

NIL violations will leave high school athletes ineligible under new PIAA policy

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Christopher Horner | Tribune-Review

PIAA championship trophy for boys basketball

Pennsylvania high school athletes who repeatedly violate name, image and likeness rules would lose their eligibility entirely under penalties adopted Wednesday by the PIAA.

The PIAA board approved a three strikes approach for violations of the NIL rules enacted last winter. A student's period of ineligibility increases with each violation, progressing from a temporary ban to a one-year ban and, eventually, a permanent loss of PIAA eligibility.

It's a strict policy, but one the PIAA might not need to use often.

"To date, I have not had any reported violations (of NIL rules)," PIAA executive director Bob Lombardi said. "This is more of a, 'Let's get in front of something before it happens,' so that everybody is informed. We've seen other states do it ... and it seems to work pretty well for them."

Under NIL guidelines approved in December, athletes can maintain their amateur status while accepting money for use of their name, image and likeness. They can be compensated for commercial endorsements, product advertisements, promotional activities and social media presence, among other options.

The guidelines also included a list of restrictions, such as a ban on wearing school-identifying apparel in any NIL-related work. Certain categories of products and services also were prohibited, including alcohol and gambling. Athletes must notify their high school principal or athletic director within three days of accepting an NIL deal.

However, until now, there were no written consequences for breaking

the rules.

Under the policy approved Wednesday, an athlete will be deemed ineligible after a first violation but can regain eligibility after taking corrective action, including "the return of the item or items which caused the violation."

A second violation would result in a mandatory one-year loss of eligibility. After a third violation, a student would permanently lose all PIAA eligibility, with no option for reinstatement.

The newly defined discipline was inserted into the PIAA bylaws in a section covering amateur status.

A number of school administrators and coaches expressed concerns last winter when the PIAA first permitted NIL deals. Only a small number of PIAA athletes have announced NIL deals in the nine months since.

"It really hasn't been an issue, that I'm aware of," Lombardi said. "We have not had any reports of somebody who has stepped outside of the intent of what it is. I think there was a lot of hand-wringing and gnashing of teeth, but it hasn't resulted in anything."

Lombardi said a key reason might be a PIAA decision to ban collectives, which is a group of alumni or other boosters who pool their money for NIL purposes. Collectives have become common in college athletics, but, Lombardi said, the PIAA wanted to prevent any potential "pay for play" arrangements in high school.

As a senior last winter at [Laurel Highlands](#), two-sport athlete Rodney Gallagher was the first PIAA athlete to announce an NIL deal. Gallagher

is a freshman on West Virginia's football team.

Others have accepted NIL contracts, including [Belle Vernon](#) senior Quinton Martin, a Penn State football commit who announced a deal in April.

Details of their financial agreements weren't disclosed.

"There are very few of those students who are going to attract that big number," Lombardi said. "We'll see how it goes."

Girls wrestling plans

The inaugural PIAA girls wrestling tournament will feature four regional qualifiers this winter, including a west region with athletes from the WPIAL and City League along with PIAA Districts 9 and 10.

The PIAA has plans to host its first girls championships in March, but a number of important decisions must still be made. The regional format was approved Wednesday by the PIAA board, but the number of wrestlers who'll qualify remained undecided for now.

The board also delayed action on a tentative championship schedule that will let the boys and girls compete together at Giant Center in Hershey.

In a separate decision, the board approved 13 weight classes for girls competing in junior high wrestling: 71, 77, 83, 89, 96, 103, 110, 117, 125, 135, 148, 165 and 200 pounds.

Officials appreciation

Officials' Appreciation Weeks return this school year, and the idea

championed by the PIAA is spreading nationwide.

The National Federation of State High School Associations is mirroring the Pennsylvania program, said PIAA assistant executive director Pat Gebhart, and will follow the same schedule. The recognition week for fall sports officials is Oct. 1-7, with winter sports Jan. 7-13 and spring sports April 14-20.

"Many of the member schools do a great job with this," said Gebhart, who encouraged schools to post social media photos of students and staff recognizing the game officials.

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