



# NCAA Student-Athlete Gambling Behaviors and Attitudes: 2004-2012

## Executive Summary

### May 2013

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#### Findings

- **Overall rates of gambling among male NCAA student-athletes have decreased.** 57% of males in the 2012 survey reported gambling for money within the past year, compared to 66% of respondents in the 2008 study. The activity showing the largest drop was playing cards for money (21% played monthly in 2004, 14% in 2008 and 6% in 2012). As in the general population (college-aged and otherwise), male student-athletes engage in nearly all gambling activities at much higher rates than females.
- **However, despite being a violation of NCAA bylaws, many student-athletes continue to engage in sports wagering.** In 2012, 26% of male student-athletes reported violating NCAA bylaws by wagering on sports for money (8% reported wagering on sports once/month or more). These rates are similar to those seen in the 2004 and 2008 surveys. About 5% of female student-athletes reported wagering on sports in 2012 (less than 1% wager frequently).
- **Technology continues to rapidly change how gambling and sports wagering occur.** One-third of the male student-athletes who reported wagering on sports in the 2012 survey placed bets via the Internet or a mobile device (ranging from bet placement with student bookmakers to use of international gambling sites). Many mobile options for playing casino-style games for money are available and a number of student-athletes continue to participate in these activities. In addition, 28% of male and 10% of female student-athletes engaged in some form of simulated gambling activity via social media sites, videogame consoles or mobile devices over the past year. These games are being increasingly marketed toward youth, and the line between gaming and gambling via social media sites is quickly disappearing in many countries.
- **There are contest fairness concerns around sports wagering technological enhancements.** New technologies, such as live in-game betting (odds generated in real-time for participants to bet on various aspects of a game as it unfolds), could present increased opportunities to profit from “spot fixing” a contest (just a single mid-game event or portion of a contest needing to be fixed for a bet to pay off) as has been uncovered recently in a number of international sports leagues. Spot fixing is generally seen as easier to undertake and harder to detect than manipulating a final contest outcome. Roughly 10% of male student-athletes who wager on sports have engaged in live in-game betting. An additional technological concern is the proliferation of websites that offer betting lines on NCAA sports outside of men’s basketball and football, including non-Division I contests.
- **Outside gamblers appear to be increasingly using social media channels to reach student-athletes.** Since 2004, there has been a steady increase in the percentage of student-athletes claiming to have been contacted by outside sources looking for inside information. This coincides with increased access to student-athletes and others in college athletics via social media. For example, while only 1.2% of Division I men’s basketball players reported having been contacted by outside gamblers in 2004, that

figure increased to 4.6% by 2012. Perhaps as a result of campus educational efforts, it should be noted that the percentage of student-athletes reporting that they knowingly provided inside information has decreased since 2004. However, it is clear that many student-athletes unknowingly post information to social media sites that could be beneficial to outside gamblers.

