

NCAA making changes in player eligibility rules

INDIANAPOLIS (AP) — The NCAA wants to change eligibility requirements for incoming student-athletes by lowering the emphasis on standardized tests and increasing the weight of classroom work.

In a sweeping package of academic reforms approved Tuesday, the Management Council increased the number of core courses high school students must take and extended the "sliding scale" that helps determine freshmen eligibility.

Student-athletes must now score at least 820 on the SATs, but the changes would allow freshmen to become eligible with lower test scores — with a higher corresponding GPA. The minimum GPA of 2.0 in core courses remains unchanged, although high school students would have to complete 14 core courses, one more than the current rule.

If approved by the NCAA's Board of Directors on Oct. 31, the changes would take effect next year.

"We now have the best research data ever available to us, in terms of predicting success, during the first two years of college," said Percy Bates, the council's chairman. "That research clearly indicates that the number of core courses, and the performance in those courses, are the best predictor of college success."

The change has been discussed since January, when the NCAA released data showing that students with higher GPAs fare better in college than those with higher test scores.

As part of the reform package, the council approved changes that would increase the workload to be eligible while attending college.

College students would have to accrue 24 semester hours before entering their second academic year, while maintaining a minimum load of 18 hours each academic year and six hours per term.

Progress toward college graduation would have to come at a quicker pace. Current rules require four-year students to complete 25 percent of their credits each year, but the proposal would increase that to 40 percent after one year, 60 percent after the second year and 80 percent after the third year.

Bates said the new requirements will help the NCAA reach its goal of achieving higher graduation rates for student-athletes, rather than just allowing athletes to maintain their eligibility.

"For the first time ever, we are addressing in one legislative package the entire academic experience of student-athletes, from high school performance through college graduation," Bates said.

The council also gave initial approval to new rules for football practices.

The proposals would require a strength or conditioning coach certified in CPR to attend voluntary weight training or summer conditioning drills.

Those changes came after the deaths of Eraste Autin, an incoming freshman at Florida, and Rashidi Wheeler, a Northwestern player, who died during voluntary workouts in the summer of 2001.

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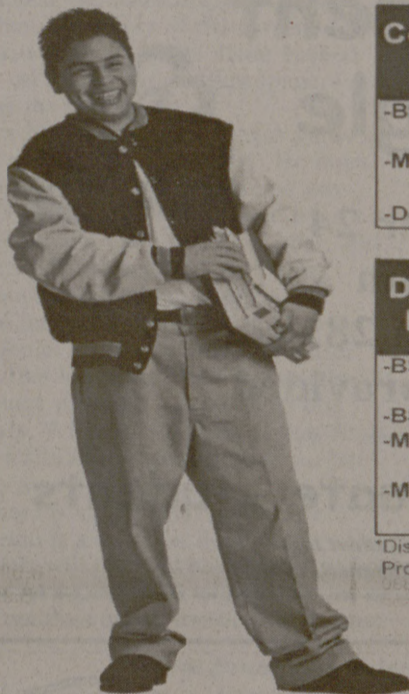
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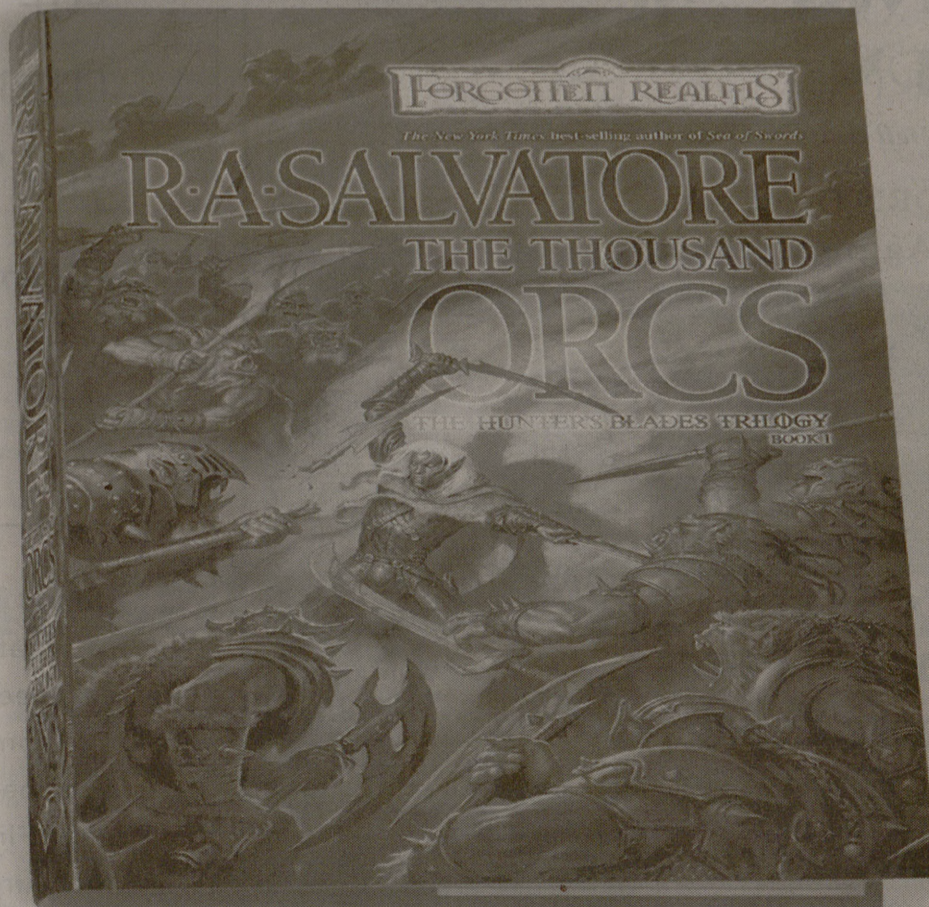
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