



Loyola Marymount University - Athletics

October 2004 - Rules Education

Medical Hardships

In athletics, injuries and illnesses are a matter of when and to whom, not if. When injuries occur, the media and supporters of a college program often discuss the consequences of that injury and speculate about a student-athlete's recourses. Phrases such as "medical hardship" and "extension of the five-year clock" (i.e., extension of eligibility, clock extension, etc...) are commonly heard or seen in newspaper articles or other forums. However, they are not the same; medical hardships and extensions of the five-year clock are two distinct concepts and qualifying for one entails a process and issues different from the other. Additionally, these two concepts are also distinctly different from the term "redshirting".

To understand medical hardships and extensions of the five-year clock, the following knowledge is prerequisite: on the Division I level of the NCAA, when a student-athlete begins attendance at any college on a full-time basis, he or she then has five years within which to participate in four seasons of competition (i.e., a five year clock). Any amount of participation (even as little as one second) in a competition will trigger the use of a season of competition. If the student-athlete redshirts (i.e., does not compete), but is healthy then that is a year charged against the student-athlete's five-year clock but not a season of competition...providing a previous redshirt season has not already been utilized.

Similarly, if a student-athlete participates in only one contest near the end of the season, but was healthy for the entire year, that student-athlete has used one season of competition and one year of his or her five-year clock (the five-year clock begins once a student-athlete enrolls full-time in a two or four-year institution). The only way the five-year clock can be paused is specific exempted cases of U.S. military service, church missions and other specifically designated forms of service). But what if over the next two years the student-athlete successively incurs season-ending injuries? Does the student-athlete qualify for a medical hardship and/or an extension of his eligibility? As for the medical hardship, the answer depends on the circumstances, but, as for the extension, that is the subject of the next Rules Education piece.

A medical hardship is a form of relief that a university's student-athlete could receive after a university's application to the conference only if ALL of the following criteria are met including:

- 1) The student-athlete's injury or illness MUST BE incapacitating in nature...meaning as a result of the injury or illness, the student-athlete could not longer compete for the remainder of the season. This incapacitation MUST be certified in writing by the treating physician and contemporaneous medical documentation must also be provided.
- 2) The student-athlete's incapacitating injury or illness MUST HAVE occurred during the first half of the season.
- 3) The student-athlete MUST NOT have competed in more than two contests or 20% of the season's scheduled contests (whichever is greater). The 20% calculation is computed by multiplying the total number of contests on the official schedule by .20. If this number is a fraction (e.g. 2.4)...this number is then **ROUNDED UP** to the next whole number.

If successful in meeting these three criteria, the effect of an approved medical hardship by the Conference Office means that the student-athlete's participation does not result in the use of a season of competition (the season of eligibility is re-captured), however, the five-year clock is not extended.

For cases of Five-Year Clock extensions, the simple requirement is that a student-athlete must demonstrate two (2) seasons of incapacitating injury. In most cases, this means the student-athlete must demonstrate two successful medical hardships.

The Medical Hardship rule is simple and its application is clear, but it can be frustrating. For those cases that do not meet the requirements of the medical hardship rule, such as a student-athlete that competed beyond 20% of the season only because of a medical misdiagnosis, the institution always has the option of requesting that its conference apply to the Administrative Review Subcommittee of the NCAA for a waiver of the medical hardship rule. To be successful in such an application, the conference must show that granting the request is in the overall benefit of the student-athlete, is consistent with the intent of the medical hardship waiver and does not provide the institution with a competitive advantage.

Suggestions

Consult often with the Athletic Training Office if you have a student-athlete who is injured...especially during the beginning of the season. Also consult with the Compliance Office for guidance on application of the Medical Hardship rules. For specifics on Medical Hardships, refer to NCAA Bylaw 14.2.4.

ASK BEFORE YOU ACT!

