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Despite calls for ban, NCAA says it can't stop beer ads, fantasy sports

Associated Press

Beer ads will continue to pay for college sports telecasts, and college fantasy leagues could become the next real moneymaker on Web sites.

On Thursday, the NCAA's executive committee decided it couldn't eliminate alcohol advertising, nor could it stop the incorporation of college sports into the fantasy games and decided, essentially, to retain the status quo.

"We want to be very conservative with this," committee chairman Michael Adams said of the beer ads. "Though we don't think this type of advertising is appropriate [for college sports], we have tried this once before in this country and it didn't work very well."

Pressure mounted from many corners of the sports and non-sports world, pleading with the NCAA to change a policy that allows networks to sell 60 seconds of commercial time for each hour they're on the air. Ads can only be sold for beverages containing 6 percent or less of alcohol -- almost exclusively beer -- during the NCAA's national championships.

The NCAA also requires all beer ads in stadiums or arenas to be covered during its championships, does not permit the sale of beer, wine or liquor during the games and has advised its member institutions to follow the same code.

For some, that's not good enough.

In April more than 100 university presidents wrote to NCAA president Myles Brand, calling the beer ads that appeared during the men's basketball tournament "embarrassingly prominent."

A similar number of football and men's basketball coaches -- some with national-championship pedigrees such as Bobby Bowden, Jim Tressel and Urban Meyer, and others who have been nearly as successful, such as John Calipari and Bobby Cremins -- sent their own letter to the executive committee, urging a gradual ban during the next three years.

That position was backed by two other letters that were signed by more than 200 athletic directors and 39 university presidents.

"Alcohol and college sports are a bad mix," the letter said. "Beer promotion during college sports telecasts undermines the best interests of higher education and compromises the efforts of colleges and others to combat sometimes epidemic levels of alcohol problems on many campuses today."

Joining the call were nine members of the U.S. House of Representatives, who sent their own letter to Brand on Wednesday.

All four letters were released by the Center for Science in the Public Interest,

"We find it puzzling that NCAA advertising rules prohibit ads for cigarettes, other tobacco products, organizations promoting gambling and alcoholic beverages, yet continue to allow ads for beverages with

alcohol content of 6 percent or less [beer, the top alcoholic drink of college students]," the letter said. "Given the devastating problems caused by underage and excessive drinking, much of it in the form of beer, this policy makes little sense and flouts the core values of sports and learning."

But the argument fell short as the committee recommended the current policy remain untouched.

"I think we've taken a very sensible, very rationale, very conservative approach and we've asked that any company that advertises [alcohol] during our games continue to include the message 'drink responsibly' on its ads," Adams said. "I think we've taken about as a conservative an approach as any sport in the country. While not everyone agrees 100 percent, I think we represent what is a good balance in that opinion."

The other hot topic was fantasy games.

During the past two decades, fantasy sports have become synonymous with most pro leagues. Fantasy players draft their own teams of real-life players and compete against other owners using those players' statistics.

Until now, college sports were pretty much exempt.

That changed late last month when CBS Sports, which has an \$11 billion television deal with the NCAA, announced it would revamp its college football game by using individual names and stats instead of school names and positions.

Because of a ruling handed down by the 8th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in St. Louis and the U.S. Supreme Court's decision not to hear the case, the NCAA believes all it can do is revise its own rules.

"Our bylaws lump together names, images and likenesses and the names are being used now, so we'll have to go back and look at this," Brand said. "We will need to go back and look at our options. We certainly are not giving up our model of amateurism."

The meeting occurred on the same day the NCAA announced a federal court had approved its proposed settlement with 12,000 former student-athletes seeking reimbursements for educational expenses, resume preparation and career counseling.

As part of the deal, the NCAA will create a \$10 million fund for former student-athletes who signed on to the class-action lawsuit. Those students, who attended college between Feb. 17, 2002, and Aug. 4, 2008, have three years to file claims with the NCAA.

Current student-athletes can apply for reimbursement from another \$218 million fund, which will be in place through 2012-13.

The committee also upheld a decision to prohibit men's basketball coaches from attending non-scholastic events, such as AAU tournaments, during the month of April.

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