- **Gambling and sports wagering can lead to significant well-being issues for some student-athletes.** Just under 2% of male student-athletes participating in the 2012 survey (along with a smaller percentage of females) met standard diagnostic criteria for problem gambling. Nearly 4% of male student-athletes who had gambled in the past year reported one-day gambling losses of \$500 or more.
- **Student-athlete debt load should be a concern in terms of well-being, but also potential vulnerability to outside gambling influences.** 28% of male and 23% of female student-athletes in the 2012 study reported at least \$10,000 in total financial debt (loans, credit cards) that they feel they are personally responsible for paying back.
- **There is evidence that gambling and sports wagering are becoming more normative among student-athletes.** In the 2008 survey, we observed that 26% of males and 14% of females who have ever gambled had their first gambling experience prior to entering high school. In 2012, those percentages increased to 33% and 18% respectively. Further, far fewer student-athletes consider certain activities (e.g., fantasy football where entry fees and prize money are involved, which is a violation of NCAA bylaws) to constitute gambling than was seen even four years ago. Currently, 57% of male student-athletes and 41% of females consider sports wagering acceptable provided you do not wager on your own sport. Of concern is that 59% of men and 49% of women believe people can consistently make a lot of money betting on sports.
- **Substantial divisional differences remain in gambling and sports wagering behaviors.** Male and female student-athletes in Divisions II and III continue to gamble and wager on sports (in violation of NCAA bylaws) at much higher levels than observed among Division I student-athletes. Whereas 19% of males in Division I reported wagering on sports in 2012, that percentage was 26% in Division II and 32% in Division III (for females, the Division I, II and III sports wagering rates were 3%, 5% and 7% respectively). The most likely reasons for these disparities are differences in educating student-athletes about NCAA sports wagering rules and perceptions that the rules (and potential issues of contest fairness) are solely a Division I concern.
- **There are significant reasons to be concerned about gambling and sports wagering among golf student-athletes.** Even outside the pervasive culture of on-course wagering in the sport, golf student-athletes (males in particular) across NCAA division are significantly more likely to engage in virtually every gambling activity assessed compared to other student-athletes. For example, 20% of men's golfers report betting on sports (outside of on-course wagering) at least once/month versus 8% among other males. They are also roughly two to three times more likely than other male student-athletes to frequent casinos, play cards for money and play casino games on the Internet. These differences remain even when we control for socioeconomic status of the student-athlete. Additionally, in the 2012 survey, 10% of men's golfers claimed to have bet on another team at their school and 13% reported directly knowing a bookmaker.

- **Knowledge/understanding of NCAA wagering bylaws appears to have decreased since 2008.** Across divisions, fewer student-athletes reported in 2012 that they have ever received information on the NCAA sports wagering rules. 72% of males and 76% of females in Division I reported receiving such information in 2012 compared to 77% of males and 83% of females in 2008. Fewer than 60% of men and women in Divisions II and III reported being given information on the wagering rules. These rates did not decrease in Division I men's and women's basketball, where NCAA educational efforts have been most focused, but roughly one-quarter of participants in those sports continue to claim that they are unaware of these rules.
- **Enhancements and innovations in educational programming are necessary to protect student-athlete well-being and contest fairness.** In addition to educating about NCAA sports wagering rules, enhanced and innovative forms of programming need to be developed and implemented specifically for student-athletes, coaches and athletics administrators. To be maximally effective, this programming needs to go beyond simply telling these groups not to gamble/wager, given the deepening normative nature of gambling and sports wagering in our society. These programs should assist all involved in college athletics recognize risk factors associated with problem gambling, provide up-to-date information on the science and technology of gambling and sports wagering (e.g., betting lines are set using lots of data/research; gamblers can easily reach student-athletes through social media), and even promote strategies for discussing perceptions and normative expectations associated with gambling/wagering (e.g., being an athlete does not necessarily mean one has the insight required to make money wagering on sports, as many student-athletes believe). It is clear from the data that any wagering educational efforts need to better leverage the influence of both coaches and teammates. Roughly two-thirds of student-athletes believe teammates would be aware if a team member was gambling on sports; more than one-third believes that coaches would be aware. Both groups were rated as significantly more likely to impact a student-athlete not to gamble as just receiving materials from outside entities like the NCAA staff; above almost anything else, a typical student-athlete does not want to negatively impact his/her team. Considering that roughly 40% of males think their coaches see sports wagering as acceptable, such programmatic efforts to educate need to involve not only student-athletes, but also coaches/administrators.

### Study Background

- Approximately 23,000 current student-athletes across all three NCAA divisions were surveyed during the spring of 2012 about their attitudes toward and engagement in various gambling activities, including sports wagering.
- Similar NCAA studies were conducted in 2004 and 2008 (about 20,000 student-athletes surveyed on each occasion), allowing comparison with the 2012 data in many cases.
- Surveys were administered with the assistance of campus faculty athletics representatives (FARs), who were asked to survey up to three teams on each of their campuses. It is estimated that nearly two-thirds of NCAA member schools participated in the study.
- Study protocols were designed to ensure the anonymity of participating student-athletes and schools.
- A full report will be completed and released later in summer 2013.
- Study investigators are Dr. Thomas Paskus of the NCAA Research staff and Dr. Jeffrey Derevensky of McGill University.