

Most players in tourney don't graduate, study says

By The Associated Press

A new study says 42 of the 65 teams playing in the men's NCAA tournament graduated less than 50 percent of their players.

The graduation rate statistics, compiled in a study released Tuesday by the University of Central Florida, also found that women's teams in the NCAA tournament continue to graduate players at a much higher level. The numbers are based on athletes who entered the universities from 1994 to 1997 and were or were not able to graduate in six years.

If the NCAA's new academic reform plan was in place, the teams with less than 50 percent graduation rates would face penalties that include loss of scholarships and a ban on postseason play. The NCAA has said penalties won't be issued until 2004-05 graduation data is included, which will happen in the 2005-06 academic year.

"Regarding graduation rates for

women, we can cut down the nets in celebration. As for men's graduation rates, especially for African-American student-athletes, the dance has barely begun," Richard Lapchick, director of UCF's Institute for Diversity and Ethics in Sport, said.

The study also found an increasing disparity between the graduation rates of white and black student-athletes on NCAA tournament teams.

Two men's teams, LSU and Minnesota, failed to graduate even one player, according to numbers supplied by the 2004 NCAA Graduation Rates Report. Two No. 1 seeds — Illinois (47 percent) and Washington (45 percent) — graduated less than half their players. Bucknell and Utah State both graduated 100 percent, but only four other schools topped 70 percent.

Numbers looked much better for women's teams, where only six schools in the 64-team field failed to graduate at least 50 percent, while 35 graduated at least 70 percent.

Pro Day

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invited to the official combine in Indianapolis. His performance at the combine was highlighted by a 45 1/2 inch vertical jump — the second best of all players in attendance — which helped to boost his draft status to the currently-projected 5th round.

The majority of the players attending Pro Day have stayed on campus to train at the Penn State facilities with speed development coach Jeremy Scott, who helps them prepare for the set of standard combine drills.

"I'm a big proponent of guys staying at Penn State and doing training up there; I don't advocate the pro-training facilities," Senior said. "They have a great training program together, and we supplement it with [other preparations such as] discussions about the interview process."

Though NFL representatives will be present at Pro Day, immediate feedback still might not result, leading to more weeks of uncertainty for the players. However, the courting process will heat up considerably after the NFL hopefuls have been assessed today.

"We start focusing right after Pro

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Brett Senior
sports agent

Day on position coaches and various scouts we've had relationships with," Senior said. "We do follow-ups with teams who show interest in players — setting up interviews by phone or in person ... and arranging follow-up workouts after Pro Day for scouts who weren't able to be there."

"It's premature for [teams] to say, 'Hey, we really like the guy, he's definitely under our consideration.' That gets closer to the first or second week in April, as to who might be on the draft board or has made the short list considered for a free agency."

Final answers, of course, won't arrive until April 23 or 24, forcing the athletes to continue to play the waiting game — but pro day is, at least, an opening round.

Fencing

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team in the country, suffered a setback before Regionals two weeks ago. Its top epee fencer, junior Katarzyna Trzopek, suffered an injury and was unable to compete and therefore could not qualify for this week's competition.

Stepping in her place are junior Andrea Wine and sophomore Case Szarwark. Both had strong seasons and are more than able to step up in Trzopek's place.

"Fencing overall is a team sport," Zagunis said. "If Katarzyna is injured or not, we still have six other girls who still need to do their jobs to help the team win."

The rest of the women competing are sophomores Sophia Hiss and Laura Hillstrom in the saber, and senior Meredith Chin and junior Annkathrin Donath in the foil. The Lions are going into Rice University from tomorrow to Sunday to regain the title that they have held many times over the last decade.

"I'm in a position that I've never had to be in, but I have faith in this team," Zagunis said.

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