



**REPORT OF THE
NCAA DIVISION I WOMEN'S BASKETBALL COMMITTEE
JULY 8-10, 2025, MEETING**

ACTION ITEMS.

1. Legislative items.

- **Automatic qualifiers.**

1. Recommendation. The committee recommends the NCAA Division I Women's Basketball Oversight Committee approve the 31 eligible conferences for automatic qualification and 37 schools eligible for an at-large qualification for the 2026 championship. The following 31 conferences shall receive automatic qualification in the 2025 championship: America East Conference, American Athletic Conference, Atlantic Coast Conference, ASUN Conference, Atlantic 10 Conference, Big East Conference, Big Sky Conference, Big South Conference, Big Ten Conference, Big 12 Conference, Big West Conference, Coastal Athletic Conference, Conference USA, Horizon League, The Ivy League, Metro Atlantic Athletic Conference, Mid-American Conference, Mid-Eastern Athletic Conference, Missouri Valley Conference, Mountain West Conference, Northeast Conference, Ohio Valley Conference, Patriot League, Southeastern Conference, Southern Conference, Southland Conference, Southwestern Athletic Conference, Sun Belt Conference, The Summit League, West Coast Conference and Western Athletic Conference.
2. Effective date. Immediate.
3. Rationale. Provide all 31 conferences that sponsor Division I women's basketball eligibility as an automatic qualifier for the championship and all remaining 37 berths in the 68-team tournament as at-large qualification.
4. Estimated budget impact. None.
5. Student-athlete impact. None.

2. Nonlegislative items.

- **Team replacement policy.**

1. Recommendation. The committee recommends the Division I Women's Basketball Oversight Committee approve the team replacement policy for the 2026 championship.
2. Effective date. Immediate.
3. Rationale. The team replacement policy was developed considering the possibility of unforeseen circumstances impacting the championship fields. This policy will be



implemented in accordance with the terms set forth when, despite its best efforts, a team within the championship field is impeded or hindered from participating in the event for reasons beyond its control.

4. Estimated budget impact. None.
5. Student-athlete impact. None.

INFORMATIONAL ITEMS.

1. **Welcome, introductions and review of meeting schedule.** The committee reviewed the meeting schedule and provided a brief overview of the agenda.
2. **Approval of committee meeting report.** The committee approved the June 17 videoconference report.
3. **Mission statement and conflict of interest policy.** The committee reviewed the mission statement, conflict of interest, confidentiality of committee business and the speaking agent policy were reviewed.
4. **Basketball leadership updates.**
 - a. **Senior vice president of basketball update.** Dan Gavitt provided an update on future tournament consideration discussions and timeline.
 - b. **Vice president of women's basketball update.** The committee received a women's basketball staffing update, highlighting the hiring of Emily Zimmerman to backfill the coordinator position overseeing student-athlete experience and championship lodging program, as well as welcoming Kodi Brenner, 2025-26 NCAA postgraduate internship program participant assigned to women's basketball.

NCAA and women's basketball goal alignment was emphasized citing the women's basketball key commitments of the game, the championship and the brand supporting the NCAA's overarching business plan to grow the fan base, grow the college sports ecosystem and revenue generation. Key women's basketball successes for 2024-25 were identified including the inaugural year of the Division I women's basketball performance fund, revenue generation, ticket sales and attendance, first year of the new ESPN broadcast agreement, team selection criteria and NET education, strategic communications, championship operations, enhancements and adjustments responsive to membership feedback. Key areas of focus for the future include future tournament considerations, championship format, site selection processes, national officiating program initiatives and goals, execution and enhancement of championship operations and continued growth of fan base.

5. **2028 Women's Final Four and women's basketball joint championship concepts.** The committee received a presentation of innovative concepts from business performance management. Additional input and evaluation will be gathered before, and the committee will continue discussion of these concepts at future meetings.
6. **Preliminary round format review.** The committee received a presentation of format concepts for the first and second rounds and regional round from Business Performance Management. Additional input and evaluation will be gathered and the committee will continue discussion of these concepts at future meetings.
7. **Strategic investments.** The committee approved the implementation of strategic investments to offer student-athlete lounges and the family travel program at regional rounds effective for the 2026 championship. Their approval is contingent upon either parallel approval by the Division I men's basketball committee or further joint discussion to ensure alignment. The committee cited funding commitments and elevation of experiences, with a focus on areas of student-athlete impact, are essential to maintaining the high-quality experience expected for this championship. Their approval the proposed policy change, contingent upon either parallel approval by the MBB committee or further joint discussion to ensure alignment.
8. **Review and future planning of national officiating program.** The committee received an annual update on the national officiating program. The two main areas of focus were the championship and education, training and development of officials. Data from the past five years on demographics, performance and the number of new officials in the championship was shared. An overview of the regional advisor program which includes the evaluation process of officials was discussed. Eligibility requirements, summer camps and fall clinics were highlighted. Future areas of focus for the 2025-26 season were outlined along with the role conferences play in improving the national officiating program.
9. **Playing rules update.** The committee received an update on the women's basketball playing rule changes and points of emphasis for the 2025-2026 season.
10. **ESPN update.** ESPN provided a review of the viewership ratings for the 2025 championship and regular season highlighting the continued growth of the sport of women's basketball. The sport has gained nearly 20 million fans over the last few seasons. One key impact for the 24-25 season is the stars of the game. Cross-platform consumption was down year-over-year but the growth over 2023 is strong.

