



**REPORT OF THE
NCAA DIVISION III CHAMPIONSHIPS COMMITTEE
FEBRUARY 5-6, 2024, MEETING**

ACTION ITEMS.

1. Legislative items.

a. Administrative Regulations – NCAA Bylaw 31.3.1.1.1 – Administration of NCAA Championships – Selection of Teams and Individuals for Championships Participation – Maximum Bracket Size – Football.

- (1) Recommendation. That the Division III Management Council amend Bylaw 31.3.1.1.1 (maximum bracket size) to increase the maximum bracket size in football from 32 to 40 teams.
- (2) Effective date. 2024 Division III Football Championship.
- (3) Rationale. The Division III Championships Committee received a recommendation from the Division III Football Committee to increase the current football bracket to 40 teams. The proposal also has been thoroughly vetted among the Division III football-sponsoring members and has gained significant membership support. Because current legislation caps the football championship bracket at 32, an amendment is required to increase the bracket. The Division III Championships Committee believes the universal support within the membership and governance structure for the increase merits approval.
- (4) Estimated budget impact. Approximately \$581,000.
- (5) Student-athlete impact. The recommendation significantly increases the championship participation opportunities for Division III football student-athletes.

b. Administrative Regulations – NCAA Bylaw 31.3.1.1 – Administration of NCAA Championships – Selection of Teams and Individuals for Championships Participation – Principles of Establishing Bracket Sizes – Pools A, B and C.

- (1) Recommendation. That the Division III Management Council amend Bylaw 31.3.1.1 (Pools A, B and C) to combine Pools B and C into one group of teams eligible for at-large selection into team sport championships.
- (2) Effective date. 2024-25 academic year.
- (3) Rationale. When Pools A, B and C were established in 2003, it was important for institutions that were independent or in non-automatic-qualifying conferences (Pool B) had the same access to championships as those institutions in automatic-qualifying conferences. Recently, though, concerns have been raised regarding the reduction of at-large opportunities with the establishment and potential growth of automatic

qualification bids and consequently a dilution of the championship itself. With the increased emphasis on institutions being members of a conference and the decrease in the current number of institutions in Pool B, the Division III Championships Committee believes it is appropriate to combine Pools B and C into one group. This proposal was vetted in multiple membership surveys and consistently received broad-based support.

(4) Estimated budget impact. None.

(5) Student-athlete impact. None.

2. Nonlegislative items.

- None.

INFORMATIONAL ITEMS.

1. **Opening remarks and review of schedule and agenda.** Division III Championships Committee Chair Karen Tessmer welcomed the group and previewed the agenda.
2. **Championships and alliances update.** Joni Comstock, NCAA senior vice president of championships, updated the committee on championships-related topics, including the anticipated recommendation from the NCAA Committee on Women's Athletics that all three divisions consider legislation to move women's wrestling from an emerging sport to an NCAA championship sport. Division III is expected to vote on the recommendation at the 2025 NCAA Convention. The committee thanked Ms. Comstock, who is retiring March 1, for her outstanding contributions during her 17 years at the national office.
3. **Update regarding Name, Image and Likeness; NCAA Championships Licensing.** Staff walked the committee through a structure the NCAA is establishing in which member institutions can at their discretion to participate in NCAA championships licensing opportunities that include student-athlete NIL. The system is predicated on (a) the use being lawful; (b) the use complying with the NCAA's NIL policy (e.g., no inducements); (c) the NCAA does not provide consideration or value to the student-athletes; and (d) the member institution affiliated with the student-athlete has no objections. These four precautions were central to the NCAA's decision to allow its corporate champions and partners to use student-athlete NIL in their promotional campaigns surrounding NCAA championships.
4. **Recent Championships Committee reports.** The committee approved reports from its December 12 videoconference and January 22 electronic correspondence as presented.
5. **Sport committee liaison assignments.** The committee reviewed assignments for 2024.
6. **Division III Student-Athlete Advisory Committee update.** Adaobi Nebuwa updated the committee on the SAAC's recent meeting at the NCAA Convention during which members

focused on efforts to manage how student-athlete mental health is impacted by injury recovery. Additionally, the committee continued working on other initiatives in diversity and inclusion, and encouraging institutional efforts to celebrate the division's 50th anniversary.

