

## Ringo: Proposed tougher APR standards tough to swallow

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Posted:

SEATTLE -- Venerable Colorado sports information director Dave Plati says his least favorite press release to write every year is the one detailing the athletic department's performance in the NCAA Academic Progress Rate program.

It's a convoluted system tracking eligibility and retention of student-athletes that many fans and members of the media don't fully understand and don't really care about, at least until there are negative results and penalties.

Now comes word that the NCAA is pushing to raise APR standards and toughen the system in very significant ways.

If Plati and his peers don't like APR week in mid-May now, they could be downing headache and antacid medicines by the bottle in the future when faced with simply making sense of the system in some years and possibly being the bearers of very bad news in others.

Scholarship losses for first time offenders, loss of out-of-season practice time for second time offenders and completely wiping out out-of-season practices for third-time offenders are the suggested punishments put forth by the NCAA for programs that fail to meet the standards in the future.

Oh by the way, the NCAA would also like to raise the minimum standard score from 925 out of 1,000 to 930, 935 or maybe even 940.

That equates to much less wiggle room when it comes to the number of student-athletes in a particular program who can become academically ineligible or leave the program or both in a particular year without causing the team major problems.

Proposed APR changes will be just one of dozens of topics being discussed by administrators this weekend at the Pac-12 Conference spring meetings in downtown Seattle.

Athletic directors, senior women's administrators and faculty athletic representatives and the league's chancellors and presidents will also spend time talking about issues recently in the news such as the Ohio State scandal and the suggestion from some that student-athletes should be paid to play.

A healthy menu of league business awaits, such as future scheduling in all sports, the formation of the conference's television network, the future of the basketball tournaments and more.

Colorado has never done better collectively as an athletic department than it did in the 2009-10 academic year.

Right there is one of the primary problems with the system. The results are always a year old by the time they make headlines each spring.

All of CU's programs reported passing numbers this year, making Plati's job much easier than it has been at times in the past.

But the APR proposals the NCAA is considering would make it much more difficult for the Buffs to continue producing such good news.

Through most of the history of the APR system, CU football and men's basketball have been either below the current standard of 925 or hovering just above it, with just a few points to spare.

Raising the standard would likely force CU coaches in those sports to take fewer risks on recruits with mediocre academic histories than they do now.

Six or seven years ago in the early days of the APR system, there was a rather large school of thought, particularly among

coaches, that the APR experiment would eventually go away.

I remember former Colorado basketball coach Ricardo Patton rolling his eyes the first time I asked him about it like he couldn't be bothered.

Disclaimer here: It's entirely possible Patton was rolling his eyes because the question came from me. He made a habit of that.

Regardless, it's clear the APR won't be fading away any time soon.

Coaches in general don't like the system because it makes sustaining a winning program more difficult than it used to be. And the coaches at schools such as CU, where general studies degrees, and physical education courses are not offered, have an even tougher task of retaining and graduating players because the academic bar is higher.

CU professor Dr. David Clough has become an authority on the APR system, having created a spreadsheet five years ago that helps CU coaches see into the future by predicting what the team's APR score will be based on simple math and different variables.

Clough, who serves as the faculty athletic representative at CU, has shared the spreadsheet with dozens of other schools around the nation who have requested it in an effort to be more proactive in the APR system.

Clough recently attended a conference in Tucson, Ariz., where he and his fellow faculty athletic representatives were briefed on the NCAA APR proposal. The motivation is to push schools, athletic departments and coaches toward higher graduation numbers.

The APR proposals will likely be voted up or down by January or next spring at the latest and then phased in over several years if they pass.

Thanks to Clough and his spreadsheet, CU coaches should be prepared for whatever comes their way in three or four years.

And you can bet that even with a decade of APR history at the point, there will be plenty of folks around the nation who won't be.

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