



**REPORT OF THE  
NCAA DIVISION II FOOTBALL COMMITTEE  
FEBRUARY 12-13, 2024, MEETING**

**KEY ITEMS.**

1. **Division II Conference Commissioners Association (D2 CCA) feedback.** The committee is seeking feedback from the D2 CCA on three topics: (1) Whether the D2 CCA would prioritize possible bracket expansion to 32 teams over restructuring the 28-team bracket so that regionalization ends at the time of selections and changing the priorities of the bracketing principles to provide for a more competitive bracket; (2) Whether the D2 CCA stance on the referral to push the championship game back into January to align with the FCS championship game changes based on the week zero legislation recently adopted at the NCAA Convention; and (3) Feedback as to why the D2 CCA believes any requests related to possible bracket expansion, championship date formula changes, and/or possible changes to bracketing principles and priorities should be approved outside of the triennial budgeting process. (See Informational Item 21).
2. **Officiating.** The committee is recommending allowing conferences to assign the same number of officials in the playoffs as they do for regular-season games. (See Action Item).

**ACTION ITEMS.**

**1. Legislative items.**

- None.

**2. Nonlegislative items.**

- **Number of game officials used during the championship.**
  - a. Recommendation. Allow conferences to assign the same number of officials in the playoffs as they do for regular-season games.
  - b. Effective date. 2024 championship.
  - c. Rationale. Five conferences currently use eight-person crews during the regular season; however, during the championship all games are officiated by seven people with an alternate official being provided on site. The committee recommends allowing any conference that officiates with eight people during the regular season to be allowed to do so during the championship. In this situation, the alternate official would work in the game, and there would not be an additional alternate official assigned to this game. If an injury were to occur during the game, the crew would just officiate the remainder of the game with seven officials. This should continue to improve the officiating since these crews are already accustomed to eight-person officiating mechanics, so using a different system in the postseason could inadvertently introduce unwanted issues. The chance for an officiating mechanics error being made also increases if the crew is accustomed to officiating with eight individuals during the regular season and then

have to adjust to seven-person mechanics they are less familiar with in the postseason. A similar recommendation was submitted in 2022, and at that time there were only four conferences using eight-person crews during the regular season.

- d. Estimated budget impact. None, as the alternate official would still only receive a game fee, which has previously been approved to be increased to \$200 per game effective with the 2024 championship. The alternate official will also be paid their travel expenses and per diem, as that was also previously approved effective with the 2024 championship.
- e. Student-athlete impact. As this move should lead to improved officiating, this change should result in a better championship experience for the student-athletes.

### **INFORMATIONAL ITEMS.**

- 1. **2023 annual meeting report.** The committee reviewed and approved the 2023 annual meeting report as submitted.
- 2. **2023-24 Division II Championships Committee actions.** The committee reviewed action and informational items applicable to Division II football since the committee's 2023 annual meeting.
- 3. **2024 American Football Coaches Association (AFCA) Convention.** Committee members and NCAA staff who were at the convention reviewed issues from the Division II football coaches who attended.
- 4. **Football rules.** NCAA National Coordinator of Football Officials and Football Secretary-Rules Editor Steve Shaw joined the meeting and updated the committee on possible football rules changes, as 2024 is an "on year" in the two-year rules change cycle. The Football Rules Committee will meet in early March 2024 and will review player health and safety matters and overall playing rules related to football strategy.

In addition, the committee discussed those seven conferences that used the new football playing rule that allowed for the optional use of instant replay in games that do not have an instant replay booth official. Data from the 2023 regular season were reviewed. All targeting plays were reviewed, and beyond that, the head coach challenge is the only other method to stop a game for a replay review. The committee asked Division II Director of Football Officials Mike Burton and NCAA staff to research this sideline instant replay and the committee will discuss at a future meeting. The committee expressed a possible interest in using such a sideline replay system during the first, second, and quarterfinal rounds of the championship if it does not have a budgetary impact.

