

# NCAA committees endorse swimsuit restrictions

**Records set in 2009 to stand**

**By Gary Brown**

The NCAA Divisions I, II and III Men's and Women's Swimming and Diving Committees have endorsed [swimsuit rules for 2009-10](#) collegiate competition and beyond that restrict suit construction to textiles or a woven material.

The swimming committees also recommended that suit coverage be limited to between the waist and kneecap for men and between the shoulder and kneecap for women.

The new standards, which must be approved by the NCAA Playing Rules Oversight Panel before being implemented, also would require materials to be 100 percent permeable to both air and water and be no more than .8 millimeters thick.

The proposal comes after 18 months during which hundreds of professional and collegiate swimmers wearing impermeable, body-conforming and drag-diminished suits essentially rewrote the records books. The NCAA committee actions reflect the sentiment of coaches wanting restrictions that would make suits more closely resemble those worn in the 2008 collegiate championships rather than the ones that contributed to 70 NCAA meet records in 2009.

"Our decisions reflect the vast majority of college coaches deciding what they are willing to accept in performance augmentation," said Michigan women's coach Jim Richardson. He provided the technical expertise for an NCAA suit subcommittee that brought recommendations to the full committees after months of comprehensive research and communication with other constituencies, including suit manufacturers.

"The general feeling among coaches was that the new technology suits had too profound of an effect on performance," Richardson said.

FINA, the sport's international governing body, adopted similar restrictions for international competition during a series of

meetings that concluded this week in conjunction with the 2009 world championships in Rome. However, Oakland Athletics Director Tracy Huth, who chairs both the Division I committee and the rules committee, said the NCAA reached its conclusions independently of FINA.

“Our NCAA subcommittee has been working tirelessly since the end of the 2009 collegiate championships and even well before that to get our arms around this issue,” Huth said. “We wanted to develop rules regardless of what FINA might do.”

Huth said the similarity between NCAA and FINA standards regarding the suits likely reflects a growing concern among coaches and others worldwide who worry that the new technology suits that made such a splash at the 2008 Olympics ultimately threatened the integrity of the sport. Huth and Richardson said the NCAA committees’ goal was to get away from the impermeable material used in the technology suits that added buoyancy and reduced resistance. Coverage also was a factor, they said, since the more the suit covers, the more it affects on performance.

The primary difference between the NCAA recommendations and FINA’s is when the new policies take effect. FINA has indicated its standards will be effective sometime in 2010, while the NCAA recommendations are for the collegiate season that begins in September.

Other minor differences include the NCAA allowing a space not to exceed 9 square inches for an impermeable school logo.

“This represents the first time we’ll have rules specifically for suits,” Huth said. “Previously our rules covered equipment and ‘uniforms,’ but now we have rules designed specifically for the suit swimmers wear. We certainly couldn’t have anticipated this being a need two years ago.”

The NCAA committees also voted to disallow qualification for NCAA championships in multi-national meets sanctioned by FINA. Swimmers seeking qualifying times for NCAA meets must do so in bona fide competition conducted under NCAA rules (this would include meets sanctioned by USA Swimming and USA Diving as

well as competition at Canadian institutions that are in the process of reclassifying as NCAA members).

Committee members also voted to retain records set in the 2009 NCAA championships. The decision followed a rigorous discussion about whether this past year's meet records set with the techno suits diminished previous accomplishments.

Sentiment among committee members ranged from placing an asterisk by the 2009 marks (one coach on the committee even said records set at the institution's pool this past year were not being recognized as school marks if they were set by swimmers wearing the techno suits) to allowing them as legitimate under terms that at the time were acceptable.

The committee did agree to include the previous mark for records set in 2009 on heat sheets at the 2010 championships to provide context for participants. The group stopped short of footnoting the circumstances in other record documents, however, not wanting to diminish the accomplishment of any student-athlete.