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SPORTS

NCAA Will Allow Championships in Sports Betting States

The suspension of an existing policy reverses a hard-line stance against sports wagering



The NCAA board of governors might consider permanent revisions of its sports-wagering policy in the future. PHOTO: KEITH SRAKOCIC/ASSOCIATED PRESS

By *Rachel Bachman*

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The National Collegiate Athletic Association on Thursday suspended its policy not to hold championships in states where sports betting is legal, a sharp reversal for an organization that has taken a hard-line stance against sports wagering.

The move came three days after the Supreme Court struck down federal prohibitions on sports wagering, clearing the way for states other than Nevada to allow gambling on athletic events.

“Our highest priorities in any conversation about sports wagering are maintaining the integrity of competition and student-athlete well-being,” NCAA president Mark Emmert said in a news release.

The NCAA board of governors might consider permanent revisions of its sports-wagering policy in the future, according to the release. It also called for a “federal model addressing legalized gambling.”

The now-suspended policy prohibited NCAA championships from being held in any state that allows single-game sports wagering—even on non-college sports.



The men's basketball tournament stayed out of Oregon for decades, for instance, because its state lottery offered two games based on NFL scores. The NCAA tournament returned to Oregon in 2009 after the state legislature banned the NFL-based lottery games.

Today, only Nevada allows bets on individual sporting events.

"The decision provides a long-awaited opportunity for our State's two Division I athletic programs (Nevada and UNLV) to host NCAA championship events," Nevada athletic director Doug Knuth said Thursday. "We couldn't be happier for our student athletes and coaches to finally have the opportunity to compete close to home where their friends and family can watch them contend for NCAA championships."

The Pac-12 Conference has held its men's basketball tournament in Las Vegas since 2013, and is moving its women's basketball tournament there for 2019 and 2020.

For years, the NCAA has strongly opposed sports betting of any kind. The case on which the Supreme Court ruled Monday involved the NCAA trying to block New Jersey from enacting a law to permit sports gambling in the state.

Despite the wide popularity of informal betting pools for the NCAA basketball tournament, the NCAA has long banned sports gambling among its members. It bars athletic-department and conference-office staff members from wagering on sports or even participating in pools or fantasy leagues that require an entry fee and offer prizes.

In the past, the NCAA has papered hallways outside NCAA basketball tournament locker rooms with posters warning athletes not to bet on sports. Athletes caught betting on any sports can lose their eligibility for a year.

Those caught trying to influence points totals or game outcomes for gambling purposes, or participate in any wagering involving their school, can become permanently ineligible, according to Division I rules.

The NCAA's statement Thursday said its policy restricting sports-gambling advertising at NCAA championships and football bowl games would remain in place.

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