



**REPORT OF THE
NCAA DIVISION III FOOTBALL COMMITTEE
JAN. 26-27, 2026, ANNUAL MEETING VIA VIDEOCONFERENCE**

ACTION ITEMS.

1. Legislative items.

- None.

2. Nonlegislative items.

a. Automatic qualification.

- (1) Recommendation. Approve the following 28 conferences for automatic qualification to the 2026 championship: American Rivers Conference, American Southwest Conference, Centennial Conference, Collegiate Conference of Illinois and Wisconsin, Commonwealth Coast Football, Empire 8, Heartland Collegiate Athletic Conference, Landmark Conference, Liberty League, Massachusetts State Collegiate Athletic Conference, Michigan Intercollegiate Athletic Association, Middle Atlantic Conference, Midwest Conference, Minnesota Intercollegiate Athletic Conference, New England Small College Athletic Conference, New England Women's & Men's Athletic Conference, New Jersey Athletic Conference, North Coast Athletic Conference, Northern Athletics Collegiate Conference, Northwest Conference, Ohio Athletic Conference, Old Dominion Athletic Conference, Presidents' Athletic Conference, Southern Athletic Association, Southern California Intercollegiate Athletic Conference, Upper Midwest Athletic Conference, USA South Athletic Conference, Wisconsin Intercollegiate Athletic Conference.

The anticipated pool allocations are as follows with the addition of the New England Small College Athletic Conference: Automatic Qualifier – 28; At-Large – 12.

- (2) Effective date. Immediately.

- (3) Rationale. All recommended conferences meet the criteria for automatic qualification eligibility.

- (4) Estimated budget impact. None.

- (5) Student-athlete impact. None.

b. Coach-to-player communication.

- (1) Recommendation. Allow coach-to-player communication devices for the NCAA Division III Football Championship. (Coach-to-player communication systems are not required to host a preliminary-round game.)

(2) Effective date. September 1, 2026.

(3) Rationale. Coach-to player communication is available starting in the 2026 season.

For preliminary-round games, should the host institution use coach-to-player communication, or the visiting institution brings a coach-to-player communication system, the host institution is required to have personnel assigned to implement the cutoff switch based on Rule 1-4-11-b. Hosts will garner personnel through the same process as the game clock, play clock and other game management personnel. The play clock operator can manage both the play clock and coach-to-player communication cutoff switch.

A meeting with the head official, representatives from both teams and applicable host personnel will be required at least 150 minutes prior to the start of preliminary-round games.

(4) Estimated budget impact. None.

(5) Student-athlete impact. The recommendation will provide convenient in-game communication technology to the Division III level.

c. Update noisemaker policy.

(1) Recommendation. Eliminate the noisemaker restriction requirement to host a preliminary-round game.

(2) Effective date. September 1, 2026.

(3) Rationale. The committee does not intend to eliminate crowd control; however, relaxing the noisemaker restriction requirement for hosting a preliminary-round game would create an updated positive experience for home and visiting football student-athletes. The committee noted the current noisemaker policy waters down the gameday atmosphere and the culture of a home football game, which is an active crowd and stadium audio generating noise during and between plays, respectively, and as attendance grows to 4,000 to 5,000, site rep feedback confirmed the policy is nearly impossible to enforce. The committee also noted there is no noisemaker policy at the FCS and CFP levels, only stadium policies. The committee also discussed that the experience of hosting a football game is slightly different than other team sports because with football there is one visiting team and one game per weekend, whereas other team sports have multiple games and visiting teams at the host site per weekend, so neutrality also needs to be monitored when the host team is not playing. Long term, the committee recommends the Division III Championships Committee consider updating and modernizing hosting experiences by reducing neutrality elements during preliminary-round games for all team sports.

(4) Estimated budget impact. None.

(5) Student-athlete impact. Eliminating the restriction will provide an elevated hosting experience.

INFORMATIONAL ITEMS.

1. **Minutes from 2025 annual meeting.** Minutes from the committee's January 2025 annual meeting were approved as submitted.
2. **Championships and governance update.** Championships and alliances staff discussed topics related to NCAA Division III football, including current financial status, budget and webcasting updates, NPI and bracketing procedures, per diem, bench size updates, high-cost cities and championship updates from the 2026 NCAA Convention.
3. **Legislative review.** The governance and member services staff discussed action and informational items from 2025-26, particularly those applicable to NCAA Division III football.
4. **2025-26 preliminary-round review.**
 - a. **Rankings.** The committee reviewed the new NCAA Power Index regional ranking process. The committee discussed continuing to post regional rankings despite a national ranking being available.
 - b. **Championship travel.** NCAA travel and insurance staff joined the committee to discuss results from the pilot program involving bracketing and protecting the top eight seeds in the bracket. Overall, there were fewer flights than the previous year, seven in 2025 compared to 12 in 2024. However, first-round flights were the same for both years.
 - c. **Host neutrality.** The committee agreed to ask the Championships Committee to consider updating and modernizing hosting experiences by reducing neutrality elements during preliminary-round games. Specifically, the committee discussed eliminating the noisemaker policy to create more of a home game environment. (See Action Item 2-c.)
 - d. **Preliminary-round broadcasts.** NCAA staff discussed ESPN+ and the early issues hosts encountered and overcame. If asked, the committee would support increasing minimum camera requirements to host.
 - e. **Video exchange.** The committee used the preliminary-round video exchange policy involving first-round teams advancing to play second-round bye opponents. The committee agreed that when games played between first-round and second-round bye teams were exchanged, the first-round teams would receive weeks nine, 10, and 11,

