

FHSAA vs. NCAA standoff hurts basketball prospects

[Buddy Collings](#)

Edgewater High School basketball standout Michael Eads dieted to lose 10 pounds this summer and ended up gaining rave reviews as a top-notch rising senior prospect.

But major college coaches haven't been able to see a quicker, slimmer Eads in a game since April due to Florida's failure to be among the states that bought into new NCAA policies that govern when and where Division I recruiters can go to see players in the off-season.

The disconnect has frustrated Florida high school and travel team coaches, who say their players were denied opportunities to attract scholarship offers, and the Florida High School Athletic Association (FHSAA), which has been accused of dropping the ball.

"Our kids got punished. They had only two weekends to be seen," said Windermere High coach Mark Griseck, referring to this weekend and an April weekend during which Division I coaches could attend travel-team events. "There were two other weeks where kids from Georgia got seen but our kids weren't. That's got to be fixed."

While the Georgia High School Association (GHSA) sanctioned two high school team camps that drew nearly 200 major college coaches, major states Florida, California, New York and Texas were among those that were off limits for Division I recruiters during the June evaluation periods set by the NCAA in a plan that involved the National

Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS).

The FHSAA opted out after initially planning to have the Florida Association of Basketball Coaches orchestrate its camps. The FABC did not gain approval as a sanctioning agency and Florida was left out.

"There's a bunch of issues we have with the agreement the NCAA and NFHS made," FHSAA executive director George Tomy said this week. "Our state statute is very clear. It tells us to run interscholastic sports.

"We are not a recruiting agency. We specifically do not regulate our school's activities during the summer months. We just don't do that."

The NCAA changes were made after findings in an FBI probe into college basketball corruption rocked the sport in September 2017. The NCAA responded with an effort to "reduce the leverage of harmful outside influences" in recruiting by restoring the relationships between college coaches and high school basketball programs.

The NCAA reduced the number of evaluation periods during which D-1 coaches can watch players perform on travel teams — which have long been the primary recruiting vehicle for players. It reserved the last two weekends in June for three-day camps in high school settings with "no involvement of third-party agents."

But only 19 states staged certified scholastic events, according to the NFHS.

A number of Florida groups, including the FABC, held camps in June, but they were witnessed only by colleges below the D-1 level.

Florida is one of basketball's best breeding grounds, annually producing 80 to 110 major college signees, according to Scott Golden, who runs exposure events and advises college coaches through his Hoop Exchange scouting service.

Tomyn said the scholastic camp concept created immediate concerns for the FHSAA because it did not offer comparable events for girls basketball and initially included only high schools within state associations in the NFHS network.

The restriction would have omitted players on powerhouse teams from leagues like the Washington Catholic Athletic Conference (WCAC) of the D.C. area, some of the New York City schools, and those that play outside the FHSAA, including West Oaks and Downey Christian of Orlando and Central Pointe Christian of Kissimmee, members of the Sunshine Independent Athletic Association.

A state statute forbids the FHSAA from prohibiting competition between its teams and those playing outside the association. Tomyn said the NCAA/NFHS plan would have pushed the FHSAA "a half a step away" from violating state law and gender equity regulations.

The NFHS limitation was later lifted and some independent schools, including those in the WCAC, were allowed to participate.

"I would never want it to be said that we don't want Division I coaches to see our players and I'm all for bringing recruiting back to the educational system," Tomyn said. "But nobody took that away. College coaches can come to games during our regular season. We have coaches at Friday night football, at track meets, at all sorts of games. [College] basketball coaches are welcome."

But the reality in recruiting is that camps outside the high school realm have for decades been the venues where college coaches flock to see hundreds of prospects at travel-team tournaments like this weekend's prestigious Peach Jam in South Carolina and the AAU games played on the string of connected courts at Disney's ESPN Wide World of Sports.

The NCAA cut out two July weekends that were previously devoted to travel-team showcases. But Nike, Adidas and Under Armour each continues to have its own circuit with multiple tournaments where players are widely publicized by scouting services even on weeks that are closed to D-1 coaches.

