

Compliance Corner

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BACK TO SCHOOL 2012

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DRUG TESTING

by Brian Hendrickson (NCAA.org)

I kept thinking about how a young student-athlete could find this experience embarrassing and awkward as I stood in the restroom of Drake University's tennis center last June, providing the first athletics-event drug test sample of my life. Outside, the 2012 NCAA Division I Track and Field Championships were in full swing. Athletes streamed into the tennis facility to participate in a process they'd been through several times. But I was here to learn about testing. And the first step involved standing in this restroom, facing an employee from the National Center for Drug Free Sport, and providing a urine sample in full view. But by the time it was done, I realized it wasn't a big deal. And from what I soon learned, most NCAA student-athletes feel the same way about the testing process. For those involved, it's merely a routine procedure with little drama.

Most people can't understand how routine it really is unless they're involved in athletics. They aren't likely to experience the degree of testing scrutiny, the processes that protect confidentiality, or the steps that are taken to ensure valid samples are provided, such as those Drug Free Sport takes when testing NCAA student-athletes. With that level of scrutiny comes a layer of mystery and confusion, and questions are often submitted to the NCAA about the process. So I decided to take a walkthrough of a test that thousands of NCAA student-athletes experience each year, and better understand how drug testing is conducted and the steps that are taken to ensure accuracy and confidentiality. Here are some of the things I learned:

POP QUIZ: "VOLUNTARY" ACTIVITY

- Q: A coach did not schedule any countable athletically related activities on Sunday during the playing season. On Tuesday of that week, a student-athlete missed a required workout and did not engage in any countable athletically related activities that day. The coach required the student-athlete to make up the missed workout on Sunday. Is that wrong?
- A: Yes. "Off days" must be given on an individual basis, not on a team basis. Students cannot be required to workout on their off day, but they may choose to do so voluntarily if they do not get credit for a required workout and understand that it's not required activity.

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At NCAA Championship events, athletes are selected randomly, not targeted: Suggestions about targeting make Drug Free Sport's NCAA Program Manager Michelle Dorsey laugh. "Trust me, with everything that's going on, we don't have time to play that game," she said. But she still hears accusations that testers target specific schools, or even particular athletes, that they suspect of cheating. But the lack of cloak and dagger elements might leave conspiracy theorists disappointed: Each morning, a computer spits out a random number, which is then matched to the heat sheet for each event. If a number 3 is drawn, then the third-fastest qualifier in the heat is selected as the random participant to be tested, along with the event winner. The computer is never fed the names of actual athletes or schools. If the random selection ends up winning the event, then they will be the only person tested in that event. But the only way a single team could be disproportionately selected would be if it wins a disproportionate number of events – in which case it could be considered a compliment.

Discretion is a priority: With so much mystery surrounding the process, it may be easy to imagine the testing staff as intimidating and demanding. Yet when I met a courier – volunteers hired at events to notify athletes who have been randomly selected – I shook the hand of a middle-aged gentleman with a white beard in a straw hat and suspenders. He looked like he should be teeing off near his retirement home in Florida. He was pleasant and enthusiastic, and generally seemed thrilled to be involved with the event. And when it came time to notify a male athlete that he had been selected for testing, the courier waited until after the athlete had finished his media interviews, followed him discretely from several steps behind as they exited the press area, and waited until the athlete had entered a tunnel where nobody else was around. It was only then that the courier introduced himself and explained his role at the event. Nobody saw that the athlete was being selected for testing, and therefore nobody could question why. The courier quietly explained the next steps, most importantly that the athlete had 60 minutes to report to testing but could extend that period if he still had medal-stand or media duties to fulfill. The courier then helped the athlete notify his coach so nobody would question why he wasn't around.

Testers work to make the student-athletes comfortable: Most of the student-athletes Dorsey works with are already intimately familiar with the process. They've been tested previously; they don't see it as a big deal and are usually finished quickly. If an athlete is uncomfortable, Dorsey said, it's often because they are early in their college careers or Division III athletes experiencing drug testing for the first time. Their previous experiences with testing may have been limited to an employment setting in which more privacy is allowed. In other words, they may not have experienced the awkwardness of providing a sample in full view of a Drug Free Sport employee who visually validates that the sample is being properly provided and not tampered. But for those who appear anxious or unfamiliar with the process – such as myself, a first-timer – Dorsey and other Drug Free Sport staff walk the student-athletes through the process. "You can tell if someone's really nervous and you start engaging with them," Dorsey said. "And then they relax, you relax, and it just becomes easy for everybody." In my case, they discussed the necessity of observing the sample being given, explained the term "specific gravity" – how diluted or concentrated the sample is depending on the athlete's hydration level – and the need for it to fall into a certain range for accurate testing. They discussed how tamper-proof seals work and the many steps taken for security and confidentiality. Those same answers are provided to student-athletes with similar curiosities or concerns. But testing is so common now, Dorsey said, that it's often not necessary.

