

Conduct Code

DES MOINES, Iowa (AP) - When Iowa State basketball player Jackson Vroman was charged with marijuana possession last month, he immediately was suspended from the team.

Several months earlier, ISU football player Nick Linder was cited for public intoxication. He was disciplined by coach Dan McCarney but was not suspended.

Different punishments to be sure, but both handled strictly by the book.

Iowa State has a written code of conduct for athletes that spells out disciplinary procedures for criminal violations.

An athlete charged with a drug offense, felony or violent crime is automatically suspended from the team by the athletic director until the case is settled in the legal system.

A misdemeanor such as the charge against Linder does not bring an automatic suspension, though coaches in such cases are allowed to impose their own penalties.

All schools have rules for athletes, but most are enforced by the individual teams. Iowa State has been a leader in developing an across-the-board conduct code for its athletes.

"There are other schools moving in this direction," said Bill Smith, Iowa State's associate athletic director for compliance. "We've received calls from several schools about our policy and wanting to take a look at it."

One school going that way is Iowa, which hopes to have a department-wide policy in place next year. Currently, discipline for Iowa athletes is determined by individual team rules and the university's code of conduct for all students.

"I started that discussion probably a year ago at this time," said Fred Mims, Iowa's associate athletic director in charge of compliance. "There are so many pieces out there, it's hard for people to get a grasp on what things are in place.

"Team rules, departmental expectations, university requirements, substance abuse protocols _ all of those things are separate. We want to put it in one central document so everyone will have what they're required to do and abide by."

Along with grounds for suspension, Iowa State's policy sets out procedures for notifying an athlete of the suspension and for the athlete to appeal.

"By suspending the student-athlete, the Athletic Department and the University are in no way prejudging the situation; rather, such an action is taken in order to protect the student-athlete and the intercollegiate athletics program," the policy reads.

An athlete who is suspended is not allowed to practice or compete, but does not lose his or her scholarship and is permitted to use the weight room and work with the academic support staff.

Appeals must be filed within 72 hours. They are heard by a committee that includes athletic department, faculty and student representatives.

Smith, who has been at Iowa State since 1998, said several athletes have appealed suspensions. The committee can uphold, lift or modify the suspension. Its decision is final.

"Typically, the appeal is not to compete with the team, the appeal is to be able to practice with their teams," Smith said.

The ISU code also includes guidelines on classroom conduct, academics and behavior during games and warnings against contact with agents. Athletes are not allowed to smoke or drink while representing their teams and gambling is prohibited.

Individual teams still have their own rules and some are stricter than department policies, Smith said. Coach McCarney has team rules but believes the department-wide code is important, too.

"It's very fair," he said. "It's the only way to go. I can't imagine operating without it. Without rules that are spelled out, I don't know how you do it."

Along with the department handbook, McCarney gives his players a copy of his own policies and rules and said he stresses their importance.

"We all make mistakes now and then, but don't test me. I don't have much patience with misbehavior," McCarney said. "We've done so many good things. We've built it the right way.

"I want my players to understand that they're representing this program on and off the field _ in the dorms, downtown, in your apartment, in your hometown _ and not just on national television when we're playing Iowa or Texas or Nebraska."

Iowa requires all athletes to attend an orientation session at which NCAA, Big Ten and university rules are explained. Mims said those sessions also emphasize the visibility of athletes and what happens when they get in trouble.

There have been plenty of examples lately.

Sexual assault charges against basketball player Pierre Pierce were widely reported. Alcohol-related charges against several football players in the past year made news across the state and prompted a review of the athletic department's disciplinary policies.

"That's one of the things we tell them _ this is the nature of intercollegiate athletics in Division I," Mims said. "It's a reality. There's nothing you can do to change it.

"Yeah, we expect a lot, but that's the way things are. They're visible. They're newsworthy. I could have a son going to college do some of the things a student-athlete does and nothing is mentioned. When a student-athlete does it, it makes the front page."

Mims also said Iowa athletes are encouraged to intervene if they see a teammate doing something that could lead to trouble. Officials even have athletes role-play situations to show how they could be handled.

"We encourage them to take initiative," Mims said. "It works sometimes and sometimes it doesn't."

Iowa athletic officials are working with the university's Board in Control of Athletics and Student Welfare Committee in developing the new conduct code. It's expected to be ready for 2004-05 school year.

"I think it's going to help everybody," Mims said. "Because the processes will be laid out clearly as to who is handling what, if this situation occurs, this is in play, things of that nature. We'll have everything together."