7. **Division III Management Council update.** Holly Sheilley updated the committee on the council's meeting at the NCAA Convention, noting the approval of pausing the membership dues assessment for two years, the ongoing evaluation of the Division III Enrichment Fund, and the approval of the men's ice hockey championship from 12 to 13 teams effective for the 2024 championship. The council also approved noncontroversial legislation, in concept, to remove cannabinoids from the list of NCAA banned-drug classes, effective immediately and applicable retroactive for the 2023-24 academic year.
8. **Governance update.** Staff updated the committee on the Financial and Risk Management Working Group's recent meetings and the retention of Deloitte to collaborate with the Division III Strategic Planning and Finance Committee to conduct the previously approved review of the division's finances. The analysis is expected to be completed by April. Division III also will engage in a review of its transfer regulations given the recent legal action in Division I that temporarily precludes the enforcement of the year-in-residence transfer requirement.
9. **Academic and membership affairs update.** Staff reviewed legislation adopted at the 2024 NCAA Convention, including the revised Division III philosophy statement as amended. The revised Philosophy Statement will become effective on Aug. 1.

10. Championships budget.

- a. **Budget-to-actuals.** The committee reviewed the division's 2023-24 budget-to-actuals through January 25, which do not yet reflect the total expenses for fall championships.
- b. **Championships enhancements.** In preparation for submitting final recommendations for the 2024-26 budget cycle, the committee revisited the budget assumptions agreed upon during the group's December videoconference and began a financial assessment to support the priorities in the order listed below. The discussion produced several questions that still must be addressed before final recommendations can be submitted to the Division III Strategic Planning and Finance Committee. The Championships Committee asked staff to continue working internally to ensure the budget can support desired outcomes. The committee will use its March 19 videoconference to finalize recommendations for the Strategic Planning and Finance Committee to consider at its March 25 meeting. Recommendations from the Strategic Planning and Finance Committee will be forwarded to the Division III Management and Presidents Councils for consideration at their April meetings.
 - (1) **Per diem.** Increasing per diem to mitigate costs for participating institutions has consistently been the highest priority from the multiple membership surveys conducted during this review. After considering various funding models, the Championships

Committee settled on a staggered approach to increase the current allocations per travel party member by \$5 annually and for host institutions by \$5 per budget cycle as indicated in the chart below. The committee reasons that the staggered approach provides an immediate benefit while still offering flexibility in the total budget to support additional priorities.

Year	Student-Athlete Per Diem	Host Per Diem
2024-25	\$135	\$55
2025-26	\$140	\$55
2026-27	\$145	\$60
2027-28	\$150	\$60

(2) Football bracket expansion. Membership feedback also has consistently supported consideration of expanding the current 32-team football bracket. The Division III Football Committee has examined the alternatives at length and determined that expanding to a 40-team bracket carries the maximum benefit for the membership and would provide the best experience for participating teams. Because current legislation caps the football bracket at 32 teams, the Championships Committee asked the Management Council to consider approving an amendment in April. (See Action Item 1-a above.) If approved, the Division III Football Committee will continue deliberating the bracket expansion impact on the timing of the championship (i.e., the date of the championship game beginning in 2024).

(3) Championships access. Another priority that consistently emerged through surveys and collaboration with the membership was exploring alternatives for establishing bracket sizes in sports other than football. The Championships Committee has deliberated alternative models at length during previous meetings and during this meeting decided to pursue adjusting the current 1:6.5 access ratio to 1:6 in team sports. Committee members did not choose the ratio arbitrarily, nor did they select it based on what they thought the budget could support; rather, the committee reasoned that the 1:6 ratio aligns with the six-core-member requirement for conferences to be eligible for automatic qualification, it lowers the threshold for future bracket expansion by only requiring six additional sponsoring institutions to gain an additional championship berth, and it would maximize brackets in high-sponsored sports not already at 64 (i.e., baseball and softball could expand their brackets from 60 and 62, respectively, to 64). The committee also recommends that when applying the 1:6.0 ratio to sport sponsorship, the next whole number must be achieved for an additional championship berth (e.g., 52.61 truncates to 52). The committee asked staff to conduct a financial analysis of the 1:6 ratio to ensure this could be achieved without compromising support for the other priorities identified above and will review it again during the March videoconference.

