



## What Happened to the Unattached Criteria?

The new bylaw amendment that passed in [October 2020](#) removed the blanket exception to the seasons of competition (SOC) ruling, commonly known as the “unattached criteria”. As of May 1, 2021, there will no longer be a way for a student-athlete to get a “free pass” to being charged an SOC for competing in outside competition (i.e., non-intercollegiate competition). All outside competitive experience will be evaluated under the elite-level competition criteria.

If the outside competition meets the definition of elite-level (see the [Competitive Experience – Evaluative Criteria](#)), then the student will be charged according to whether they compete in a team sport (i.e., baseball, soccer) or an individual sport (i.e. wrestling, tennis, track & field). If the student competes as part of a team sport, then the student will be subject to being charged an SOC for competing in one competition in a 12 month period. If the student is competing in an individual sport, then they will be subject to being charged an SOC upon competing in the third elite-level competition in a 12-month period.

## FAQ's

### **Q: How do we ensure the athlete is not representing the NAIA school in competition?**

**A:** The rule of thumb is to utilize the old unattached criteria as the guide to ensure an athlete is not representing an NAIA institution in competition. Examples of this include (but not limited to), not wearing institutional gear in competition, not being coached by the NAIA coach during the activity, and the NAIA coach cannot enter or pay for the student-athlete in the outside competition. If any of these examples occur, then the student would be considered to be representing the NAIA institution in competition and all eligibility requirements would apply.

However, these actions can occur and it will not affect whether an athlete is considered “attached” to the NAIA institution: the NAIA institution can transport an athlete competing in outside competition; an NAIA team can feed and house an athlete competing in outside competition; and there is no requirement that the athlete must be certified as eligible prior to competing in outside competition.

### **Q: How does this interplay with Intercollegiate Competition & the new 20% rule?**

**A:** Per the NAIA bylaws, a student-athlete will not be charged more than one SOC (combining both intercollegiate and outside competitive experience) in a 12-month period. If the student-athlete is charged for outside competitive experience, then the student will not be charged for intercollegiate and vice versa.

There is a scenario where a student may not be charged for either outside competition or intercollegiate competition. Using the most common example of wrestling, if a student competes in two

elite-level competition in a 12-month period, they will not be subject to being charged an SOC for outside competitive experience. In addition, if a student-athlete competes in four intercollegiate dates (under the 20% limit for wrestling frequency of play limits) then the student will not be charged for intercollegiate play. Therefore, the combination of two outside competitions and four intercollegiate competitions will NOT result in a season of competition charged.

**Q: Are we saying that if a student is enrolled, they can no longer compete in any collegiate competition on their own unless they are representing our institution?**

A: No. The NAIA bylaws dictate what happens when a student-athlete represents an institution in competition. If the student-athlete is representing the NAIA institution in competition, then they must be certified as eligible. If they are not representing the NAIA institution in any form or fashion (old unattached criteria is useful here as a framework) then they can compete in outside competitive experience, or a college open competition if available to all athletes to enter.

**Q: Does the new rule essentially eliminate the option for an ineligible athlete to compete?**

A: The old language required an athlete to be eligible to take advantage of the full free pass (aka – unattached exception). If they were not eligible, then they would default to outside competitive criteria application.

Outside competitive experience is now the only thing that is applicable and is the only framework that is applied outside of intercollegiate competition.

**Q: What if an NAIA coach wishes to pay for an entry fee for a student-athlete who wishes to compete by themselves (not with an NAIA institution) in a collegiate open?**

A: NAIA coaches can pay athletic related expenses for intercollegiate competition only. If the event is considered to be outside competition, even if it is called a collegiate open, the NAIA coaches cannot pay for the entry fee as it does not constitute athletic related expenses as part of the NAIA team.