



Proposed new NBA deadline ignores players' best interests

Marc Isenberg

Money Players

I would like to think the people in charge of college basketball truly care about student-athletes. That the welfare of the players matters more than the Almighty Dollar. That rules are written in such a way to help athletes' chances to succeed beyond school, pro or otherwise. And maybe when we consider the literally thousands of rules that govern college sports, the vast majority strike a reasonable balance between the needs of athletes and the interests of schools.

Then they gut the once-friendly rules allowing underclass basketball players to "test the NBA waters."

Sometimes I feel like Howard Beale in the movie *Network*, who famously ranted, "I'm as mad as hell, and I'm not going to take this anymore!" In my case, there is really nothing I can do — other than rant about why this is unfair and call attention to the nonsensical rationale used by the Atlantic Coast Conference, which twice sponsored legislation to shorten the window for players to gauge their pro market value.

NCAA rules allow players a one-time opportunity to declare for the draft but still return to their college teams. In 2011, they must withdraw their names from consideration by May 8. Even though we call it "testing the NBA waters," there is not an opportunity to actually do this effectively. There is just no way for players not considered lottery "locks" to gather enough information to make an informed decision.

In late April, the NCAA board of directors were likely to approve moving the deadline to April 10, which happens to be the day before the spring signing period. In other words, players must base their decision on opinions rather than workouts and in-depth evaluations.

The less time a player has to make his decision, the more likely he is to stay in school. From a Machiavellian standpoint, I suppose this makes sense. The more pragmatic and thorough a player is, the more likely he is to rely on conventional wisdom, which undoubtedly is to stay in school. Of course, that's not a bad thing. Just slightly evil.

Obviously, I am passionate about increasing the chances that athletes succeed — or "go pro like a pro," as I call it. My goal is to help athletes take advantage of the opportunities — and avoid the dangers — of sports, school and business. I have no doubt that college and college athletics can be life-transforming. I just cannot fathom taking away the safety net that gives players the chance to return to school if that is the best option.

Instead, those who miscalculated their decision (possibly because of bad advice) get kicked to the curb. They do have value to the NCAA and its members as cautionary tales for all future basketball players who might avoid a similar fate by, of course, staying in school. See Korleone Young, Lenny Cooke and Gerald Green, to name just a few.

The rationale used to justify moving up the date is laughable: "The change ... is intended to keep student-athletes focused on academics in the spring term and to give coaches a better idea of their roster for the coming year before the recruiting period is closed."

It's great that they want to keep athletes focused aca-

demics, especially since many schools spend a good part of March barnstorming. The UConn Huskies played 11 magical games in 28 days. Yes, most every college athlete would "sacrifice" missing class in order to experience playing the Big East and NCAA tournaments. And those who have a legitimate chance to play in the NBA would also miss a few classes. Interesting that athletic

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The ACC, which sponsored this legislation, also wrote: "This year, NBA teams did not spend money to have workouts with student-athletes until the withdrawal deadline passed."

And why is that? Oh, the NCAA moved the deadline up to a date when nearly half of the NBA is focused on the playoffs.

Like a Ron Popeil infomercial, "Wait. There's more." The ACC continued, "Evaluations by professional scouts and others during preseason practices, regular-season games and postseason games should provide student-athletes with adequate information to credibly determine NBA draft status."

Go ask NBA GMs and scouts if that is a true statement.

Thankfully, more than a few basketball writers and coaches saw right through the spin.

Sports Illustrated basketball writer and CBS college basketball analyst Seth Davis tweeted: "Players making huge life decisions should have all the time the NBA gives them. They deserve chance to improve draft position thru workouts."

Portland coach Eric Reveno tweeted: "The NCAA should not have a draft deadline. Let players return after draft if they want. Good for players and coaches will manage."

After I read Reveno's tweet, I spoke to him on the phone. He articulated his point further: "Having more stringent rules will not necessarily create a more workable solution. The goal should be to help players make the correct decision. From a player's perspective, I'd be concerned that a coach might use lack of available information and time to trick players to stay in school. At the same time, some agents will do the same to convince a player to leave. The best argument for having more time to go through the draft process is it disempowers bad gatekeepers, which is a good thing."

Agents and coaches might lie. The market tells the truth. Of course, schools don't always benefit from the truth.

Marc Isenberg is the author of *Money Players: A Guide to Success in Sports, Business & Life for Current and Future Pro Athletes* and founder of *Money Players Blog* (moneyplayersblog.com). He is a business adviser to athletes and their families. Follow Marc on Twitter @marcisenberg.

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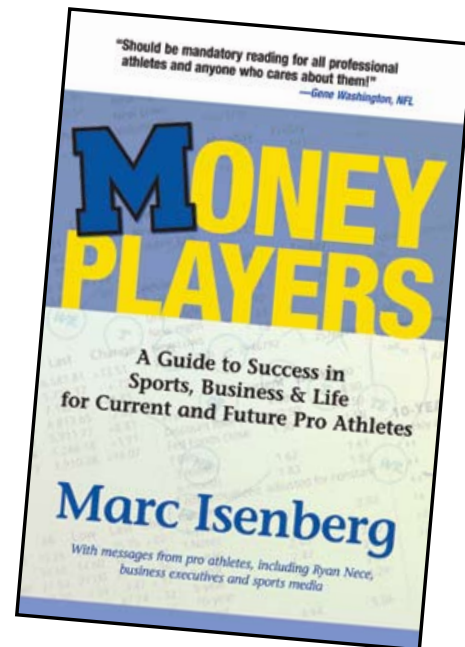
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