## 5. Officiating.

- a. **Update from Mike Burton.** The committee received an update from Division II Director of Football Officials Mike Burton on initiatives to increase the level of officiating across Division II. Mr. Burton plans to attend select conference officiating clinics during the offseason where he will also emphasize the importance of recruiting more football officials in the future.
  - b. **Assignment history.** The committee reviewed the officiating assignment history for the championship dating back to the 1999 season. The committee continued to agree that all 15 conferences sponsoring the sport should ideally be assigned at least one playoff game in either the first and/or second round of the championship.
  - c. **Video evaluators.** Mr. Burton noted he will only continue to assign a video evaluator to evaluate each game during the 2024 championship.
  - d. **Conference evaluations/grades.** NCAA staff will send a memorandum on behalf of Mike Burton and the committee to the relevant conference commissioners informing them how their officiating crew(s) performed during the recent championship. The memo will accompany the assignment history and a document related to the characteristics of a good officiating crew.
6. **NCAA National Letter of Intent and transfer portal.** Susan Peal, NCAA director of governance, updated the committee on the National Letter of Intent program and the number of Division II football student-athletes in the transfer portal.
7. **Selection criteria.** The committee discussed the current criteria used for rankings and selections and noted no changes are needed. The committee also listened to a presentation about the Kevin Puga Index (KPI) data from the 2023 season and confirmed that they would like to use the KPI metric as an additional selection criterion during the 2024 season.
- ## 8. Review of the 2023 polls process.
- a. **Weekly rankings.** The committee had no issues with the weekly rankings. Some committee members used videoconferencing while others used traditional conference calls for this process. The committee mentioned that there were some regional advisory committee (RAC) members who either did not participate in these ranking calls and/or were not prepared. The committee plans to address this in the upcoming RAC orientation call and inform all RAC members that if they are not participating and/or not fulfilling the expectations for this role, the national committee member(s) will inform NCAA staff and ask staff to educate the respective conference commissioner about their assigned RAC member who falls into this category.

- b. **Online score reporting and bracketing principles and priorities.** The committee reported no issues with the online score reporting system or the online balloting system during the rankings period. The committee also noted that no changes are needed to the bracketing principles and priorities.

## 9. Review of the 2023 championship.

- a. **Videoconferences with championship game participants.** The committee conducted a videoconference with both of the teams that competed in the national championship game (Colorado School of Mines and Harding). Colorado School of Mines representatives were complimentary, consistently mentioning how the experience from start to finish featured a national championship atmosphere. They also commended the hospitality of the local organizing committee [Lone Star Conference and the McKinney Independent School District (McKinney ISD)]. They thought their hotel for the 2023 championship game (Marriott property) was slightly better than their assigned hotel for the 2022 championship game (Sheraton property), primarily due to the fact that there were more things to do within walking distance from this hotel. The contingent from Colorado School of Mines also noted that the banquet room and meeting space at the Marriott was so large that it could be used as a back-up plan for a team walk-through the day before the championship game. They liked participating in the championship celebration with only their own team members as opposed to having both teams at this site at the same time, and they recommended keeping this format in future years. Finally, as there was only one media representative at their open practice on Thursday of championship week, a suggestion was made to possibly revise the practice schedule on Thursday and move back the open time for media interviews such that a team could fly into the championship finals site on Thursday as opposed to Wednesday of championship week. Colorado School of Mines mentioned they could have used more sideline credentials for their donors.