ESPN also discussed plans for the 2025-2026 regular season coverage and post-season coverage inclusive of the championship. ESPN programming discussed the top 16 reveal shows and when they plan to schedule those reveals. As a new feature, the committee, with support from ESPN, will publicly announce the top 16 seeds for the 2026 championship on Saturday, March 14, the day before Selection Sunday. This will allow additional time for those top 16 seeded hosts and tournament operations to start preparations for the championship. On the early top 16 reveal, the top 16 schools

will be provided in alphabetical order. Exact time for the early reveal March 14 with ESPN is still to be determined. The final bracket and true seed order, 1-68 for the entire tournament field, will be provided publicly on Selection Sunday as it has been in previous years. Additionally, the committee took action to approve losing head coach interviews in the locker room area as optional at all rounds. This opt-in by teams will be added to the existing ESPN access form that teams must complete throughout the championship.

ESPN production discussed their new leadership team, increased production value in regular season prime games and the upcoming Armed Forces Classic. For post-season, they discussed continued investment in the Women's Final Four and enhanced production value in regional coverage.

11. Sponsorship update.

- a. CBS/TNT Sports sponsorship business update.** The corporate partner program was reviewed as well as a full recap of NCAA corporate partner involvement for the 2025 championship. Highlights included partner marketing, activations at ancillary events and creative.
- b. ESPN sales sponsorship update.** For the first time, ESPN sales and marketing leads presented on their structure, efforts around women's sports as a whole and specific successes around the 2025 DI women's basketball championship. Highlights were a sold-out tournament for advertising sales, record of completed tournament challenge bracket completions, successful new selling strategy for round-by-round sponsorship and surround coverage investment by sponsors (e.g. alternate telecast, Elle Duncan show, wrap-up show, etc.).
- c. Familiarization meeting and tour preview.** An overview regarding the upcoming corporate partners and champions familiarization tour scheduled for September in Phoenix was shared with the committee.

12. Team selection criteria/priorities, NCAA Evaluation Tool and team sheets. The committee took action to add the Wins Above Bubble (WAB) evaluation metric to the championship selection criteria/priorities, noting that WAB will provide a resume-based metric that shows how many more, or fewer, wins a team has against its schedule versus what a bubble team would expect to have against the same schedule. The WAB metric uses NET as the basis for opponent strength, with the reference "bubble team" being defined as a team ranked 45th in NET based on a study of recent women's basketball seasons. The daily updated WAB metric, also currently referenced by the Division I men's basketball committee, will be added to the respective team sheets referenced by the committee that will be made public each day beginning December 1.

With the addition of WAB, the committee team selection criteria/priorities for 2025-26 will include 1) bad losses 2) common opponents 3) competitive in losses 4) early performance versus late performance 5) head-to-head 6) NET ranking 7) observable component 8) overall record 9) regional rankings 10) significant wins 11) strength of schedule and 12) Wins Above Bubble ranking.

- 13. Evolution of regional advisory committees.** The committee discussed and reviewed the RAC program. RAC virtual training session will take place in early January and RAC pre-ranking virtual calls and voting deadlines will be scheduled for late January, February and early March. Committee members will be assigned to each of the five regions to assist with each pre-ranking virtual call.
- 14. Review of selection, seeding and bracketing policies and procedures.** The committee reviewed the 2025 selection, seeding, and bracketing policies and procedures. Policies and procedures for the 2026 championship will be discussed and approved at a later meeting.
- 15. Review of team replacement policy.** The committee reviewed the team replacement policy and approved the recommended edits to dates for the 2026 championship. Since the policy is for NCAA basketball, the men's basketball committee is also reviewing the policy to take action and the policy will also need to be approved by the men's and women's basketball oversight committees respectively.
- 16. Conference related matters.** The committee took action to approve the 31 conferences eligible for automatic qualification and 37 schools eligible for an at-large qualification in the 2026 championship.
- 17. Division I governance topics.** The committee received an update by the governance staff on implementation of the women's basketball revenue distribution fund and Division I governance structure related to basketball.
- 18. Office of legal affairs update.** The committee received an update on progress with the House settlement and discussed developments related to state-specific legal matters.
- 19. Championship finance.** The committee took action to approve the host honorarium for the University of South Florida's role as host of the 2025 Women's Final Four in Tampa Bay.
- 20. Ticketing.** The ticket revenue for all rounds of the 2025 championship was shared with the committee. A small increase in face value ticket revenue over the 2024 championship was noted. Women's Final Four revenue was up 27.56% over 2024. The committee reviewed the pricing road map and approved the 2026 championship ticket pricing for regionals and Women's Final Four.

