



**REPORT OF THE  
NCAA DIVISION III CHAMPIONSHIPS COMMITTEE  
FEBRUARY 6-7, 2023, VIDEOCONFERENCES**

ACTION ITEMS.

- **None.**

INFORMATIONAL ITEMS.

1. **Opening remarks and review of schedule and agenda.** Division III Championships Committee chair Chuck Mitrano welcomed the group and introduced new members Maureen Harty, the commissioner of the College Conference of Illinois & Wisconsin, and Adaobi Nebuwa, a basketball student-athlete at Colby College representing the Division III Student-Athlete Advisory Committee. Mr. Mitrano also previewed key agenda items and noted the schedule for presenters during the meeting.
2. **Recent Championships Committee reports.** The committee approved the report from its December 13 videoconference as presented.
3. **Sport liaison assignments.** The committee determined assignments for the various sport committees for the coming year.
4. **Division III Student-Athlete Advisory Committee update.** Adaobi Nebuwa provided an update from the SAAC's meetings at the NCAA Convention, which included a productive conversation with incoming NCAA President Charlie Baker. SAAC members praised the adoption of legislation giving the SAAC a vote on the convention floor beginning in 2024.
5. **Division III Management Council update.** Management Council chair Holly Sheilley provided an update from the council's meeting at the Convention, noting that the current and incoming Management Council leadership had the opportunity to meet with incoming NCAA President Charlie Baker. Other key topics the council discussed were the work on the Division III philosophy statement; prioritizing championships administration (noting that about 80% of the Division III budget is allocated to support championships); and ongoing discussions regarding federated playing rules, evolving standards in student-athlete health care, and transgender participation policies.
6. **Championships update.** NCAA Senior Vice President for Championships Joni Comstock joined the videoconference to update the committee on the evolving landscape in championships administration given the recommendations the Division I Transformation Committee issued in its final report. Other topics covered were the ongoing work to implement recommendations from the gender equity report, preparations for negotiating the upcoming contract with ESPN for select NCAA championship events, and efforts underway to enhance officiating.
7. **Governance update.** Louise McCleary, vice president of Division III, updated the committee on issues impacting the division, particularly efforts from the NCAA Board of Governors Subcommittee on Congressional Engagement and Action to urge legislators to seek federal

legislation that would address the governance of college sports on a national level and preempt state law; codify student-athlete non-employee status; and create an antitrust exemption in the form of legal safe harbor protection. Springfield College President Mary-Beth Cooper, who serves as a Division III representative on the board, and Division III Presidents Council Chair and University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire Chancellor Jim Schmidt are coordinating communication and feedback efforts with the Division III membership regarding these initiatives.

Relatedly, Ms. McCleary also noted the Presidents Council's approval of creating a Financial and Risk Management Working Group that will report to the Presidents Council, collaborate with the Division III Strategic Planning and Finance Committee and be responsible for reviewing the landscape of intercollegiate athletics, the division's financial standing, and the risks, threats and opportunities that confront the division.

Other topics covered with the committee included the upcoming Division III Week activities April 10-16, a train-the-trainer program initiated through the Division III Diversity and Inclusion Working Group, and the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Division III celebration that will begin in August and run through the 2023-24 academic year.

## **8. Championships budget discussions.**

- a. Budget recap.** The committee reviewed fiscal year 2022-23 budget-to-actuals through January 31. The committee also reviewed future budget projections and noted that the new CBS/Turner contract begins in fiscal year 2025, during which the division will receive a 13% revenue increase. The contract ends in 2032. The committee was reminded that in fiscal years 2023 and 2024 the division will intentionally overspend its budget by an approximate average of \$2.7 million per year to reduce the excess beyond the mandated reserve.
- b. Budget priorities.** The committee continued discussing its priorities previously identified (championships access, per diem, travel party increases, officials fees and host honorariums) and agreed to add "student-athlete experience" to the list. The committee also noted the scheduled increases in per diem and officiating fees slated for 2023-24 and 2024-25. Committee members discussed at length the crisis facing officiating and asked staff to look into officiating fees by conference for regular-season contests and conference tournaments, as well as fees for each round of the Division III championships, to help the committee recommend a progression in fees as an incentive for advancement. The committee also asked staff to list the ancillary events at various Division III championships (e.g., banquets) for review.

