

AP Exclusive: Colleges Ease Athlete Penalties For Marijuana Use

BY ERIC OLSON
AP College Football Writer

LINCOLN, Neb. — At least one-third of the Power Five conference schools are not punishing athletes as harshly as they were 10 years ago for testing positive for marijuana and other so-called recreational drugs, according to an investigation by The Associated Press.

The NCAA last year cut in half the penalty for athletes who fail screenings for substances like marijuana at its championship events, and its chief medical officer is pushing for college sports' governing body to get out of the business of testing for rec drugs altogether. The AP found that some of the nation's biggest universities, from Oregon to Auburn, have already eased their punishments as society's views on marijuana use have changed. Marijuana use among U.S. adults has doubled over a decade, according to government surveys and recreational use is now legal in four states.

The AP analyzed policies for 57 of the 65 schools in the Southeastern, Atlantic Coast, Big 12, Big Ten and Pac-12 conferences, plus Notre Dame.

Of the 57 schools, 23 since 2005 have either reduced penalties or allowed an athlete to test positive more times before being suspended or dismissed. Ten schools have separate, less stringent policies addressing only marijuana infractions.

In the Pac-12, five schools do not suspend athletes for as long as they once did. At Utah, for example, a third failed test used to mean dismissal; now it's a half-season suspension.

"It's a moving target, and we have to find that balance between being too punitive and not punitive enough, and making sure that we help people that have a problem," Utah athletic director Chris Hill said.

Recreational use of pot is allowed for adults in Oregon and Washington but is against the rules at Pac-12 schools in those states. At Oregon, an athlete doesn't lose playing time until a third failed test; at Oregon State, a third failed test used to mean dismissal, but athletes are now given one more chance.

At Washington, a third failed test used to be a one-year suspension but is now just 30 days.

"The change was intended to make the policy more rehabilitative," Washington spokesman Carter Henderson said.

Northwestern, Penn State, Pittsburgh, Southern California, Syracuse, Vanderbilt and Wake Forest did not provide copies of their drug policies despite repeated requests, citing privacy laws. Stanford does not test its athletes. Illinois has a separate pot policy that has become more strict but isn't as punitive as its policy for drugs like cocaine or heroin.

The Big Ten and Big 12 are the only Power Five conferences that do their

own testing in addition to the testing done by the schools and NCAA. Those two conferences punish athletes who test positive for performance-enhancing drugs. The Big 12 is the only conference that screens for recreational drugs, but it does not sanction athletes who test positive. Instead, the Big 12 notifies the school of a positive test and leaves any discipline to the school.

Alcohol remains by far the most abused substance on college campuses, with marijuana ranking second. In the most recent NCAA survey of athletes (2013), 70.9 percent of Division I football players acknowledged using alcohol in the previous 12 months and 19.3 percent acknowledged using

dismissal. The previous policy, in place when Gregory initially enrolled, didn't take away playing time until a third failed test.

"I'm not saying that we were kind of like invincible," said Gregory, who played under former Huskers coach Bo Pelini. "But they don't make it a big deal. ... They didn't really test you unless you had failed one and then after that, they test you weekly almost."

Dr. Lonnie Albers, Nebraska's associate athletic director for athletic medicine, declined an interview request through the sports information department.

In addition to school testing for a wide range of drugs, Gregory and his teammates were subject to random screening for PEDs by the Big Ten and NCAA.

"Did I know folks that were abusing it? Yeah, on different ends of the spectrum. I think you know what I mean, smoking and other performance-enhancing drugs," Gregory said.

"Sometimes guys get lucky. The Big Ten comes in, we're testing steroids, might be a guy on steroids but he may say, 'You know what, I don't think I'll be one of the 12 guys that they're testing out of the 100-and-how-many guys we have on the team.' And they'll get lucky and not get tested. It's kind of hit or miss, I think."

The NCAA has been testing for marijuana and other street drugs at championship events since the 1980s. The NCAA suspends athletes for a full season for a failed PED test. Starting in August 2014, however, the penalty for failing an NCAA street-drug test was reduced from a suspension of one full season to a half season.

