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Recruiting by video studied

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DESTIN, Fla. - Nick Saban set the bar by staging video conferences with recruits. Now the rest of the SEC is evaluating whether to follow.

At this week's SEC spring meetings, coaches tossed around phrases such as "ahead of the curve," "a little extreme" and "silly" in reference to Saban's recruiting innovation.

"They all could have done it," Saban said. "I mean, it's no secret. It's legal by the NCAA. A picture's worth a thousand words. In my case, as ugly as I am, (recruits) probably don't like looking at me, but I like looking at them when I'm talking to them."

New NCAA legislation, commonly dubbed "The Saban Rule," banned head coaches from going on the road during the spring evaluation period. A staunch proponent of evaluating players in the spring, Saban turned heads by using Web cams to stage video conferencing.

"He was out there ahead of the curve a little bit, so I guess if they're gonna do it, we've got to do it," said Tennessee coach Phillip Fulmer, who has his first video conference scheduled for next week.

"It's like texting - just another way to communicate. Somebody will eventually say you can't do it. That's why the rule book was made, right? That's why it's so thick."

SEC Commissioner Mike Slive said he is comfortable with the practice because it is permitted by the NCAA.

The NCAA Division I Football Coaches Off-Campus Recruiting Guide states that "all electronically transmitted human voice exchange (including video conferencing and videophones) shall be considered telephone calls."

A coaching staff can make one phone call to a junior prospect during the spring evaluation period, but a prospect can make unlimited calls to a staff. The Web cam allows coaches to be face to face with a recruit miles away.

"It just seems kind of silly to me," Florida coach Urban Meyer said. "You've got to look in that little camera. I'm just not comfortable in it. But to each his own."

Meyer prefers unlimited text-messaging to recruits - a practice the NCAA has since banned. He said he came close to using video conferencing last week and added, "If it would help us get a player, then I absolutely would do it."

Georgia coach Mark Richt hasn't used video conferencing yet. "If it's legal to do next year, I'm sure we'll do it," he said.

Arkansas coach Bobby Petrino said he couldn't figure out how to coordinate a video conference with high schools.

"You can't have your coaches bring in a laptop and set it in (the high school) coaches' office and do it over that," Petrino said. "You can do it in the library, if they have that equipment available. It's kind of gone a little extreme, I think."

Saban estimated 60 percent of high schools have the technology to use Web cams.

Last year, Saban spent the spring meetings defending the conversations he had with recruits during the spring evaluation period. Some reports said he exceeded NCAA rules.

Saban said Tuesday the NCAA restriction was placed on head coaches "because everybody is paranoid about what everybody else is doing.

"I got turned in all kinds of times because I was supposed to be doing this and that. I wasn't doing that," he said. "I was just watching practice, evaluating a player, which is part of our job."

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