The committee also discussed the access ratios for individual/team sports and is considering a ratio of 1:7. Similar to the team sport recommendation, the committee

requested a further financial analysis and impact before making a final decision during its March meeting. Finally, while the committee discussed individual sport championships (i.e., wrestling, track and field, swimming), it indicated a need to get further sport committee and membership feedback prior to making a recommendation.

(4) Permissible flights to protect higher regional ranked teams. The committee has discussed providing sport committees the flexibility concerning flights to avoid pairing highly ranked teams within a region. During this meeting the committee broadened the goal to “protecting” those top seeds and acknowledged the challenges with the division’s philosophy and budget. It requested additional analysis and feedback from sport committees to identify the sports in which these issues most frequently occur. The committee will continue to discuss this priority during the March videoconference.

c. Sport-specific budget requests. In addition to the priorities above, the Championships Committee reviewed specific budget requests from sport committees that are included in Informational Item 15 below. The committee agreed to table these items pending further financial analysis in March.

d. Additional commitments. Embedded in the committee’s budget discussion were the following assumptions the committee reaffirmed, and are supported by a membership survey, but that do not require specific funding:

- Pools B and C can be condensed as one collection of at-large selections based on membership feedback. (See Action Item 1-b above.)
- Legislation capping team sport championship brackets at 64 teams should be retained.
- The length of championship should remain at no more than three weeks (except for football, which already exceeds that limit).

11. Playing Rules Oversight Panel (PROP) update.

a. Recent PROP reports. Staff summarized the report from PROP’s January meeting, noting actions the panel took to address unsporting behavior in all sports’ playing rules, and discussion about Division III-specific issues regarding the visible action clock in baseball and the timing rule in football.

b. Championships Committee liaison to PROP. The Championships Committee designated Chad Eisele as its new representative on the panel.

12. Selection criteria database update. Staff provided an update to the timeline and next steps in considering a new selection criteria metric. The metric under consideration has been vetted with sport committees, regional advisory committees and select membership groups to ensure it is well understood. Fall sport committees are considering the database in earnest during their

annual meetings in January and February, and that feedback will help inform a final recommendation from the Championships Committee during a future meeting. The committee noted that since selection criteria are legislated, adopting the database (either as permanent legislation or as a pilot) would require a proposal to be considered via the normal legislative process (i.e., the Division III Management Council could approve an administrative regulation to make the database effective in fall 2024). The Championships Committee also stressed that sport committees should understand that if the database is adopted, the window for making any adjustments would be periodic (i.e., every two or three years) rather than annual, and that those adjustments would need to be approved by the Championships Committee at the appropriate time. The Championships Committee will continue discussing this interval when it considers its final recommendation regarding the metric.

13. Fall championships recap.

- a. **Streaming metrics.** Staff summarized the metrics for the fall sport championships, noting that viewership is trending upward in almost every sport.
- b. **Streaming initiatives.** Staff also updated the committee on an arrangement Division II reached with Hudl and NCAA Digital, managed by Warner Bros. Discovery Sports, to stream more than 200 Division II championship contests in 2023-24 behind a paywall, including live and on-demand coverage of the Division II Football and Women's Volleyball Championships in the fall and the Division II Men's and Women's Basketball Championships this winter. Staff noted that the partnership, which was agreed upon in the midst of the NCAA's new media rights negotiations, likely contributed to the new agreement with ESPN that adds coverage of the Divisions II and III women's volleyball semifinals and final, the Divisions II and III men's and women's basketball semifinals, and the Division III women's basketball final, to the package.

The Championships Committee noted that the new agreement gives ESPN the right to produce and distribute other rounds of those championships and that those rights revert to the host institutions if ESPN declines. Committee members expressed a desire to explore production of additional rounds (e.g., quarterfinals) of select championships at a future meeting.

14. In-region waiver requests.

- a. **Waiver guidelines review.** Before evaluating the waiver requests in items b, c and d below, the committee reviewed actions taken in recent months to strengthen the criteria by which in-region waiver requests are evaluated. In past years these waivers were routinely approved, but the committee initiated a shift in ideology over the last year that reflects the primacy of the 70% in-region requirement (50% in tennis) being in both the previous philosophy statement and the newly adopted statement. Actions the committee took were changing the legislative deadline for submission of waivers, which the Division III

Management Council approved, and requiring institutions submitting requests to provide documentation demonstrating that they had exhausted their efforts to meet the threshold.