Finally, the committee noted that women's wrestling, which is an emerging sport for women, is approaching the sponsorship threshold for meriting a national championship. While championships for emerging sports traditionally have begun as National Collegiate Championships, Division I is reviewing parameters and policies regarding National

Collegiate Championships funding and administration. The committee also acknowledged that women's bowling, which is already a National Collegiate Championship, is being sponsored by an increasing number of Division III members and could reach the threshold for meriting a separate Division III championship, which would affect the division's championship budget allocations.

The Championships Committee will begin reviewing budget requests at its September 2023 meeting and will prepare recommendations in earnest during its February and June 2024 meetings for the next Division III budget cycle.

**c. Additional budget initiatives.** The Championships Committee continued its discussions regarding championship bracket enhancements and ways to improve the postseason experience while protecting the overall integrity of the brackets. Accordingly, committee members reviewed the following options:

- (1) Championships access model.** This proposed model was created as a result of championships access discussions after legislation was adopted at the 2022 NCAA Convention that reduced the number of conference members required to receive automatic qualification status from seven to six. The proposed model is a product of discussions exploring how brackets could be expanded to absorb more conference AOs without reducing the at-large pool. The current formula for determining bracket size is to apply a ratio to the number of institutions sponsoring that sport and subtract the conference AOs to determine the number of at-large berths. The proposed model would remove the conference AOs and Pool B berths and apply a 1:15 ratio for the at-large pool (the 1:15 ratio is a starting point and is being used as an example simply because it does not compromise the current at-large pool). The intent is to establish an equal opportunity for at-large berths in all sports regardless of membership sponsorship, conference size or average number of members in a conference. Championships Committee members expressed interest in exploring this model further and discussed ways to generate sport committee and membership feedback regarding whether this model would be supported, cost effective, and how it could be best implemented.
- (2) Permissible flights model.** The committee also discussed the feasibility of providing sport committees the flexibility to add one or two flights during the selection process to spread out higher regionally ranked teams in the preliminary rounds. Committee members agreed that this model has its advantages, though it would benefit fewer teams than the expansion model above and thus from a cost perspective the championships access model might be more preferred.
- (3) Increasing funding to current championships.** A third option the committee discussed would be to increase the current funding for championships to enhance the postseason experience (e.g., increased per diem, host honorariums and officials fees, providing standardized credential templates, streaming stipends, etc.).

Ultimately, the Championships Committee acknowledged that these options come with a budget impact and will be added to other anticipated budget requests for the next cycle. The committee agreed that membership feedback will be critical in helping the committee prioritize these and other options during the coming year. Accordingly, the committee suggested that staff survey the membership (working through sport committees and the Division III Conference Commissioners Association) regarding potential championship enhancements.

9. **Playing Rules Oversight Panel (PROP) update.** The committee reviewed reports from the NCAA Playing Rules Oversight Panel and noted ongoing discussions regarding federated playing rules, including the Division III Management Council's approval of forming an advisory group to help the staff develop a process to establish federated playing rules. The group will consist of one member from the Division III Championship Committee, one Division III athletics director, one Division III conference commissioner, one member from the Division III Management Council, one Division III member from the NCAA Playing Rules Oversight Panel and one member from the Strategic Planning and Finance Committee.

The Championships Committee also invited nominees for a member to serve as the committee's representative to PROP to fill the vacancy created when Robin Baker rotated off the committee.

