



BY ISABELLA BAKER-JOHNSON
Sports Editor

PRIORITIZING NEW PLAYERS

The NCAA should make changes to the recruitment process for football to allow high school athletes more opportunities to overcome COVID-related setbacks and compete at the collegiate level.

With last year's spring football and 7-on-7 summer football camps cancelled, the Class of 2022 Gladiator football players will enter their senior year with less experience under their belts for the recruitment season.

In the 2021-22 school year, the National Collegiate Athletic Association should refocus their efforts on recruiting high schoolers instead of athletes already at the collegiate level.

Current juniors missed chances to improve their skills and gain experience, which could put them at a disadvantage when getting recruited for football. According to the official South Eastern Conference website, the SEC canceled all in-person summer camps, which provide an opportunity for college coaches to see high school athletes competing outside of their regular season.

Also, due to the lack of in-person recruiting this year in Division I, many athletes turned solely to online networking opportunities during their crucial junior year, a time when athletes gain experience and initial contact with recruiters. The NCAA plans to reinstate regular in-person recruitment in Division I on June 1, which is an important step in regaining normalcy that will benefit high school athletes.

However, the NCAA must do more to prioritize incoming high schoolers.

The addition of extended eligibility allows college seniors to remain on their

team after graduating in order to account for season losses in the pandemic, according to the Next College Student Athlete (NCSA) website. The extended year will last through the winter season of 2022 for the top two divisions.

This unfairly advantages college seniors who have already received a college athletic and academic experience, whereas many high schoolers trying to get recruited would be unable to play on a quality college team at all if they are not prioritized for a spot.

It is essential that high school athletes have every opportunity to get recruited to receive a postsecondary education.

According to an article in The Chattanooga Times Free Press, many scholarships given to high school seniors are only guaranteed for one year. Meanwhile, colleges must also accommodate scholarships for these college seniors staying for at least another season. Such competition against established college players will further limit the collegiate athletic opportunities of current high school athletes.

According to Scholarship Stats, only 8.9% of high school football players go on to compete in college. For the Clarke County School District with a poverty rate of 28%, which is double the national average according to the district, a spot on a college team can provide a chance to escape poverty and progress in society.

It is essential that high school athletes have every opportunity to get recruited to receive a postsecondary education.

There are only a certain amount of spots on college teams available, and the NCAA should direct them toward high school athletes who could use the opportunity to better their future. *o*



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Featured: CHOOSING PLAYERS: In an illustration, the National Collegiate Athletic Association is depicted as a person deciding which jar, representing a type of athlete, to give money to. The NCAA should focus on recruiting high school athletes in order to make up for the disadvantages the group in particular has faced due to COVID-19. Illustration by Frances Thrasher