NCAA medical chief Dr. Brian Hainline said his organization should concentrate on busting athletes who use PEDs and leave it to the schools to deal with the rest, preferably through treatment rather than punishment.

"The most important thing that I can't emphasize enough is that as a society, we have to make a clear distinction between recreational drug use and cheating," Hainline said. "I really believe that they require two different approaches. One is more nuanced, and one is hard core."

What about marijuana being against the law in most states?

"If we're going to test at championship events for things that are illegal, then we shouldn't just test for pot," Hainline said. "If there are any kids under the age of 18 smoking cigarettes, we should test for that. We certainly should be testing for alcohol for everyone under the age of 21. Then we ask ourselves, 'Where does the moral authority stop?' I'm all for moral authority as long as there is a philosophical consistency to it."

AP Sports Writers Kareem Copeland, Tim Booth and Schuyler Dixon contributed to this report.

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MIKE RILEY

marijuana or synthetic marijuana. In men's basketball, reported use was 58.1 percent for alcohol and 11.3 percent for marijuana/synthetic marijuana.

While schools come down hard on athletes caught using performance-enhancing drugs — a first positive test typically results in a one-year suspension — they are much less punitive for marijuana and other so-called street drugs.

Athletes who test positive a first time typically receive counseling but lose no playing time. Also, athletes who come forward and acknowledge drug use before they are tested are offered help under "safe harbor" programs. Second positive tests typically result in some lost playing time. Suspensions generally start kicking in after a second positive, though Kansas, Mississippi, Purdue and Oregon don't mandate a suspension until a third offense.

Football coach Mike Riley, in his first year at Nebraska after 14 years coaching at Oregon State, said he becomes suspicious marijuana is being used when he notices a player who misses or is late for meetings or is not fully engaged on and off the field.

"Through my years in coaching, I can almost pick out the guys who have a marijuana problem," Riley said. "You give me three weeks with a team and, if you've got five guys, I could get three or four of them."

Former Nebraska defensive end Randy Gregory failed a marijuana test at the NFL scouting combine last February and later publicly acknowledged his use in college. Once considered a high first-round draft pick, he wasn't selected until late in the second round by Dallas.

Gregory said he and his Nebraska teammates didn't worry a lot about being tested. Nebraska, under a policy effective since September 2014, suspends an athlete for 10 percent of his or her sport's season after a second failed drug test and 20 percent after a third failed test. A fourth failed test results in

History

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ing the priority, at least 90 percent, of the funds to the Mead building project. The other 10 percent will be available for other preservation opportunities chosen by the commission.

One of the projects being explored is the county's historical markers within city limits and along Highway 50. The official South Dakota State Historical Society (SDSHS) marker program began in 1950 when State Historian Doane Robinson created the program to erect markers at significant historical locations across the state. The

organization's contributions funded the first markers. Since then, some markers have been moved or destroyed as a result of local development.

The commission hopes to resurrect these markers and return them to their rightful places within the community. HPC member Crystal Nelson, who is also part of Yankton County's Historical Society and executive director of the Dakota Territorial Museum, knows of five in the possession of the society's museum.

"Being in the historical society, we have had a lot of things brought to us," she said. "Lately, it has been — since various construction projects are being done — historical markers that the

state has done. Markers are taken down, put in garages and people are not sure where they go."

These markers include: a Lewis and Clark Trail marker, Robert McClellan's fur post and the south wall of the Yankton stockade. Citizens of Yankton may also be in possession of some historical markers and are unsure what to do with them.

"If (the public) knows a location of a marker, work with us and let's get it back up," HPC commissioner Bernie Hunhoff said. "We all have a responsibility to preserve our history. If we recognize and know our history, I really think it adds to a sense of place."

The commission also discussed plans to become

park admittance.

For more information about Lewis & Clark Recreation Area, call 605-668-2985.

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Hike

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have in the Yankton area." The fitness hike will take approximately 30 minutes.

Bertsch encourages people to use the park year-round for activities ranging from camping to hiking to disc golf.