The committee reaffirmed this new ideology as it considered the requests in the following items; however, the committee also acknowledged the unique circumstances in these requests since some of them fall in the middle of the transition from how previous requests were evaluated and the adoption of new standards going forward.

- b. California Lutheran University men's volleyball.** The Championships Committee reconsidered its initial denial in November of the institution's request to waive the 70% in-region requirement for men's volleyball for the 2023-24 season. The committee noted that the institution since then has taken steps to significantly increase its percentage of in-region contests, though it remains short of the 70% threshold. The committee agreed that those efforts merited the waiver being granted for 2024. However, the committee emphasized that this action does not guarantee subsequent waiver requests being granted under similar circumstances and that the institution should do its due diligence in future years to meet the 70% in-region requirement (or provide the required documentation demonstrating that the institution had exhausted its best efforts to do so).
- c. Colorado College men's and women's lacrosse.** The committee also revisited a request it had tabled in November from Colorado College to waive the 70% in-region requirement for men's and women's lacrosse for the 2023-24 season. The committee granted the waiver, noting that the institution is relatively close to meeting the percentage threshold and had been operating under the previous evaluation pattern. As with California Lutheran, however, the committee strongly stressed that the new evaluation paradigm will be fully supported in future years and that the institution should not be complacent in its efforts to meet the threshold.
- d. Emory University men's and women's tennis.** The committee also reviewed a request from Emory University that it received during its meeting to waive the 50% in-region requirement for men's and women's tennis. The committee denied the request based on the institution's current schedule for both men's and women's tennis falling so significantly short of the 50% threshold. The committee also did not believe the institution adequately demonstrated that its failure to meet the requirement was due to extenuating circumstances.

15. Sport committee reports.

a. Men's golf.

- **Field size increase.** The committee considered but tabled a recommendation from the Division III Men's Golf Committee to approve a variable increase in the number of selected individual participants, dependent on the number of selected teams, to eliminate twosomes in the field and to improve scheduling efficiency. The

Championships Committee had considered this request initially during its September meeting but asked the men's golf committee to check with the women's golf committee to determine its interest. The women's committee did not believe the proposal was necessary for women's golf; thus, the men's committee returned the matter to the Championships Committee for consideration. The Championships Committee supported the recommendation, in concept, but agreed to table it pending further review of items for the next budget cycle during its March videoconference.

b. Women's ice hockey.

- **Championship date formula.** The Championships Committee approved the recommendation from the Division III Women's Ice Hockey Committee to move the championship to the fourth weekend in March, starting with the 2025 Division III Women's Ice Hockey Championship. The proposed formula aligns the women's championship date formula with that of men's ice hockey. The Championships Committee had previously supported this proposal, in concept, but asked the women's ice hockey committee to provide additional information based on its principle that any proposed changes to championship date formulas must be thoroughly vetted with coaches, directors of athletics and conference commissioners through survey questions the Championships Committee approved in advance. The Championships Committee believes the additional feedback received – and the ice hockey committee's continued support – warranted approval.

c. Men's and women's ice hockey. The committee received the report from the men's and women's ice hockey committees' recent joint meeting as information.

d. Softball.

- (1) **Championship date formula.** The Championships Committee approved the recommendation from the Division III Softball Committee to conduct the super regionals on Thursday/Friday rather than the current Friday/Saturday format. The proposed change allows an additional travel day leading up to the championship, which the softball committee believes is crucial since a day of rest was added to the finals site. The Championships Committee had previously supported this proposal, in concept, but asked the softball committee to provide additional information based on its principle that any proposed changes to championship date formulas must be thoroughly vetted with coaches, directors of athletics and conference commissioners through survey questions the Championships Committee approved in advance. The Championships Committee believes the additional feedback received – and the softball committee's continued support – warranted approval.

(2) National coordinator of officials. The Championships Committee considered but tabled a request from the softball committee to hire a national coordinator of officials to manage the Division III softball officiating program year-round and specifically manage umpire recommendations from the conferences and the assignment and advancement of umpires for the Division III Softball Championship. The Championships Committee supported the recommendation, in concept, but due to the budget impact the committee agreed to table it pending further review of items for the next budget cycle during its March videoconference.

e. Men's and women's tennis.