#### 10. Championships and alliances topics.

- a. **Pairwise discussion.** The committee continued its discussion regarding whether the Pairwise metric should be considered as a selection criterion in future years. Staff had noted previously that the 2019 and 2021 brackets for football and women's volleyball were evaluated using the Pairwise metric and demonstrated results very similar to what the sport committees selected. The metric also has been well received in men's ice hockey. Committee members discussed the metric at length with Pairwise creator Tim Danehy and generally agreed that it merits further consideration as a selection criterion for all team sports. Given the significance of such a change, however, the committee agreed that the metric should be vetted extensively within the Division III membership (e.g., facilitated webinars with sport committees and commissioners, FAQ document) before deciding. The committee plans to revisit the issue during its June meeting.
- b. **Women's lacrosse joint championship update.** The committee received an update on the joint men's and women's championships with Divisions I and II in 2025 and 2026. The Division I men's semifinals and championship game, the Divisions II and III men's championship games and the Division I women's championship game will be conducted at Gillette Stadium, while the Divisions II and III women's championship games will be held at nearby campus sites, which is causing some concern within the Divisions II and III women's lacrosse communities. Staff noted that feedback and potential recommendations from the Divisions II and III women's lacrosse committees are expected by the end of this month.

- c. **Championship bid cycle for 2026-30.** Staff previewed the upcoming championship site selection cycle from 2026-30, noting that the bid portal will open this coming July with recommendations expected for the Division III Championships Committee to review in August 2024.

#### 11. Academic and membership affairs update and action.

- a. **NCAA Convention legislation update.** Staff updated the committee on the legislative proposals adopted at the January Convention, including one that will expand the Championships Committee roster from nine members to 12 effective August 1. The Division III Nominating Committee will manage the process in the coming weeks. Another proposal adopted related to Bylaw 17 establishes a new playing seasons structure for all sports besides football that eliminates weeks as a measurement for a season. This establishes a traditional start and end date for fall and spring segments, increases the nontraditional segment interaction from 16 to 24 days, measures the winter sports season by 114 days with the flexibility to use eight days before or after the season, and measures seasons for sports such as golf, rowing and tennis by 114 days. Staff noted the Division III Interpretations and Legislation Committee will continue to monitor this new legislation.
- b. **New England Volleyball Conference (NEVC) waiver request.** The committee reviewed but did not support the NEVC's request to be granted automatic qualification for the 2022-23 season and beyond. The committee noted that the NEVC became a single-sport conference effective in 2022-23 and is subject to the legislated two-year waiting period for new conferences to be considered for AQ. The committee sympathized but ultimately did not agree with the conference's argument that extenuating circumstances merit the conference receiving AQ immediately and as such denied the request.

#### 12. Fall championships recap.

- a. **Steaming metrics.** Staff reviewed metrics from the fall championships noting the success of the Division III Women's Volleyball Championship in particular on NCAA.com. Planned enhancements for this year include a pilot initiative to provide aggregate streaming from campus sites for the men's and women's lacrosse championships (rather than require viewers to toggle among campus websites to find video) to explore whether such packaging would be attractive in future broadcast rights negotiations. This prompted a discussion among committee members regarding how to ensure that institutions are providing a consistent streaming experience if they are going to be grouped together (perhaps even providing a stipend to help offset costs for upgrading the streaming process). Staff also noted enhancements being planned for men's and women's golf with additional cameras being placed on the course.
- b. **Host feedback.** The committee reviewed reports from championship managers from this past fall's events. Staff also noted procedures regarding incident tracking and a new planned post-championship correspondence with all hosts. Committee members suggested

enhancements to the reporting forms and steps to take to help bolster effective communication between host personnel and site representatives.

- c. **Host site enhancements.** The committee revisited discussions regarding the consistency in the experience at preliminary-round sites, noting that the membership is increasingly concerned that all student-athletes are afforded the same positive and memorable championship experience in all rounds of their participation. Committee members shared ideas regarding what host institutions can do to enhance the postseason experience, including more consistency with signage and banners; increasing options available in the marketing portal and making that site easier to use; and providing visuals from proven sites related to optimal locker rooms, meeting spaces, ticketing/credentialing/game programs, etc. The committee emphasized that anything that could be done in advance to make it easier for the host to be successful would be appreciated.

