Sample Electronic Social Networking Guidelines for Departments of Athletics

The National Student-Athlete Advisory Committee (SAAC) has developed the following guidelines to help your institution prevent problems that might emerge with improper usage of social networking websites.

Guidelines for an Institutional Agreement

As a student-athlete, I realize that because I am an ambassador to my institution, I am subject to a higher code of conduct than my student counterparts. Therefore, in order to preserve my electronic presence*, I am committed to:

1. Posting only appropriate personal information to my profile
   a. I will omit my phone number or address in my profile
   b. I will only list appropriate e-mail addresses and nicknames
   c. I will not include my schedule, spring break plans, or any other information that will allow potential stalkers to know my whereabouts

   a. I will not take photos that would be considered inappropriate**.
   b. If an inappropriate photo is taken, I will ask the photographer to refrain from posting the picture on the internet or, at the very least, to exclude me when tagging pictured individuals.
   c. I will frequently check my tagged photos. If I find an inappropriate photo tagged to my name, then I will un-tag it and ask the photographer to delete the picture from their album.
   d. I will set all personal photo albums to “visible to friends only.” This will help protect me from potential stalkers and will limit the exposure of any inappropriate photos that I may have unintentionally included in the posting process.

3. Monitoring postings
   a. I will ensure that the postings on my “wall” are appropriate
   b. I will not post any message that is considered inappropriate

4. Allowing only friends and acquaintances to join my group of friends.

5. Setting parameters so that only people I accept as friends may view my profile.

   a. I realize that a team is only as successful as its weakest link and therefore I am committed to ensuring that my team does not make choices that could result in team-affecting consequences, due to improper social networking website usage.
   b. If I do not feel comfortable with confrontation, then I will discuss the issue with my coach or another teammate and have him or her resolve the issue.

7. Joining only appropriate groups.
   a. After joining an appropriate group, I will continually monitor it to ensure that the group name or focus does not become inappropriate.
   b. I will not create a group that is inappropriate

8. Using social networking sites in a way that is non-malicious.
a. I will not use social networking sites in a way that will harm others, especially coaches or teammates.
b. I will not use social networking sites to disrespect my opponents.

9. Staying up to date on new website features and making a consistent effort to ensure that these new evolutions do not compromise me or my institution.

10. Representing myself in a professional manner while using social networking sites.
   a. As a student-athlete, I realize that I am an ambassador to my institution, and because of this great responsibility, I must conduct myself in a proper manner while on these websites.
   b. I realize that potential employers, graduate school program administrators, and others outside of my peer group may view my profile, and that what I post may have an effect on my future employment or professional reputation.

*Electronic presence refers to a student-athlete’s involvement in an electronic community.

**Inappropriate content is anything that is illegal, or that your institution and or athletic department may deem as inappropriate. This list may include but is not limited to: partial or total nudity, underage consumption of alcohol, hazing activities, tobacco use, obscene gestures, derogatory statements or vulgar language.

Guidelines for Institutional Action

The intent of this document is not to restrict the civil liberties of student-athletes. It is intended to preserve the use of social networking sites for student-athletes across the nation so that they may continue to utilize their communication and networking possibilities.

Student-athletes believe that there should be a division-wide guideline for institutional action. They want a statement that clearly delineates the consequences for improper use of social networking sites. Such a statement should include the following criteria.

1. We believe that there should be a designated clean-up period after the first infraction before a suspension from athletic competition is invoked. If the student-athlete in violation corrects the mistake in judgment during this clean-up period, then we believe that their suspension should be eliminated or shortened to reflect such action. A twenty-four hour window is acceptable. This exclusion may not apply to severe offenses.

2. Upon a second infraction, a student-athlete’s electronic social networking privilege should be suspended for a year and the student-athlete should serve the full suspension from athletic competition (designated by the athletics department) without exception, as long as he or she is a student-athlete representing that institution.

3. If the student-athlete continues to use social networking websites during their one year suspension, then the institution should consider a one year suspension of the student-athlete from athletic competition along with the permanent loss of social networking site privileges.