The representatives from Harding University were also very complimentary on the hospitality provided by the local organizing committee. Harding thought their assigned hotel (Sheraton property) was first class; however, they did express concerns with the high financial quotes provided for audio/visual equipment for team meeting rooms and also for the cost of catering. They also liked participating in the championship celebration with only their own team members as opposed to having both teams at this site at the same time, and they also recommended keeping this format in future years. Harding also thoroughly enjoyed the new BirdieBox team gifts and the police escorts that were provided. They thought the community engagement was a very memorable experience. Harding also suggested perhaps revising the schedule of events for Thursday of championship week, since no media showed up for the open practice. One area for improvement noted was that McKinney ISD needs to be better prepared at the ticket windows and at the various entry and security gates. Harding mentioned that their fans waited for one hour to get into the stadium, and the waits were similarly long at the concession stands. There needs to be more staff added in the future. Another suggestion was that on the McKinney ISD website for tickets, it just listed home and visitor. The team names should be placed on the website

so fans know where their team will be located as far as sideline designation. Harding also mentioned they could have used more sideline credentials for their donors. Finally, Harding suggested it would be great if a team picture with the trophy on the field could be taken after the championship game.

- b. **Championship survey results from various groups.** The committee reviewed survey evaluations from both the championship and preliminary rounds and noted concerns to consider for improving the championship in the future.
- c. **Media feedback and credentials for the championship game.** Committee members discussed the number of credentials for the championship game and noted no changes were needed, even though both participating teams in the championship game thought more sideline credentials would be beneficial. The committee also reviewed and determined to keep the same policy for the future related to allowing non-competing student-athletes to be in the team bench area at the discretion and control of the head football coach. In addition, the committee will plan to continue with the virtual pre-championship press conference in advance of arrival at the championship site with the head coaches of both teams. The virtual press conference format for the 2023 championship game attracted more media participation than the in-person press conference at the championship site in previous years before moving to this new virtual format. Based on the feedback from the participating teams, the committee asked NCAA staff to move the media availability with both participating teams on Thursday of championship week to after their respective open practice time as opposed to before the start of their respective open practice time. The committee also suggested working with McKinney ISD to see if teams could practice at whatever two-hour window they would desire between 11 a.m. – 3 p.m. Central time. The participating teams in the championship game would have to select their two-hour window on the pre-championship administrative conference call the Monday of championship week.
- d. **Television and broadcasting discussion.** The committee reviewed the television ratings from the NCAA broadcast staff and met with ESPN representatives. The ratings for the championship game were up 27 percent compared to the 2022 championship game (total of 190,668 viewers). This was the most watched championship game since 2018. ESPN representatives noted the 45 minutes to talk to the coaches of each team (rather than the 30 minutes allocated for the 2022 championship game) was an extremely beneficial change that should continue in the future. Finally, ESPN representatives raised concerns with the high end zone camera staff member having to shoot through the kicking net the entire game. NCAA staff agreed that this most likely can be placed on the platform deck outside the team VIP hospitality space for the 2024 championship game.
- e. **Hotels.** The committee believes the two hotels used this year were excellent. There should continue to be an increased security presence at both team hotels after the championship game to deal with larger crowds at whichever hotel is hosting the winner. Based on

feedback from the teams, the committee asked staff to work with the hotels to research their rates for team meals/catering and see if those prices could possibly be reduced.

As for the preliminary-rounds, the committee asked staff to add verbiage to the preliminary-rounds host operations manual stating that if a host institution does not have a full-service hotel available for the visiting team or if the hotel available for the visiting team does not have meeting space, then the host institution must provide meeting space on campus to accommodate the visiting team. This meeting space would require reserving two meeting rooms for the duration of a team's stay in close proximity to each other, with at least one of the meeting rooms being large enough to accommodate 70 people.

- f. **Practice facilities.** The committee believes the practice facilities provided to both teams were fine.
- g. **Security.** The committee noted that McKinney ISD needs to provide more on-field security in the future and also have them arrive earlier in the day, as some of the gates were not staffed and fans without credentials were able to gain access to the field level.
- h. **Championship week schedule and itinerary.** The committee thought the schedule for the week worked well, with the exception of possibly changing the team open practice times and media interview availability on Thursday of championship week.
- i. **Thursday night championship celebration and format.** The committee was pleased again with the Thursday night celebration at Main Event. The committee agreed that both teams should continue to be hosted separately at this event in the future. The committee decided to continue not producing the championship banquet video in future years. The committee would still like to continue showing the semifinal game involving each team on the various televisions when their team is participating in this event.
- j. **Starting times.** The committee believes that a 1 p.m. local time start for the first three rounds of the playoffs works well, with the possibility for a one-hour variance if approved by the committee. The ESPN representatives and the committee also noted that the semifinals starting times of noon Eastern time and 3:30 p.m. Eastern time should remain the same in the future.
- k. **Seeding of semifinalists.** The committee believes that seeding the semifinalists once again achieved a positive result.
- l. **Supplemental questions for the facility evaluation form.** The committee reviewed the facility evaluation form and determined no supplemental questions need to be added to the form for those interested in hosting preliminary-round competition.

