



THOMAS MORE COLLEGE

Thomas More College Official Response to NCAA Decision Statement by President David A. Armstrong, J.D.

November 15, 2016

Today, the NCAA Committee on Infractions ("COI") notified Thomas More College of the results of the joint investigation into a single impermissible arrangement involving the College's women's basketball program.

The COI's report concluded that the College's failure to understand and correctly implement NCAA Bylaws and interpretations governing the interaction between a coach and a student-athlete who have a long-standing mentor-mentee relationship resulted in the provision of an impermissible extra benefit to the student-athlete as well as her subsequent participation while technically ineligible during the 2014-15 women's basketball season. As a result of the College's compliance mistake, the COI has placed the College on two years of probation and instructed the College to vacate its women's basketball victories from the 2014-15 season, including its national title victory.

Thomas More College is a values-based institution that respects the rule of law and is committed to compliance at all levels. As a Catholic Institution, our adherence to rules and regulations is a fundamental characteristic of our mission. Our principles guide our every action. As such, Thomas More College regrets its NCAA compliance mistake and is disappointed that, even unintentionally, it violated NCAA rules.

From the beginning of this matter, the College's approach was to cooperate fully and transparently with the NCAA, identify and accept responsibility for our mistakes, and further improve our compliance NCAA procedures. As noted in the COI's report, when the possibility of a NCAA violation was brought to the College's attention, the College conducted a prompt and thorough self-investigation, self-reported the facts underlying the impermissible to the NCAA, cooperated with the NCAA in its follow-up joint investigation, accepted institutional responsibility when the occurrence of a violation became clear, and implemented the significant corrective measures.

The COI's report also reflects three other important aspects of this case.

First, the involved student-athlete was not personally culpable regarding the impermissible arrangement. Nothing in the COI's report detracts from the reality that she had a wonderful athletic, academic, and personal collegiate experience at Thomas More College because of the values that the College and Division III athletics espouse. The College will always appreciate her contributions to our campus community, well beyond her athletics success, and be proud to have her as an honored alumnus.

Second, the impermissible extra-benefit arrangement that occurred resulted from the College's honest, though unfortunately mistaken, belief that the long-standing mentor-mentee relationship between the College's assistant coach and the student-athlete made the arrangement in question permissible. There was no deliberate violation of NCAA rules and no unethical conduct by any College personnel. Although Thomas More College accepts responsibility for its compliance mistake, the College experience in this case demonstrates that the NCAA bylaws and interpretations about the impact of pre-existing relationships between institutional personnel and student-athletes are not sufficiently clear. At times during the investigation of this case, even the NCAA staff expressed uncertainty about whether the pre-existing relationship between the College's assistant coach and the student-athlete made the student-athlete's housing arrangement at the center of this case

permissible pursuant to a multi-part, subjective NCAA interpretation from 2001. This is definitely an area of the NCAA rules that needs clarification.

Third, although the NCAA enforcement staff received information about a potential violation at Thomas More College in February of 2015, the College was not alerted about the possible violations for another seven months. If the College had been informed about a potential violation in February, it is likely that the situation could have been investigated and addressed before the women's basketball program's 2015 NCAA Championship run. Certainly, the relevant student-athlete could have been withheld from additional competition pending the conclusion of the investigation. The College hopes that in future cases the enforcement staff will strive to inform institutions about potential violations as early as possible, so that the impact of any violations which are established can be mitigated.

Going forward, Thomas More College will position itself as a leader in NCAA Compliance, and the College will lobby for improved clarity in NCAA bylaws and interpretations as well as earlier pro-active communication between the NCAA enforcement staff and member institutions.

Since our founding in 1921, Thomas More College has graduated over 13,000 alumni, many of whom are student-athletes, who exemplify the professional excellence, ethical leadership, and spiritual integrity that are the outcomes of a Thomas More education. As we look forward toward our 100th anniversary celebration, Thomas More College will continue to uphold these values in the classroom, on the court and field of athletics competition, and in the community.