Security is in the student-athlete's hands: From the time I provided my sample until the moment it was boxed up for shipping, my specimen and its proper labeling were under my personal supervision and control. I carried it from the restroom back to the testing station. I selected the numbered label from a sheet of stickers, assigning myself specimen number S006246128 – the only identification by which the laboratory would know me. I watched as the testers separated my samples into "A" and "B" beakers, for primary testing and backup conformation purposes. I watched them place my selected label over the lid and down the sides of the cup, sealing my sample inside. I then watched them place a matching label on the box to Fed-Ex my sample to one of two World Anti-Doping Agency-certified laboratories, and personally verified that the numbers matched before they sealed my

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sample inside. In other words, if there was going to be a problem – tampering of the sample, mistaken labeling of the package or its contents – it was within my control throughout the process to prevent and correct it.

It's usually quick and uneventful: From the start of my testing process through sealing the box, the entire testing process took me less than half an hour. And that included the extensive explanations provided by Drug Free Sport employees. For most student-athletes, the process takes 15 to 20 minutes, Dorsey said. In some instances the process can be delayed when student-athletes are dehydrated and struggle to provide an adequate sample. In extreme cases, multiple trips to the restroom can be needed. But in most instances the delays stem from minor hydration issues, which can raise or lower their specimen's specific gravity out of the range necessary for an accurate test. Those concerns are usually quickly corrected either by offering the student-athlete food or fluids, or having them exercise to sweat out the extra water. "We try to be patient," Dorsey said. "You may have mom or dad who traveled in to see you. We try to balance all that. But the end result is, we need to get that good sample."

Most student-athletes welcome testing: Dorsey rarely hears it from an athlete directly, but through third parties they often hear that student-athletes are glad to have testing in place. In the most recent NCAA Drug Use Survey, 4 percent or fewer respondents reported ever using banned performance-enhancing substances. The overwhelming majority of NCAA student-athletes are playing clean, and having drug testing in place assures them that their competition is doing the same. "They're not dirty," Dorsey said. "So they want a level playing field."

POP QUIZ: "VOLUNTARY" ACTIVITY *continued*

Q: Due to a commitment that conflicts with the team's usual practice schedule, the coach excuses a student-athlete from a required conditioning session that occurs immediately prior to the start of on-field practice. The student-athlete arrives in time to join his teammates for the on-field practice. In an effort to maintain his training regimen, the student-athlete contacts the strength coach and asks about opportunities to catch up on the missed conditioning activities. During his required day off, the student-athlete chooses to perform two hours of strength and conditioning activities while the weight room is open for voluntary activities.

A: Yes, it's permissible for a student-athlete to engage in voluntary athletically related activities at any time, including during a required day off. It is also permissible for an athletics department staff member to provide information to student-athletes related to available opportunities for participating in voluntary activities (e.g., times when the strength and conditioning coach will be on duty in the weight room or on the track). In addition, for students who have initiated a request to engage in voluntary activities, the athletics department staff member may assign specific times for student-athletes to use institutional facilities for such purposes and inform the student-athletes of the time in advance.



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ASK BEFORE YOU ACT!!!!

YOU KNOW YOU LOVE COMPLIANCE FORMS

Are you planning on getting a new car soon? Did you promise a neighbor you'd teach them some of your awesome athletic skills? What if you plan to get a job? Planning on participating in your sport, but not with your IUPUI team? What if someone asks you to come read books to kids and tell them about your IUPUI experience?

Oddly enough, these are all things that can affect your eligibility!

Come see compliance when you:

- Get a job
- Agree to teach lessons in your sport
- Accept an outside scholarship, prize, or award
- Participate in outside competition
- Get a new car
- Participate in a charity event, promote IUPUI in any way, etc.

ASK BEFORE YOU ACT!!!!