- while the second-round bye teams would receive video from weeks 10, 11 and the first-round game. Also, the committee discussed whether video technology software should be shared between competing teams.
- f. **Sideline video review.** Sideline video review options were permitted at all rounds of the playoffs (excluding semifinals and championship game where Instant Replay is used) if the cost could accommodate. A limited number of Division III teams use sideline instant replay. The committee will continue to research this issue.
 - g. **Hosting team hotels.** The committee discussed secured hotel accommodations by the hosting team and adding minimums as a best practice. Along with the NCAA Division III hotel minimums, hosts should secure a full or half service hotel to give teams a place to have team meals and team meetings while keeping the room costs reasonable.
 - h. **Bench size.** The committee discussed the increase made to the bench size to 108 with 25 additional student-athletes and 25 additional personnel and suggested that the combination of the additional 50 individuals on the sideline be left to the institution's discretion.
 - i. **Kickoff times.** The committee discussed revising game times. Currently, all game times start at noon local. The committee discussed maintaining first-, second-, and third-round game times at noon local, and have the quarterfinal games start at noon, 1 p.m., 2 p.m. or 3 p.m. local based on mileage. The committee will continue to review a possible recommendation. Also, the committee discussed requiring all games played during the final week of the season start no later than 3 p.m. local time to allow the committee time to begin its work selecting and bracketing on Saturday night and finishing Sunday around noon.
7. **2025-26 championship review.**
- a. **Championship site.** The City of Canton and Hall of Fame Stadium staff reviewed topics related to the 2025 championship game, noting the needed improvement for snow removal if possible. The participants toured the NFL Hall of Fame and conducted the banquet separately.
 - b. **Future hosts.** The committee discussed the 2026-27 championship site visit timelines for Salem, VA and plans to visit in July.
 - c. **Championship broadcast.** NCAA staff discussed television ratings, noting that overall, the championship game's rating was up from the previous year. The committee discussed suitable kickoff dates and times and again settled on the first Sunday in January. Staff will work with the television partner and relay the preferred time for the championship and will provide more information to the committee if needed.

8. **2026 American Football Coaches Association (AFCA) convention.** Staff discussed NPI issues addressed with the coaches at the AFCA convention.
9. **Rules.** The committee discussed playing rules and other items to pass along to the NCAA Football Rules Committee for its upcoming session. The committee was informed that the rules committee plans to schedule a videoconference to discuss the federated rules process.
10. **Officiating.** The committee discussed officials' game fees with national coordinator of officials.
11. **Committee chair appointment.** The committee voted Hunter Sims, athletics director at University of Mary Hardin-Baylor, as committee chair. Dr. Sims' knowledge and experience as an administrator and former assistant football coach will provide strong direction and properly represent the membership as committee chair.
12. **Annual meeting dates.** The committee tentatively agreed to conduct its annual meeting February 16-17, 2027, in Indianapolis in conjunction with the AFCA football coaches convention.

Committee Chair: John Snell, Baldwin Wallace University.
Staff Liaison(s): J.P. Williams, Championships and Alliances.

NCAA Division III Football Committee Jan. 26-27, 2026, Videoconference
Attendees:
Keith Buckley, Pacific University.
Mike Cerbrosky, King's College.
Portia Hoeg, Centennial Conference.
Jason Imperati, Lawrence University.
Hunter Sims, University of Mary Hardin-Baylor.
John Snell, Baldwin Wallace University.
Absentees:
None.
Guests in Attendance:
Zac Bissell, Hall of Fame Village.
Zita Blile, Visit Canton.
Glen Brittich, NCAA Division III Rules Committee, Elmhurst College
Jim Corpora, NCAA Division III Coordinator of Officials.
Bethany Dannelly, Ohio Athletic Conference.
Jonathan Drach, NCAA Division III Rules Committee, Union College.
Dani Gunderson, Hall of Fame Village.
Carey Harveycutter, City of Salem.

Jason Lener, NCAA Division III Rules Committee, Westminster College.
Lindsay Miller, Ohio Athletic Conference.
Matt Moore, NCAA Division III Rules Committee, University of Northwestern, St. Paul.
Logan Scherer, Hall of Fame Village.
John Shaner, City of Salem.
Mary Vlahos, Visit Canton.
NCAA Staff Support in Attendance:
CJ Sowards, Championships and Alliances.
J.P. Williams, Championships and Alliances.
Other NCAA Staff Members in Attendance:
Lucas DuMars, Ty Halpin, Tiffany Howard, Laura Peterson-Mlynski and Sarah Turner.