

What Trump's New Executive Order Could Mean for College Athlete Eligibility and Transfers

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President Donald Trump signed an executive order Friday aimed at reshaping key rules in college sports, with potential implications for athletes, families, and the schools they attend. The order directs the NCAA to implement a strict five-year limit on athletic participation and establishes a “one-time” transfer rule, allowing athletes to move schools once without a mandatory sit-out period before graduation. Schools that permit athletes to compete outside those limits could risk losing federal funding. These changes are set to take effect on August 1.

The order also calls for the creation of a national registry for player agents and introduces protections to ensure that women’s and Olympic sports are not financially harmed as schools adapt to paying athletes.

Proposed Changes: Eligibility Caps and Transfer Rules

The White House framed the order as an effort to bring stability to a college sports system that has been thrown into uncertainty by legal challenges and shifting NCAA rules. According to the administration, college athletics cannot function effectively without clear, stable rules on player compensation and eligibility—rules that are not constantly being contested in court.

However, the order is expected to face its own legal hurdles. Several attorneys have suggested it would likely be ruled unconstitutional and unenforceable if challenged in court, a possibility President Trump himself has acknowledged. The administration’s broader strategy of threatening federal funding has had mixed legal success, leaving real questions about whether these rules will ever take effect.

The NCAA’s Position: Why Federal Legislation Still Matters

NCAA President Charlie Baker responded cautiously, stating that he had not fully reviewed the order but noting that many of its proposals align with issues the NCAA has already been discussing with lawmakers.

Baker emphasized that congressional action is necessary to provide a long-term solution, arguing that the NCAA cannot fully resolve these issues without federal support. He said there appears to be bipartisan common ground in Washington, which could help move legislation forward. Many college sports leaders view the order less as a final solution and more as a signal to Congress to act.

The Broader Picture: What the Order Leaves Unresolved

The order comes as college sports continue to grapple with the fallout from the Supreme Court's 2021 ruling in *NCAA v. Alston*, which made clear that the NCAA is subject to antitrust laws. Since then, the NCAA has loosened transfer rules and faced a growing number of legal challenges tied to athlete eligibility and participation. At the same time, broader questions about athlete compensation and employment status remain unresolved.

While Congress has debated possible reform for several years, it has yet to pass a major college sports bill. Key sticking points, including whether athletes should be considered employees and how schools should share revenue, are not addressed in Trump's order. Until those issues are resolved, the uncertainty that has defined college sports will likely persist, no matter what ultimately happens to this order in court.

How We Can Help

Our firm continues to monitor developments in college athletics and offers support for those navigating changes related to college athletics. We assist student-athletes, families, coaches, and institutions in understanding the legal considerations involved. If you have questions or would like to discuss how these changes might affect you or your organization, please contact the Lowndes Sports & Entertainment team.