- m. Drug testing.** The committee noted that there were not any issues with the drug testing that took place in conjunction with one of the preliminary rounds of the 2023 NCAA Division II Football Championship.
- n. Review of various manuals for other changes that should be implemented.** The committee did not suggest any additional edits to the various manuals or the pre-championship administrative meeting PowerPoint.
- 10. Regional alignment/sport sponsorship.** The committee reviewed the anticipated changes for the 2024 season in each of the four super regions related to the institutions in each respective conference.

The committee also reviewed the finalized super region realignment for the 2025 season that has been approved when Conference Carolinas begins sponsoring football.
- 11. Earned access.** The committee reviewed the conferences eligible for earned access for the 2024 championship and noted that a recommendation would be submitted for the Championships Committee's June meeting.
- 12. Legislative issues.** NCAA staff updated the committee on several legislative matters that were addressed relevant to Division II football at the 2024 NCAA Convention, as well as other issues that will be reviewed in the future. The annual deadline for Division II legislative proposals to be submitted by the membership is July 15.
- 13. Division II governance updates.** The committee noted that due to the fact that Northeastern State University will be an independent in football for the 2024 season, committee member Meghan Mulcahy (who works at Northeastern State) will be able to serve as the regional advisory committee co-chair; however, she will not be able to vote during regional advisory committee super regional rankings. She will have full voting privileges as a national committee member.
- 14. Review of national and regional advisory committees.** Members of the governance staff joined the meeting and discussed topics of interest to the Division II Football Committee.
- 15. Annual meeting dates.** The committee will meet February 12-13, 2025, in Indianapolis. The committee will arrive on February 11, as the meeting will begin early in the morning on February 12. The committee desired to mirror the same meeting schedule that took place for this 2024 annual meeting.
- 16. Committee chair.** The committee re-elected Dennis Francois, director of athletics at Central Washington University, to serve as chair for 2024-25.
- 17. Strategic plan.** The committee reviewed the NCAA Division II Football Committee strategic plan and noted that there were not any changes needed.

- 18. Division II Football Committee – 2024-25 timeline/calendar.** The committee reviewed the timeline for the 2024-25 academic year and adjusted meeting times as necessary.
- 19. Division II Football Coaches Connection.** The committee reviewed both the charge of the coaches connection program and the existing roster of coaches representing each conference sponsoring Division II football. Any head football coach on the national committee who is not part of the coaches connection roster has been allowed to serve as an ex-officio member.
- 20. 2026 and 2027 NCAA Division II Football Championship games – status update.** NCAA staff informed the committee of the bids that were received by the February 7, 2024, deadline for both of these championship games. The committee was also provided the timeline when these bids will need to be reviewed by the committee.
- 21. Division II Championships Committee referrals.** The committee reviewed the following three items referred by the Division II Championships Committee. This discussion took place with Chris Colvin, Conference Carolinas commissioner and the Division II Championships Committee liaison to the Division II Football Committee, and Division II Championships Committee staff liaisons (Karen Kirsch and Micaela Liddane):
- a. Regionalization review.** The Division II Championships Committee is currently seeking feedback from sport committees, D2 CCA and D2ADA Board regarding the Division II regionalization model and opportunities to revise the current approach to bracketing. The Championships Committee will review this feedback at the June 17-18 meeting. Coaches Connection groups, coaches associations and other membership groups will be given the opportunity to provide feedback once concepts are further developed based on the initial feedback.
  - b. Discussion about possible expansion of the championship bracket from 28 to 32 teams.** After lengthy discussion, the committee voted to recommend to the Division II Championships Committee that the Division II Strategic Planning and Finance Committee review during their March 2024 meeting the budget guidelines and principles and determine whether any items, such as this item that has a budgetary impact, could be reviewed and acted on outside the triennial budgeting process. The committee also agreed to contact the D2 CCA seeking feedback on whether the D2 CCA would prioritize a possible bracket expansion to 32 teams over restructuring the 28-team bracket so that regionalization ends at the time of selections and changing the priorities of the bracketing principles to provide for a more competitive bracket.
  - c. Discussion about possibly changing the championship date formula to align with the Division I Football Championship Subdivision (FCS).** After further discussion about the championship date formula, the committee voted to recommend to the Division II Championships Committee that the Division II Strategic Planning and Finance Committee review during their March 2024 meeting the budget guidelines and principles and