(1) Selection criteria. The Championships Committee considered but tabled the request from the men's and women's tennis committees to change the current criterion of "win-loss percentage vs. last 50% of the season" to "consider all primary criteria vs. last 50% of the season." The Championships Committee did not question the merits of the proposal but thought it prudent to table the request until a recommendation regarding the proposed selection criteria database noted in Informational Item 12 above is finalized.

(2) Automatic qualifier deadline. The Championships Committee did not support the request from the tennis committees to require all AQ conferences to complete their championships by 11 p.m. the Saturday before selections. The Championships Committee noted that the AQ deadlines are legislated for all sports and did not believe an exception for tennis was warranted. However, the committee sympathized with the score-reporting challenges the tennis committees face that affect selections (scores are reported through the International Tennis Association rather than through the NCAA score-reporting system) and asked staff to continue working to incorporate tennis into the NCAA score-reporting system to ease logistics for the tennis committees.

(3) Championships schedule format. The Championships Committee considered but tabled the requests from the tennis committees to remove the day off (currently the practice day for individual competition) between the team finals and start of the individual competition, and to have the individual competition take place over four days as opposed to three. The Championships Committee supported the recommendation, in concept, but due to the budget impact the committee agreed to table it pending further review of items for the next budget cycle during its March videoconference.

(4) Officials' fees increase. The Championships Committee also tabled the request to increase officials' fees at the regional and national championships pending the budget review process. The committee also asked for additional information regarding fees for all three divisions.

f. Wrestling.

(1) Championship field size expansion. The Championships Committee considered but tabled the request from the wrestling committees to increase the number of participants at the wrestling championships (finals site) from 180 to 210. The increase would also necessitate a seventh regional qualifying site. The Championships Committee supported the recommendation, in concept, but due to the budget impact the committee agreed to table it pending further review of items for the next budget cycle during its March videoconference.

(2) Number of officials. The Championships Committee also tabled the request to increase the number of officials at the finals site by four (two additional on-mat officials and two off-mat replay officials) pending on the budget review process.

16. Future meeting/videoconference dates.

- a. March 19, 11 a.m.-12:30 p.m. (monthly videoconference).
- b. April 23, 11 a.m.-12:30 p.m. (monthly videoconference).
- c. May 14, 11 a.m.-12:30 p.m. (monthly videoconference).
- d. June 17-18 (meeting via videoconference).
- e. July 16, 11 a.m.-12:30 p.m. (monthly videoconference; tentative).
- f. August 20, 11 a.m.-12:30 p.m. (monthly videoconference).
- g. August 29 (tentative; championship bids review)
- h. September 8-10 (in-person meeting; Indianapolis; will include meeting with sport committee chairs)
- i. February 3-4, 2025 (in-person meeting; Indianapolis)

Committee Chair: Karen Tessmer, Worcester State University
Staff Liaisons: Laura Peterson-Mlynski, Championships and Alliances
J.P. Williams, Championships and Alliances

NCAA Division III Championships Committee February 5-6, 2024, Meeting	
Attendees:	
Renee Bostic, State University of New York at New Paltz.	
Jason Doviak, Alfred State University.	
Chad Eisele, Hampden-Sydney College.	
Maureen Harty, College Conference of Illinois & Wisconsin.	
Shannon Howley, Montclair State University.	
Duey Naatz, University of Wisconsin-Stout.	
Adaobi Nebuwa, Colby College.	

Holly Sheilley, Transylvania University.
Sara Shoffner, Huntingdon College.
Karen Tessmer, Worcester State University.
Leonard Trevino, Chatham University.
Jason Verdugo, University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire.
Absentees:
None.
Guests in Attendance:
Gary Brown, NCAA Contractor (via videoconference).
NCAA Staff Support in Attendance:
Laura Peterson-Mlynski, Championships and Alliances.
J.P. Williams, Championships and Alliances.
Other NCAA Staff Members in Attendance:
Mark Aiken, Joni Comstock, Beatrice Currie, David Clendenin, Lindsey Eldred, Nate Flannery, Margaret Gaines, Caleb Kolby, Chelsea Lamberty, Victoria Lipscomb, Louise McCleary, Jeff Myers, Bill Regan, Ryan Richardson, Rachel Seewald and Mickie Spears.