### 13. In-region waiver requests.

- a. **University of Maine-Presque Isle.** The committee approved Maine-Presque Isle's request to waive the 70% in-region requirement for men's and women's soccer, women's volleyball, men's and women's basketball, softball and baseball for the 2023-24 academic year due to a variety of unique circumstances.
- b. **University of California, Santa Cruz.** The committee approved UC Santa Cruz's request to waive the 70% in-region requirement for all sports for the 2023-24 academic year due to a variety of unique circumstances.

### 14. Sport committee reports.

#### a. Men's lacrosse.

(1) **Regional rankings.** The Championships Committee considered but did not support the sport committee's request to rank 15% of teams in select regions this year. The Championships Committee based its decision on having agreed only in September that all team sports rank seven members in each region (rather than a percentage specified by a given sport committee). The committee reasoned that this decision should play out for at least this year before revisiting.

(2) **Bench personnel.** The Championships Committee considered but did not support the sport committee's request to allow all rostered student-athletes into the bench area during all rounds of the men's lacrosse championship. As with the ranking request above, the Championships Committee noted that it devoted significant time to reviewing appropriate bench limits per sport during its meetings in 2022 and that the allocations determined during the committee's September meeting should stand for this year before being re-evaluated during the committee's June meeting.

- b. **Men’s and women’s swimming and diving.** The committee approved the following sites and venues to host regionals for this year’s championships.

Region	Institution/Conference Host	Venue/Location
Northeast/South	Ithaca College	Kelsey Partridge Bird Natatorium Ithaca, New York
Central	University of Chicago	Gerald Ratner Athletic Center Chicago
Midwest/South/West	Emory University	Woodruff Physical Education Center Atlanta
Northeast/North	New York University	Palladium Athletic Facility

*(Note: The committee approved New York University as host for the Northeast/North region but noted concerns expressed by participating institutions in the 2022 women’s basketball regional hosted by the institution regarding the substandard conditions. The committee urged the Division III Women’s Basketball Committee to contact the institution regarding these matters before bids are submitted for the 2023 basketball championship.)*

**15. Future meeting/videoconference dates.**

- March 21, 11 a.m.-noon (monthly videoconference).
- April 27, 11 a.m.-noon (monthly videoconference).
- May 16, 11 a.m.-noon (monthly videoconference).
- June TBD (in-person meeting, Indianapolis; dates to be determined later).
- September 11-12 (in-person meeting, Indianapolis).
- February 5-6, 2024 (in-person meeting; Indianapolis).

*Committee Chair:* Chuck Mitrano, Empire 8  
*Staff Liaisons:* Laura Peterson-Mlynski, Championships and Alliances  
 J.P. Williams, Championships and Alliances  
 Julie Zike, Academic and Membership Affairs

NCAA Division III Championships Committee February 6-7, 2023, Videoconferences
<b>Attendees:</b>
Chuck Mitrano, Empire 8.
Maureen Harty, College Conference of Illinois & Wisconsin.
Adaobi Nebuwa, Colby College.
John Neese, Hardin-Simmons University.
Holly Sheilley, Transylvania University.
Karen Tessmer, Worcester State University.

Leonard Trevino, Chatham University.
Jason Verdugo, Hamline University.
<b>Absentees:</b>
None.
<b>Guests in Attendance:</b>
Tim Danehy, Pairwise.
<b>NCAA Staff Support in Attendance:</b>
Laura Peterson-Mlynski, Championships and Alliances.
J.P. Williams, Championships and Alliances.
<b>Other NCAA Staff Members in Attendance:</b>
Mark Aiken, Joni Comstock, Nate Flannery, Margaret Gaines, Louise McCleary, Jeff Myers and Rachel Seewald.