determine whether any items, such as this item that has a budgetary impact, could also be reviewed and acted on outside the triennial budgeting process. The committee also agreed to contact the D2 CCA seeking feedback on whether its stance on the referral to push the championship game back into January to align with the FCS championship game changes based on the week zero legislation that was recently adopted at the NCAA Convention. NCAA staff also informed the committee that there have been editorial revisions made to the existing championship date formula to reflect the recently adopted NCAA legislation related to the first permissible date of competition.

**22. Outgoing committee members.** NCAA staff thanked all committee members for their service during the 2023-24 year. There are currently no committee members whose terms are scheduled to expire on August 31, 2024. There is also an existing committee vacancy to replace Rubin Stevenson, who recently resigned from the committee due to being appointed to the Division II Management Council.

*Committee chair:* Dennis Francois, Central Washington University, Lone Star Conference  
*Staff Liaisons:* Randy L. Buhr, Championships and Alliances  
Jay Jay Rackley, Championships and Alliances

NCAA Division II Football Committee February 12-13, 2024, Meeting	
<b>Attendees:</b>	
Jas Bains, Western Colorado University.	
Dennis Francois, Central Washington University.	
Brett Gilliland, University of West Alabama.	
Andy McKenzie, Assumption University.	
Meghan Mulcahy, Northeastern State University.	
David Sharp, Ouachita Baptist University.	
John Wilson, Jr., Virginia State University.	
<b>Absentees:</b>	
None.	
<b>Guests in Attendance:</b>	
Drew Adams, Colorado School of Mines.	
Mike Burton, Division II Director of Football Officials.	
Khari S. Climes, ESPN.	
Chris Colvin, Conference Carolinas.	
Jim Donatelli, Faktor Sports.	
Scott Goode, Harding University.	

Scott Groner, Colorado School of Mines.
David Hansburg, Colorado School of Mines.
Mallory Kenny, ESPN.
Tiffany McCampbell, Colorado School of Mines.
Max McLeod, Colorado School of Mines.
Adrian Moreno, Colorado School of Mines.
Jeff Morgan, Harding University.
Shawn Murphy, ESPN.
Kevin Pauga, Faktor Sports.
Paul Simmons, Harding University.
Steve Shaw, National Coordinator of Football Officials and Football Secretary-Rules Editor.
Pete Sterbick, Colorado School of Mines.
<b>NCAA Staff Liaison (or Staff Support if subcommittee) in Attendance:</b>
Randy L. Buhr, Championships and Alliances.
Jay Jay Rackley, Championships and Alliances.
<b>Other NCAA Staff Members in Attendance:</b>
Jeremy Christoffels, Academic and Membership Affairs.
Terri Steeb Gronau, Division II Governance.
Ryan Jones, Division II Governance.
Karen Kirsch, Championships and Alliances.
Micaela Liddane, Championships and Alliances.
Susan Peal, Governance.
Phil Pierce, Championships and Alliances.
Amy Skiles, Championships and Alliances.