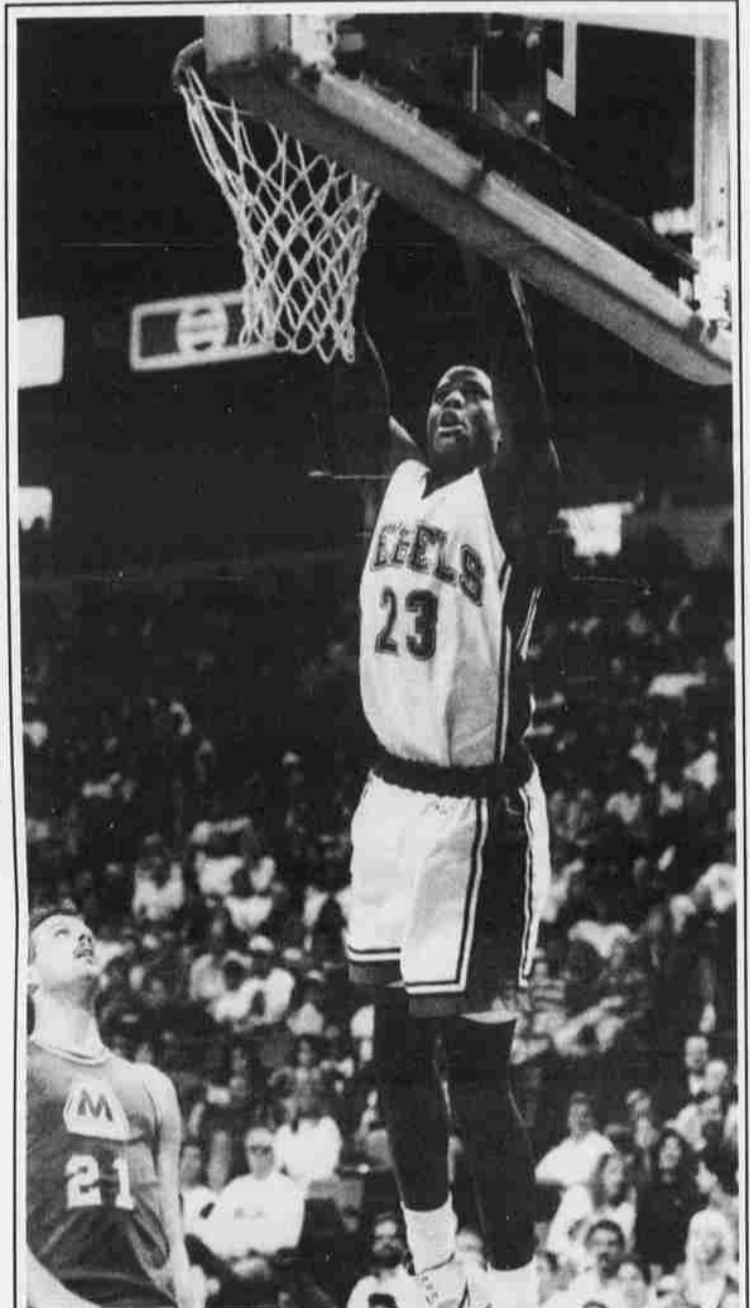
As a result of this move by the NCAA other schools have cried foul.

University of Kansas head basketball coach Roy Williams said he wished that Kansas had had a multiple-choice penalty when they were sanctioned by the NCAA after their championship season in 1988.

The NCAA will not try to reform themselves. The only way reform will occur is if college administrators demand it, or if the FBI conducts an investigation into the NCAA. The NCAA could be charged with several things, ranging from biased, unfair prac-

tices to trying to fix the outcome of its own basketball tournament. The NCAA began as a small organization of six schools, organized at the turn of the century. It has evolved into a large, all-powerful bureaucracy with thousands of complex rules whose members are constantly denied their constitutional rights.

As Penn State football coach Joe Paterno said, "Everyday I break NCAA rules. I just don't know which ones."



Yell Photo / Robert Anderson

Future All-American - Evric Gray (23) and the rest of the Runnin' Rebels travel to Reno to face the Wolf Pack Saturday at 7:30 p.m.

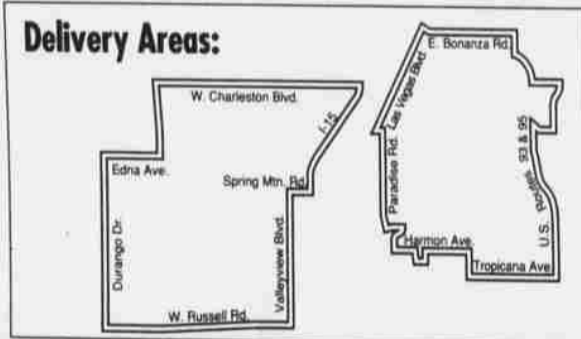
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