21. Championship operations areas of focus. The committee reviewed team feedback themes from 2022 through 2024 championships and resolution or enhancements implemented in response to this feedback. Next steps include a review of the 2025 championship team feedback themes and to provide an update to membership outlining key enhancements, policy changes and responses to recurring feedback themes to show value of feedback. This will demonstrate the committee's continued commitment to transparency and responsiveness, reinforce the value of team input and ensure that membership is informed of how their feedback directly shapes improvements.

Championship operations topics were identified for further discussion and have been assigned to the games management subcommittee to review and provide recommendations to the full committee. Some key topics that will be discussed include bench size, coach pregame handshakes, team meals, cooling off period, conference office seating, non-playing participant seating, team credential numbers, travel policies and technology on the bench.

22. Women's Final Four team experiences. The committee reviewed and discussed Women's Final Four team experiences and took action to remove red carpet arrivals for the 2026 Women's Final Four. The committee reaffirmed the value of Salute as a meaningful experience for student-athletes both to celebrate their achievements on the court and to highlight the distinctive character and hospitality of the host city, reinforcing a sense of pride and recognition at a national level.

23. Failure to adhere to policy and misconduct areas of emphasis. Due to time constraints this topic has been moved to a future meeting.

24. Enterprise risk management update. The committee received an overview of the social media monitoring during the 2025 championship. To support the NCAA's sports betting strategy the committee discussed introducing player availability reporting as a safeguard for student-athlete well-being and competition integrity. Reporting aims to reduce the risk of bettors seeking insider information on player status, especially during high-profile events like March Madness. The committee will continue their review and discussion at future meetings.

25. 2026 Women's Final Four Phoenix local organizing committee update. Arizona major events committee presented an overview of what can be expected for the 2026 Women's Final Four in Phoenix. This update included an overview of government services, citywide transportation, Women's Final Four campus, PHX Arena, lodging program and proposed ancillary event venues. The 2026 Women's Final Four will mark the first time that Phoenix has hosted the Women's Final Four.

26. Selection of committee leadership. The committee took action to select committee member, Liz Darger, as the vice chair of the women's basketball committee for 2025-26 and committee chair for 2026-2027. Amanda Braun will serve as committee chair through the 2025-26 academic year.

27. Committee composition. An overview of the current committee composition was provided. It was noted there will be four vacancies after the 2025-26 academic year.

28. 2025-26 subcommittee assignments. The 2025-26 subcommittee assignments were shared with the committee with the addition of new chairs appointed for the site selection and games management subcommittees.

29. Communication strategy. The communication strategy was presented to share the outcomes of the summer meeting publicly and with key stakeholders.

30. Future meeting topics. The committee reviewed topics that will be discussed at the upcoming joint committee meeting in August. These topics include discussion about future tournament considerations, a report from each committee's respective summer meeting and championship site selection process update.

31. Future meetings schedule. The committee will meet next on August 4 for the Division I men's and women's basketball committees joint videoconference.

32. Other business.

33. Adjournment.

Committee Chair: Derita Dawkins, University of Arkansas, Fayetteville

Staff Liaison(s): Meredith Cleaver, Women's Basketball

Lynn Holzman, Women's Basketball

NCAA Division I Women's Basketball Committee July 8-10, 2025, Meeting	
Attendees:	
Amanda Braun, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.	
Vicky Chun, Yale University.	
Liz Darger, Brigham Young University.	
Derita Dawkins, University of Arkansas, Fayetteville.	
Amy Folan, Central Michigan University.	
Josh Heird, University of Louisville.	
Jeff Konya, San Jose State University.	
Marvin Lewis, George Mason University.	
Jill Redmond, Missouri Valley Conference.	
Ashleigh Simmons, Western Carolina University.	
Lynn Tighe, Villanova University.	
Absentees:	
None.	
Guests in Attendance:	

Meg Aronowitz, ESPN; Kerry Callahan, ESPN; Penny Davis, National Coordinator of Officials; Devron Edwards, CBS/TNT Sports; Chip Johnson, CBS/TNT Sports; Sharon Katz, ESPN; Candice Lee, University of Vanderbilt; Dan Margulis, ESPN; Jay Parry, Arizona Major Events Committee; Alok Pattani, NET Consultant; Katie Roth, ESPN.

NCAA Staff Liaison (or Staff Support if subcommittee) in Attendance:

Meredith Cleaver and Lynn Holzman.

Other NCAA Staff Members in Attendance:

Lynne Andrew, Scott Bearby, Greg Bowder, Jessie Carmack, Jennifer Fraser, Dan Gavitt, Brian Higgins, Rachel Kay, Josh Logan, Ellen Lucey, Rick Nixon, Binh Nguyen, Amy Reis, Rachel Seewald, Natalie Steger, Andy Supergan, Mikaela Topper, Demetria Woodard.