"The hikes promote fitness and using the outdoors," Bertsch said. "Families young and old can participate. It gives them an opportunity to get away from their phones and computers to enjoy what we have out here."

There will also be a New Year's hike at Ponca State Park at 2 p.m. in Ponca, Nebraska.

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Climatologists: Strange Winter Storms Not Caused By El Nino

BY CHUCK RAASCH
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WASHINGTON — The El Nino effect is about to hit U.S. weather, but it is not the primary cause of the ferocious storms that brought death and flooding to much of the South over the weekend, scientists said Monday.

El Nino could, however, bring temporary relief to Midwesterners plagued by the violent weather. It is predicted to cause a relatively dry winter from the Ohio Valley to the Mississippi River Valley, said Nicholas A. Bond, the Washington state climatologist and a senior researcher at the Joint Institute for the Study of Atmosphere and Ocean at the University of Washington.

"It is just sort of a fluke event," Bond said of the weekend storms that brought tornadoes and violent storms at a time when people normally hope for a white Christmas. "Sometimes you can get these big troughs of lower pressure and ridges of higher pressure that set up in particular places and stay there, and end up steering the storms different than they usually are for this time of the year."

"There is just randomness in the weather that is always there," he said. "And impossible, really, to predict with much lead time."

Missouri State Climatologist Pat Guinan agreed, but said that even with the dry forecast, winter's short days, cold temperatures and dormant plants are not conducive to evaporation.

"We are not going to dry out anytime soon regardless of what happens over the next few weeks," he said.

While much-needed precipitation is forecast for the American Southwest from California to Texas, an El Nino effect about to kick in on North America will bring relief from saturated grounds elsewhere, according to the latest government forecast.

"Seasonal outlooks indicate an increased likelihood of above-median precipitation across the southern tier of the United States, and below-median precipitation over the northern tier of the United States," the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration said in a mid-December El Nino report.

"In terms of dryness, it is kind of the Ohio Valley extending ... to the Mississippi, including the St. Louis area," Bond said.

El Nino describes a meteorological pattern spawned from unusually warm equatorial Pacific Ocean temperatures. Temperatures in that vast belt of water are unusually high already, and some scientists predict that the effect from them this winter is likely to be stronger than the last similar El Nino, which occurred in the winter of 1997-1998, and at least the third strongest since 1950.

This El Nino already has wreaked environmental and economic havoc in the Southern Hemisphere, disrupting the Australian cattle industry by parching pastures, hurting rice crops in Vietnam, hitting South Africa and parts of South America with drought, and sparking wildfires from Australia to Indonesia.

The effect on the United States so far has been milder weather in the northern half of the country, a typical El Nino trait. But other anticipated effects have not yet begun.

"When you kind of really dive down into the details, and look at what the situation has been like so far this winter, it isn't a close match with what we have seen in the early winters of El Ninos previously," Bond said. "But what I should say also is that the computer models that we use to forecast the weather over the next week or two are showing a switch in the pattern to one that is very similar to what we have seen during previous El Ninos."

He said that "El Nino's effects on the weather in the U.S. tend to be ... more prominent and reliable after the first of the year."

Are unusually severe storms stemming from climate change, as some argue? Bond said evidence is emerging on that front but cautioned that scientific analysis of "things that happen rarely and of extreme magnitude" is hampered by a lack of systematic, historical data.

"There is some evidence that heavy precipitation events are getting a little more intense," he said. "But other than that, I haven't seen anything systematic."

tunities with this particular commission."

HPC has already completed two of the three requirements in order to be part of such a program — incorporating a local historical preservation ordinance and appointing commission members. Commissioners

will have the opportunity to be deemed eligible and approved by SHPO, which fulfills the final requirement. The HPC decided to meet biannually in mid-May and mid-November. This will allow for the incoming taxes and proper funds designated

towards the commission.

Although the commission is still in the early stages of its purpose, Hunhoff knows that planning ahead will ensure the funds are used properly and wisely.

"I have been into history all my life," Hunhoff said. "You cannot get a lot of people very interested in investing much time or resources into historic preservation. That is slowly but surely changing."

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