Strict standards stir controversy

For years the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) has paid lip service to the academic deficiencies of so-called "student-athletes." In January of this year, the NCAA decided to take a step toward correcting this problem and passed Proposal 48, which already has sparked controversy and promises to stir up more.

Proposal 48 deals primarily with academic requirements for incoming freshmen, although there is a modification to the NCAA's "satisfactory progress" rule. The two parts of the freshman eligibility requirement are as follows:

1) A student must have a high school grade point average (GPA) of at least 2.5 out of 4.0. This GPA must be obtained from a curriculum consisting of 11 academic courses, including a minimum of three in English, two in math, two in the social sciences, and two in the natural or physical sciences (including a laboratory class, if the school offers one).

2) A student must score a minimum of 700 on the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) or 15 on the American College Test (ACT).

The modification in the "satisfactory progress" clause requires a student to earn a minimum number of credits annually toward a specific degree. In the past, a student only had to earn a minimum number of credits from any courses the school offered.

These new rules on freshman eligibility apply only to Division I schools (such as Michigan, Notre Dame, etc.), and take effect on August 1, 1986, while the progress clause applies to Division I and II athletes and commences August 1, 1983.

Proposal 48 has split supporters and opponents primarily along racial lines. Those against the new rules say they will reduce the number of black athletes attending major colleges, with some observers going so far as to say the new standards are racist. Many of those opposing the new rules are administrators in predominantly black colleges and universities in the South. Others fighting Proposal 48 are civil rights leaders such as the Rev. Jesse Jackson of Operation PUSH and the Rev. Joseph Lowery of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.

The chief argument against Proposal 48 is that the standardized test provisions. The average score for all blacks who took the SAT is 684, slightly below the NCAA requirement, while the average score for whites is 925 (the gap between white and black scores has narrowed somewhat in recent years).