

NCAA put Ryan Bowen's foundation on hold

Written by Jim Ecker

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Ryan Bowen just wanted to help kids.

That's why Bowen and his wife, Wendy, started the Ryan Bowen Foundation when he was playing for the NBA's Denver Nuggets in 2004.

They bought bicycles as Christmas presents for underprivileged kids in Denver one year. They helped kids in southeast Iowa go to camps and attend tournaments.

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When Bowen was playing for the Houston Rockets, his foundation sponsored a bus trip from Burlington to Chicago so kids could see the Rockets play the Chicago Bulls at the United Center.

"Things like that are what we really intended to do when we got it started," he said Monday while participating in the Zach Johnson Foundation Classic at Elmcrest Country Club.

Bowen is from Fort Madison and his wife is from Burlington. They just wanted to help.

Things went well until last year, when Bowen joined Fran McCaffery's basketball staff at the University of Iowa, his alma mater. The foundation gave non-athletic scholarships to high school seniors, and Bowen figured he had better check with the NCAA to see if that was all right.

The answer was no, because it might violate NCAA recruiting rules, even though the recipients were not Division I athletes, just kids who could use a few extra dollars to help pay for college.

"We were trying to help youths in sports, and they (the NCAA) saw it as kind of a conflict of interest, which we kind of understood," he said.

As a result, Bowen has suspended the foundation and its philanthropic activities. "We're kind of in the process of going through and kind of tweaking our mission to make sure it fits under the guidelines," he said.

Bowen, 35, starred for the Hawkeyes and spent part of 10 seasons in the NBA as a defensive specialist. He said he never would have gotten that far if people hadn't helped him along the way, which is what sparked the idea for his foundation.

"People helped me out when I was coming up," he said. "When I was in the fifth and sixth grade and we played in AAU tournaments, we went around to the local businesses and asked for sponsorships."

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"I thought, wouldn't it be great if somebody would come to us (the foundation) and say, 'Hey, we're playing in the state AAU baseball tournament or we made it to nationals. Could you give us some help with our travel expenses? Can you buy us uniforms?'"

"That's what we were really going for, not let's start an AAU program and gear them out. It was really to help out the families and give them the opportunity to play in those things.

"Without me being able to play in those kind of events growing up, without those things I would not have been as successful as I was," he said.

Bowen's foundation helped kids in soccer, softball and baseball, not just basketball.

Bowen raised money for the foundation through a golf tournament in Burlington and through his Ryan Bowen Floor Burns Basketball Camps. His first golf tournament raised \$20,000, which went a long way to help kids.

"Even if it's only \$5,000 that you raise, that's \$5,000 more than these kids had to start with," he said.

Bowen has not given up and hopes to find a solution that will satisfy the NCAA.

"We hope we can get it back going again," he said. "We're just kind of waiting to see what direction we're going to go. Right now we're not doing anything. We're kind of on hold and regrouping."