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Jumping Through Hoops

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You’d never think of an Iowa State athletic coach wishing for a bigger paycheck.

Former Iowa State Assistant Men's Basketball Coaches Steve Krafcisin and Terry Reed remember what it was like trying to make ends meet as restricted-earnings coaches under former guidelines set up by the governing body of major-collegiate athletics.

Both former assistants on Tim Floyd’s staff were limited to making no more than $16,000 compensation per year, even though both worked the time equivalent to a full-time job. Krafcisin was a restricted-earnings coach at Iowa State for the 1993-94 season.

“It was tough, but I always ate,” said Krafcisin, who is currently the head men's basketball coach at North Iowa Area Community College in Mason City. “A married man with a family could not have done the job unless his wife had a great job.”

A class-action lawsuit has been brought up recently on behalf of former restricted-earnings coaches like Krafcisin and Reed seeking back payment from the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA). The NCAA is the governing body of major college athletic programs.

Starting with the 1993-94 season, the NCAA placed a cap of $16,000 per year compensation for third (or restricted-earnings) assistant men's and women's basketball coach on the Division I (major-college) level. The NCAA rescinded the salary cap after the 1995-96 season due to a court order.

Earlier this year, the Federal Court of Appeals for the Tenth Circuit in Wichita, Kan. upheld a lower court's ruling in favor of granting the class-action lawsuit a motion for summary judgment. A jury in Kansas City, Kan. will determine what, if any, damages are owed to former restricted-earnings coaches due to the former salary cap.

But according to Reed, any awarding of back payments by the NCAA will come too late for some coaches. Reed, who made more money as a high school coach than as a restricted-earnings coach, raised a son, Neil, and a daughter, Michelle, while a working coach at Iowa State during the 1994-95 and 1995-96 seasons. He is currently a full-time assistant men's basketball coach on former Iowa State assistant coach James Green's staff at Southern Mississippi.

“The bad thing is they can never pay back the stress that it put people through,” Reed said. “[And] the strain it put families through.”

The lawsuit was spurred by current and former assistant men's basketball coaches Jim Rosborough, Pete Gaudet and Pete Herman. All three were affected by the NCAA rulings limiting restricted-earnings coaches' salaries.

Rosborough said the group was organized after the 1993 NCAA coaches’ meetings in New Orleans during the
Division I men’s basketball championship tournament. Rosborough said the coaches were assured at the meetings by then-NCAA executive director Dick Schultz that a salary cap would not be put in effect for the part-time assistant basketball coaches’ salaries.

"[Schultz] got up in front of a large group of coaches and assured us they were going to get the salary cap fixed," said Rosborough, who is associate head basketball coach at the University of Arizona. "About a month later the rule went into place."

Gerald Roth, an attorney from Allentown, Pa., was instrumental in getting the assistant coaches organized.

"[Rosborough, Gaudet and Herman) came to me and asked my advice on the salary cap for restricted-earnings coaches," Roth said. "Right away I said that it sounds like an anti-trust matter."

Rosborough said Roth sat near a group of assistant coaches at the 1993 NCAA coaches’ meetings.

"Gerald [Roth] was at the meeting and turned to us after Schultz spoke and said, ‘Hey, you guys better get attorneys, because this will never go through,’" Rosborough said. "‘They’re not telling the truth.’"

The NCAA’s Director of Membership Services Kevin Lennon said some restricted-earnings coaches misinterpreted the purpose and guidelines of the position. "One of the reasons why the restricted-earnings coach came into being was to provide coaches with educational opportunities to enter the profession, while basically being a graduate student," Lennon said. "It was never viewed that these coaches were going to be considered full-time coaches. This was an entry-level position that exposed them to other opportunities on campus."

Lennon could not answer why the NCAA did not just label the restricted-earnings coach position as an entry or graduate-level position.

"That’s a good question," Lennon said. "Not being here in [1993], I’m not sure why they just didn’t label it as a graduate-assistant position. That may be because the [graduate-assistant position] comes with a mandatory requirement of involvement in classes. They may not have wanted it that restrictive and elected to simply place the salary cap into effect."

Reed concedes that the restricted-earnings coaches’ rule was a way for the NCAA to cut costs, but also suggests other ways the NCAA could cut costs.

"They were holding down costs with the restricted-earnings coaches, but where did they hold the meetings at to determine how to cut costs?" Reed asked. "It might have been Myrtle Beach, possibly Hawaii. They have meetings in exotic places to discuss how to hold down costs, why can’t they have a meeting in Oklahoma City or Kansas City?"

If any damages are to be paid out by the NCAA due to the lawsuit, it is still to be determined how those damages will be paid. The NCAA is made of colleges and universities, such as Iowa State, that includes all major college programs, as well as smaller schools in lower divisions.

"The NCAA says the member institutions are responsible for the damages and the member institutions say the NCAA should pay for the lawsuit out of its own budget," Rosborough said.

For Reed, who has just completed his second season at the University of Southern Mississippi, the trial’s subsequent ending will be bittersweet.

"I’m very much looking forward to this whole thing getting settled," Reed said. "To my family, it will be a great relief, because it was very difficult for us."