



## Timeline of CPSDA Advocacy Efforts Leading to the NCAA's Deregulation of Athlete Feeding

The NCAA's decision in April 2014 to lift feeding restrictions on Division I college athletes was decades in the making. The seeds of the *Collegiate and Professional Sports Dietitians Association* (CPSDA) were formed in 2009 to help speed things along, and by all accounts, the organization did just that.

**Jan. 1986 (updated in 2009)**—The NCAA's *Sports Medicine Handbook*<sup>1</sup> provided guidelines for "Nutrition and Athletic Performance," suggesting that college athletes' training be viewed in three phases: 1) *base*, when training and energy needs are high, requiring a high-quality nutritional plan; 2) *competition*, when there is less training volume but higher intensity, and when athletes should monitor weight, learn how to eat prior to competition and while traveling, and rehydrate; and 3) *transition*, after the season when calorie intake should be reduced in proportion to lower-intensity training.

**1991**—*The Knight Foundation Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics* concluded that most major sports programs were "out of control," as cited by a Chicago Tribune editorial,<sup>2</sup> "with too little institutional restriction and too much commercialization." So in an effort to level the playing field to ensure "competitive balance" between schools that had widely varying operating budgets, the NCAA instituted Bylaw 16.5.2(c) "Training Table Meals,"<sup>3</sup> which some schools complied with immediately, but would not become mandatory until August 1, 1996. The rule read: "An institution may provide only one training table meal per day to a student-athlete during the academic year on those days when regular institutional dining facilities are open. A student who does not receive institutional athletically related financial aid covering the full cost of board, including a walk-on scholarship recipient, may purchase one training table meal per day at the same rate that the institution deducts from the board allowance of student-athletes who receive athletically related financial aid covering board costs...."

**2009—The Bagel Rule:** The NCAA enacted legislation that only allowed schools to provide "fruits, nuts and bagels" to student-athletes throughout the day, but did not allow spreads for the bagels (or English muffins), such as butter, cream cheese or peanut butter, which brought about widespread scorn.

**May 2009**—A half dozen registered dietitians, all members of what is now called the *Academy of Nutrition & Dietetics* (AND), gathered in Nashville, Tenn. to begin the process of creating a new "sports dietitian" organization for the expressed purpose of properly feeding college athletes. Within a year, their mission was expanded to include registered dietitians working in professional sports, law enforcement and the U.S. military.

**May 2010**—By a vote of 18-0 with two abstentions at what was designated their 2<sup>nd</sup> annual meeting, the *Collegiate & Professional Sports Dietitians Association* was formally launched in Pensacola, Fla. The CPSDA was incorporated as a not-for-profit 501 C-6 organization in Texas with five elected members serving on the Board of Directors, all registered dietitians: President Dave Ellis, sports nutrition consultant; Vice President Amy Bragg, now at the University of Alabama; Treasurer Randy Bird, now at the University of Virginia; Secretary Becci Twombly, now at the University of Southern California; and Conference Committee Chair Amy Freel, now at Indiana University.

**July-December, 2010**—CPSDA created by-laws, a code of ethics, and a "food first" philosophy for feeding athletes, and received commitments from half of the 14 sponsors that would eventually underwrite them in their first full year of operations. By the end of 2010, 300 members had joined the organization, one-third of them college students of dietetics who had an eye on what was viewed as an up-and-coming career specialty that was finally beginning to gain traction: sports nutrition.

**May, 2011**—191 attended the 3<sup>rd</sup> annual CPSDA conference and symposium in Scottsdale, Ariz., with Dave Ellis beginning his second year as president. For the first time, a formal CPSDA awards banquet was held to recognize outstanding contributions made to the specialty of "sports" nutrition.



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**July, 2011**—*Athletic Business* magazine writer Paul Steinbach published the first of a number of deregulation-related stories<sup>4,5</sup>—this one with then-CPSDA President Dave Ellis—that put “sports nutrition” in focus for readers, comprised primarily of directors of college athletics and college coaches.

**Aug. 31, 2011**—*The Associated Press* published a national wire story featuring then-Nebraska Sports Dietitian Josh Hingst (now with the Philadelphia Eagles) under the headline: [“Sports Dietitians Fueling Top Football Programs”](#)<sup>6</sup> Several CPSDA sponsors who stretched budgets to underwrite the fledgling CPSDA at a comparatively high cost in 2011 said this AP story validated their faith in the organization.

**Sept. 29, 2011**—*The Wall Street Journal* published a story [“College Football’s Last Frontier: Better Food”](#)<sup>7</sup> which solidified the CPSDA’s credibility in the minds of the nation’s 87,000 registered dietitians, but also caught the attention of many high-profile college football and basketball coaches, who spun the story themselves.

