

# Bleak Moment, Bright Future

*The NCAA investigation was a challenge to change.*

STEVE SARTORI



SU officials met the press on October 1 after notification of the NCAA's penalties. From left are Athletic Director Jake Crouthamel, Basketball Coach Jim Boeheim, and Lacrosse Coach Roy Simmons Jr.

Mike Hopkins leads the Syracuse University men's basketball team in both floor burns and clever quotes, so it was no surprise to hear him put the team's plight into proper perspective on October 1, the day Syracuse received the long-awaited news of its penalties for violating NCAA rules.

"The past two years of the investigation were pretty tough on everybody," Hopkins said. "It's in our past now. We'll suffer the consequences, but we'll move on."

And so they have. The NCAA's announcement ended almost two years of speculation and should have eased at least two Syracuse concerns:

- The relaxed environment that allowed violations to occur in five programs—men's and women's basketball, lacrosse, wrestling, and football—is now history. In its place is a stricter system of checks and balances to help deter any possibility of future viola-

tions and make this probationary pox an isolated event.

- The short-term sanctions placed on the men's basketball team, Syracuse's signature program and the nation's attendance leader eight years running, are unlikely to cause long-term damage. The program will suffer at least for a couple of seasons, but barring unforeseen events, it should remain among the nation's elite.

As far as the men's basketball team is concerned, the best aspect of the NCAA's October 1 announcement was the conclusion of the investigative process. Nearly two years had passed since the program had its doorstep darkened by accusations of widespread wrongdoing in a two-part story by the *Syracuse Post-Standard*.

The allegations and the possibility of harsh NCAA sanctions hindered the program's recruiting ability. By comparison, the evenhanded penalties levied by the NCAA—no postseason play for one year, limited recruiting

travel by coaches, limited paid visits for recruits—seem a relatively light sentence.

"The most difficult thing was not knowing what would happen, especially in recruiting," said basketball coach Jim Boeheim on the day sanctions were announced. "It's good to know what's there."

The team survived its ordeal without an inordinate amount of suffering. Recall that SU won the Big East Conference tournament last spring and successfully recruited John Wallace, a player considered to be among the nation's best freshmen.

Far more important, though, was the response of the University and the athletic department to allegations of NCAA misconduct. They used this opportunity to overhaul and bolster the internal mechanisms that failed to prevent the infractions that occurred.

Instead of awaiting and debating its possible penalties, the University took a proactive role in trying to determine and correct existing problems. The University began an aggressive self-investigation shortly after the newspaper stories appeared. It employed lawyers familiar with NCAA jurisdiction, created a Faculty Oversight Committee to ensure no coverup was attempted during the investigation, and hired a compliance director to act as a long-term NCAA rules watchdog.

The University's investigation, which included the entire athletic department, lasted 13 months and not only verified some of the newspaper allegations but uncovered violations not previously reported. It also revealed infractions in programs not covered by the newspaper or NCAA, those being lacrosse, wrestling, football, and women's basketball.

"We wanted to leave no stone unturned, which is why other sports



STEVE PARKER



The NCAA sanctions will sideline senior Mike Hopkins and teammates during this year's postseason tournaments.

were implicated," says Robert Hill, University vice president for public relations. "We felt an obligation to learn as much as we could and to chase down allegations wherever we could.

"Our quest was threefold. We wanted to find the truth as best we could determine it. We wanted to resolve the problem. We wanted to limit the possibility of this recurring."

Chancellor Kenneth A. Shaw, while admitting the athletic program of the past had problems, insists it was not out of control—a statement repeated by David Swank of the NCAA Committee on Infractions. As for the future, Shaw maintains that Syracuse has become a model program because of the steps taken by the University.

NCAA compliance is now closely monitored by the Faculty Oversight

Committee and by compliance director John Hardt, who was hired in April to clarify rules and inform staff, players, and boosters of all regulations.

"We're clearly headed in the right direction," says athletic director Jake Crouthamel, who nonetheless fears the possibility of future infractions involving boosters, whose generosity with recruits and players contributed mightily to Syracuse's NCAA punishment. "We can't possibly control everyone out there who is technically a representative of our athletic interests. We talk about the rules all the time now, at every function we attend. We need to sensitize the community as much as the student athletes. They need to know that not only are these the rules, but you've got to apply them."

—BOB HILL

## THE PENALTIES AND THE PRICE

On October 1 the NCAA announced it was placing Syracuse University's athletic program on probation for two years. Probation itself does not limit television exposure or postseason play for any team. It merely requires Syracuse to submit annual written reports to the NCAA Enforcement Department reviewing its efforts to remain in compliance with NCAA rules.

Beyond probation, however, the NCAA did levy more specific sanctions against three Syracuse programs, men's basketball, lacrosse, and wrestling.

The most noteworthy sanctions concerned SU's most visible program, men's basketball, and here postseason play is affected. The basketball team will not be allowed to participate in either the NCAA or NIT postseason tournaments for this season only. The NCAA also took away one basketball scholarship for each of the next two academic years, and limited off-campus recruiting by coaches for one year and on-campus paid visits for prospective recruits for two years.

The basketball team was penalized because it violated NCAA rules concerning the provision of improper transportation, meals, game tickets, and lodging to prospective recruits, and the provision of extra benefits (gifts, meals, lodging, etc.) and \$50 cash gifts to several players from boosters.

Although the Committee on Infractions determined that Syracuse committed "major violations" of NCAA rules, the committee opted not to punish SU more severely because of the University's "thorough investigation and its prompt action involving those who violated NCAA rules." Syracuse's internal investigation influenced the committee's decision not to prohibit the basketball team from appearing on television.

Also:

- For exceeding the team financial aid limitations for three seasons and not requiring players to pay for personal telephone calls from a hotel, the lacrosse team was docked three scholarships in each of the next three academic years.

- For exceeding the team financial aid limitations for four seasons, the wrestling team will lose 2.5 scholarships in each of the next four academic years.

- The NCAA also determined that rules violations were committed by the football and women's basketball programs, but decided the violations were of "limited nature" and merited no sanctions beyond probation.

—BH