All three of those companies have major events in the second D-1 evaluation period for travel teams this weekend. Nike wraps up a tour that included stops in Atlanta, Indianapolis and Dallas with this week's prestigious Peach Jam. The Under Armour finals are in Atlanta, and Adidas teams are auditioning for recruiters in Birmingham, Ala.

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Anthony Ricks, director of Team Parsons CP25

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"This didn't hurt the top 100 [national] kids," said Anthony Ricks, director of the Team Parsons CP25 travel program Eads plays for. "It's the 100 through 500 kids, or even further down than that. A lot of guys are going to go under the radar because there's not enough time for everyone to be seen. The college coaches are in panic mode. They're relying on the scouting services and doing a ton of guess-work."

CP25, sponsored by NBA forward Chandler Parsons, has one of the best 17U teams in the state but lost its shoe-circuit status this year. It is playing this week in the Best of the South Showcase in Atlanta, strategically placed near the three major circuit events in hopes that college coaches will pop in.

Ricks is confident that schools will want to see players like Eads, a 6-foot-5, 205-pound big guard who is outside the national top 100 but not far from that sphere with scholarship offers from the likes of Oklahoma State, Nevada and schools below the big boys in Florida — Florida Gulf Coast, UNF, FAU and FIU.

Eads said he has been told by others, including Pitt and USF, that they will watch him this weekend in Georgia.

It is a small weekend window for recruiters to see players (and be seen by prospects).

"A college coach is going to say I only have a couple of days to get this right," said Kenny Gillion, who coaches high school ball at West Oaks and coaches Team Breakdown on the Under Armour circuit. "He has to go where the bulk of the talent is. Those independent [team] kids are getting hurt a lot by this."

Willie Anderson, a longtime Orlando high school coach who also runs the independent Q6 All-Stars travel team program, agrees. He added that the NCAA changes aren't likely to solve the issues brought to light by the FBI probe.

"Money has been going around since when I was in a college [LSU in the late '90s], and it's still going around," Anderson said. "Those issues were all at the top, with the elite teams sponsored by the shoe companies. And they didn't do anything to change that.

"When you go from five live periods to two you crush the dreams of so many kids on teams like ours that are out there doing car washes so we can travel. Now it's harder for kids on those teams to get seen. The high school part of this could be good, but the FHSAA has to do their part."

That may not happen. Tomy said it is up to the NCAA and the sport to clean up its messy recruiting landscape.

"There's absolutely no reason why the Florida Association of Basketball Coaches should not be allowed to sign off and run something like this," Tomy said. "That was our plan originally. Those guys know who the players are. They had a good plan."

Gainesville Buchholz coach Bob Horodyski, president of the FABC, said the coaches organization is happy to take on the task.

"When people say the FHSAA didn't sign off on it they don't fully understand what went on," Horodyski said Tuesday. "I don't fault the FHSAA. We were talking with those guys about this thing since last fall. They've been 100-percent supportive."

Georgia's team camp drew 150 high school teams (with more on waiting list), followed by a 100-player individual showcase. An ad hoc committee of coaches did much of the legwork.

The camps were profitable and proceeds went to a GHSA student leadership program, which met NCAA requirements.

"It's a voluntary thing and we wanted to provide that opportunity for our kids," said GHSA executive director Robin Hines. "Our coaches committee worked out the details. We signed off on it. It went really well."

Illinois sanctioned six events in June and according to published reports had more players seen by college coaches than any other state.

NFHS representatives have said they expect more of their state associations to be on board next year. But others expect a second wave of adjustments since the 2019 concept flopped in so many states.

Horodyski said the NCAA can reduce the complications and confusion by serving as the agency that approves all June scholastic events itself — just as it certifies the travel-team tournaments and camps that are open to D-1 coaches.

"It's the NCAA's deal, not the FHSAA's," Horodyski said. "Cut out the National Federation and the state associations. I think that's how it's got to go.

"I think the NCAA is going to figure this thing out and it's going to be a

huge event in Florida. You can't let this happen two years in a row and I don't think it will."