The Times article was widely reported in the media. Several commentators suggested that recruits Harvard had planned to admit now would not be admitted, whether or not they had received “likely letters” (notifications to applicants, primarily athletes, issued before the official reply date, that they can expect to be admitted). But that is unlikely: the Ivy League has specific rules about the academic performance of recruited athletes, and all seven schools share information about their recruits and teams on an annual basis. The league’s standards are predefined and enforceable. In an interview, deans of admissions William R. Fitzsimmons confirmed that no likely letters sent to men’s basketball recruits had been rescinded.

The Ivy League uses a measure called the “academic index” (AI) to monitor compliance. Based on standardized test scores and secondary-school class rank (or grade point average in the absence of class rank), the minimum AI allowed for any individual Ivy athlete is 171. (Applicants with lower AIs may be admitted, but not on the basis of athletic ability.) But the mean AI for any incoming class of recruited athletes across all sports (except football, which uses a different system) has to be within one standard deviation of the mean AI of all students—athletes and non-athletes—at a particular institution, as calculated when they entered as freshman. That means Harvard recruits must meet a standard higher than that at other Ivy colleges, to the extent that the mean AI of the Harvard student body is higher. The system is designed to ensure that “student-athletes be ‘representative’ of the undergraduate student bodies to which they are admitted,” according to an Ivy League fact sheet.

There is some wiggle room within this framework. “When a new coach comes on board, we realize that it usually leads to a kind of culture change within the team,” said Scalise in an interview. “Sometimes you go for a couple more [recruits] so that you can get your kids and your culture into the program.” In other words, a thriving sport might get fewer recruits one year, so that more recruits can be directed to a program that needs them. “That is what we have done [for basketball],” says Scalise. “We have not given them a lower AI target than we have given them in the past.” Instead, the basketball program received a larger number of the total pool of recruited first-year athletes. That has apparently had minimal impact on the team’s AI. “It appears that the basketball athletes we’ve recruited for next year’s class will have one of the highest AIs of any school in the League over the past several years,” Scalise wrote separately to alumni athletes.

Harvard Crimson editorials questioned the practice of recruiting athletes at all. One declared that Harvard should be pursuing “world-changing talent instead.” In an interview, FAS dean Michael D. Smith, himself a varsity swimmer at Princeton and now a member of the FAS standing committee on athletics, pointed out that the two are not mutually exclusive. “Harvard admits students with broad ranges of backgrounds: it is not just athletics, but musical ability that students bring, drama, [a desire to] write for the Crimson. All those different aspects [of student life] are ways that we look at extending the learning environment outside the classroom.” Smith is concerned that there is an implication, in some of the articles being written, that some students on campus don’t belong here. “The admissions process has not been lowered in any manner for students we are bringing in now, or students we are bringing in in the future,” he says. “I’d hate to have our students feeling that maybe they don’t belong here. All of our students absolutely belong here.”

The executive director of the Ivy League, Jeff Orleans, said in an interview that the Times allegations relating to basketball admissions will be reviewed in the regular Ivy League athletic admissions meeting in May, and that a statement would be made at that time.