**May, 2012**—Just before 302 members gathered for the 4<sup>th</sup> annual CPSDA conference on the beaches of St. Petersburg, Fla., incoming President Amy Bragg (University of Alabama) pressed the Board of Directors to turn up the heat on advocating for more college-based sports dietitians and fewer feeding restrictions. She declared that sports dietitians should be viewed by athletic departments to be as essential to a balanced college sports program as athletic trainers and strength coaches, which put in motion the Board of Directors decision to publish its first position paper that defined “feeding protocol for athletes.”

**June, 2012:** CPSDA Board member and Conference Committee Chair Amy Freel (Indiana University) was selected to represent registered dietitians at the NCAA’s *Committee on Competitive Safeguards and Medical Aspects of Sports* as a non-voting member. Freel would remain in this capacity through June, 2015, having contributed measurably to the committee’s understanding of proper feeding protocols, and validating the ongoing need for an sports dietitian on the committee. The dietitian who will succeed Freel will have a vote.

**Oct. 25, 2012**—Only hours after the CPSDA issued a news release announcing its first position statement under the heading [“Recommended feeding protocol for all athletes,”](#)<sup>8</sup> *The New York Times* published its story in response: [“Some Dietitians Say College Athletes are Underfed”](#)<sup>9</sup> which escalated the discussion about NCAA feeding restrictions on social media, especially among college coaches, among them five-time National Basketball Coach of the Year [John Caliperi](#)<sup>10</sup> from the University of Kentucky.

**May, 2013**—302 CPSDA members brought to full capacity the 5<sup>th</sup> annual CPSDA conference in St. Louis, where Randy Bird (University of Virginia) was elected President and began a two-year term. By now, the Board of Directors had grown from five to nine and membership exceeded 800.

**Nov. 1, 2013:** With special assistance from *The National Dairy Council*, an early sponsor of CPSDA, leading minds of CPSDA and others conducted a study that led to a paper entitled [“State of the Science: Student Athlete Feeding,”](#)<sup>11</sup> which formalized and solidified the CPSDA’s position on feeding athletes.

**Dec. 5, 2013**—*Stack* magazine published its story on feeding restrictions in college sports that was hailed by registered dietitians: [“NCAA nutrition regulations hamper student-athletes on the field and in the classroom”](#)<sup>12</sup>

**January, 2014**—**Northwestern University** football players filed a petition with the Chicago office of the National Labor Relations Board to organize as “employees” of the school. Led by their graduating quarterback Cain Colter, they conducted the first-ever union election by college football players. The petition was dismissed by a unanimous 5-0 vote of the NLRB on Aug. 17, 2015, but the story received extensive national publicity in the winter of 2014, which called public attention to several little known truths about college athletics at the time, among them: college scholarships were not guaranteed; health insurance coverage often ended before health was restored; cash stipends were needed to help athletes



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cover basic living expenses. Ultimately, NU football players' effort to organize probably contributed to the NCAA's decision three months later to lift restrictions on feeding athletes at D-1 and D-2 schools.

**April 7, 2014**—University of Connecticut basketball player Shabazz Napier, who just led his team to the NCAA championship and received "Most Outstanding Player" honors, was quoted after the title by national news media, saying: ["I go to bed starving..."](#)<sup>13</sup>

**April 14, 2014**—The NCAA voted to lift restrictions on feeding, first for all athletes in 345 Division I schools effective August 1, 2014, as heralded throughout the sports media world, including *Sports Illustrated*: [NCAA approves unlimited meals for student-athletes...](#)<sup>14</sup> NCAA President Mark Emmert told ESPN's radio team "Mike and Mike" four days later that it was just "dumb coincidence" that the NCAA lifted feeding restrictions one week after Connecticut's Napier complained of going to bed starving, explaining that the rule had been working its way through the system for two years.

**May, 2014**—Attendance at the 6<sup>th</sup> annual CPSDA conference grew to its largest to date at 325. The conference was abuzz as Sports Dietitians tried to reconcile how NCAA rule changes would affect their lives. Then-CPSDA President Randy Bird held an unscheduled meeting outdoors, which drew more than 100 current and aspiring registered dietitians hungering for new feeding parameters.

**Aug. 1, 2014**—New NCAA regulations went into effect, lifting feeding restrictions at all 345 Division I schools "with intent to specify that an institution may provide meals and snacks to student-athletes as a benefit incidental to participation in intercollegiate athletics," as published on the NCAA web site.

**May, 2015**—Auburn University's Scott Sehnert became the CPSDA's fourth President at the 7<sup>th</sup> annual CPSDA conference in Point Clear, Ala., which again drew a capacity 302 attendees. The theme may as well have been "Jobs, Jobs, Jobs" as forecasts for employment shined bright with the relaxation of food restrictions. More were entering professional sports as well, notably in the National Football League, where ten teams currently have sports dietitians on staff.

**Aug. 1, 2015**—NCAA lifted feeding restrictions in all 314 Division I-AA schools, bringing to 659 the number of NCAA college athletic programs now with unlimited feeding.

### References:

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