



NCAA slaps Ohio State with severe probation

By Vince Guerrieri, The (Fremont, Ohio) News-Messenger

COLUMBUS, Ohio — The memory of the Ohio State men's 1999 trip to the Final Four will have to be erased as a result of NCAA sanctions announced Friday.

But any future glory is there for the Buckeyes' taking.

Ohio State was placed on three years' probation Friday due to rules violations by former basketball coach Jim O'Brien and assistant Paul Biancardi. The university will have to return 90% of tournament revenue — estimated around \$800,000 — and erase all mentions of teams from 1998-2002, when Slobodan Savovic played for the team. He was ruled ineligible due to money, gifts and academic support received while he was at Ohio State.

O'Brien was also hit with a "show-cause" ruling, meaning if he gets another job, he and his prospective employer will have to petition the NCAA. Biancardi, now head coach at Wright State University in Dayton, was prohibited from recruiting until Oct. 1, 2007, pending appeal.

Inside the OSU scandal

The coaches, players, officials and boosters involved in Ohio State's NCAA rules violations:

Andy Geiger: Ohio State athletic director from May 16, 1994, until his retirement on June 30, 2005. He remains on the athletic department payroll through June 2006.

Jim O'Brien: Men's basketball coach from 1998-2004. Had a record of 133-88, took the 1998-99 team to the Final Four, an appearance that is now erased with three subsequent NCAA tournament runs. Won two Big Ten titles.

Paul Biancardi: O'Brien's top assistant, now the head coach at Wright State University in Dayton.

Aleksandar Radojevic: A 7-foot-3 international player recruited to play at Ohio State. After signing a letter of intent, he was determined to be a professional in the former Yugoslavia and never enrolled in the university or played for the Buckeyes.

Slobodan "Boban" Savovic: A 6-foot-5 guard from Serbia who played under O'Brien from 1999 to 2002, starting on the Final Four team in 1999.

Dan and Kim Roslovic: A married couple, since divorced, who befriended Savovic and originally gave him a place to stay when he arrived in Columbus.

Kathleen Salyers: A suburban Columbus housekeeper and baby sitter who says she was hired by the Roslovics to house and support Savovic for \$1,000 per month plus expenses, but never paid.

Heather Lyke: Former head of Ohio State's athletic compliance department, who has been transferred

elsewhere in athletics.

Gene Smith: Athletic director hired at Ohio State in early 2005 after Geiger retires.

Thad Matta: Head men's basketball coach, hired from Xavier in July 2004.

Although mentions of the four NCAA Tournament teams from that era are scrubbed, Ohio State will not be banned from tournament play in the future.

The Buckeyes — currently ranked No. 7 and coming off a win in the Big Ten Conference semifinals against Penn State — might have dodged a bullet with a self-imposed ban from tournament play last year, avoiding any further postseason bans.

"Certainly it would have significant influence on whether the committee would add a second year," said Josephine Potuto, vice chairwoman of the NCAA's committee on infractions.

The NCAA investigation found that O'Brien made a loan in 1999 of around \$6,000 through Biancardi to an Eastern European prospect who was signed to play at Ohio State. Aleksandar Radojevic, the 12th overall pick in the 1999 NBA draft, ultimately forfeited any athletic eligibility after it was revealed that he had already played professional basketball in Eastern Europe.

O'Brien and Biancardi maintained the loan wasn't improper because he wasn't an eligible player, but the committee said it was a blatant violation since Radojevic's eligibility was under appeal.

"The circumstances surrounding this violation are especially troubling because the former coaches concealed the cash payment from administrators at the institution for over five years," said Potuto, a law professor at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

When O'Brien revealed the loan to then-athletic director Andy Geiger, O'Brien was fired. He sued, claiming wrongful termination, and a Columbus judge agreed, saying that although O'Brien breached his contract, the offense did not merit firing.

O'Brien asked for \$3.5 million in lost wages, but the damages have yet to be settled.

The former coach said he wasn't sure what the future would hold for him, but he knew he wouldn't be back to coaching while the "show-cause" ruling hangs over him, until 2011.

"I wouldn't even think about asking another school to do that for me," he said.

O'Brien said he was disappointed by the ruling, calling it unfortunate and unfair.

"We've never cheated," he said in a conference call. "I've never paid a nickel to get a kid to come to where I've been."

Eighty of O'Brien's 133 wins at Ohio State have been negated by the ruling, but he feels bad for the rest of the team.

"If they think what I did was so bad, well, I got fired," he said. "There have been a lot of really good guys paying the penalty.

"Everyone should be paying more attention to the kids on the basketball court."