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# Rawlings losing freshman battle

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I I never thought the day would come when I would have to appeal to a guy named Hunter Rawlings III. Unless you pay extremely close attention to the sports pages, you've probably never heard of Rawlings ey-ey-ey. Can't say that I had before a few days ago.

Although he sounds like someone you could find lounging out at the Oak Brook Polo Club, he isn't. Nor is he to be confused with a certain Gonzo journalist. And he isn't the heir to a vast sporting goods fortune, either.

But if Hunter Rawlings III somehow finds the courage to stick to his guns, the face of college sports could be forever altered.

Rawlings, president of the University of Iowa, made a major splash recently when he announced his intention to abolish the practice of freshman eligibility within three years. Rawlings said he wanted the policy implemented even if it meant Iowa would be the only school in the country to do so.

Claiming the issue of freshman eligibility has been discussed nationally for several years with virtually no sign of progress, Rawlings said, "I am now convinced that a bold move by a respected institution like Iowa is necessary to bring about change on a national level."

It must be mentioned here that the timing of Rawlings' decree was no coincidence. It came just after Iowa was embarrassed badly by revelations - call it Water Coloring Gate - at the trial of

Norby Walters and Lloyd Bloom.

Testimony revealed that two former Hawkeye football stars, running back Ronnie Harmon and defensive back Devon Mitchell, were enrolled in such wonderfully challenging courses as water coloring, billiards and coaching football.

Still, I was ready to applaud Rawlings' guts. Within the last week, though, things have changed dramatically. It seems Rawlings isn't just getting a case of cold feet. They're more like frostbitten.

Speaking to Iowa's Board of Regents last week, Rawlings said, "I have no intention of taking unilateral action without full consultation with appropriate constituencies. But the guiding principle should always be academics first, athletics second."

While that might not sound like a full-fledged surrender, it comes dangerously close when you stop to consider that the constituents Rawlings spoke of are more than likely from the school's athletic community, which has been squealing since Rawlings went public with his proposal.

The loudest squawks came from none other than that paragon of virtue, football coach Hayden Fry.

The manipulative Fry, in what appears to be nothing more than an attempt to curry public favor, called a news conference and threatened to resign because of the way the reputation of Iowa's athletic department has been dragged through the mud. Fry said he could not support Rawlings' position.

I wish Rawlings would have told Fry not to let the door hit him in the sunglasses on the way out.

But that isn't how it works for the hayseed fans in Iowa City. Their only concerns in life are making sure the watering troughs around town are full and the state of Hawkeye athletic teams.

The sad truth is that Rawlings probably never had a chance from the beginning. I don't know of a president from any of the major sports schools who would dare revoke freshman eligibility.

While there supposedly remains a possibility that the Big Ten schools could unilaterally act to get that much-needed rule passed, that will happen about the same time Michigan rehires Bill

Frieder.

And that's a shame. The adjustment from high school to college is hard enough for most freshmen without having the extra pressure of being thrust into a big-time sports program.

School administrators recognize the difficulties, just as they know freshman eligibility, which has been around for 15 years, makes it doubly tough.

We know that far too many athletes go to college just to play their chosen sport, but at least if freshman eligibility were denied they would have to act like a student for at least one year.

Who knows? Maybe some of them would like it.

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