

NCAA Division I Wrestling Championships

(Updated May 6, 2016)

Recommendation

The Division I Wrestling Committee recommends that the championships include a team component and an individual component. Teams of sponsoring institutions shall compete in a minimum of six, Division I intercollegiate dual meets to be eligible for the team component. The NCAA champion will be determined by a combination of team points earned through the dual team component, as well as points earned by individuals during the individual component.

FORMAT

- The individual component will be unchanged. 330 student-athletes will continue to earn spots into the individual component. Those individuals will continue to earn points that will be included in their respective teams' overall score.
- 24 teams will qualify for the team component. Based on current bylaws eight conferences would receive automatic qualifiers (AQ) for their top team. The remaining 16 teams would then be selected by the Division I Wrestling Committee, using similar selection criteria currently used for individuals, which will be calculated for team competition.
- Four regionals will be held on the campuses of the top four seeded teams. Each regional will include six teams.
- The regionals will be financially independent; the institutions for the competing teams are responsible for all expenses. The host institutions shall cover all hosting expenses, and retain all revenues received with a percentage of revenue to be shared with the visiting teams.

SCORING

- The 24 teams selected to compete in the team component will earn a minimum of 5 points. *(See attached bracket for full breakdown of team component scoring)*
- The 330 student-athletes selected for the individual component will continue to earn points toward their institution score.
- The results of the team component will be tabulated and combined with the individual component results to crown the NCAA Wrestling champion.
- Approximately 20% of the overall scoring will come from the team component and 80% from the individual component. *(See attached historical scoring comparison data)*

TIMELINE

The proposed timeline *(Earliest possible implementation would be 2019)*:

- **First Saturday in February:** Eligible AQ Conferences must submit their designated team AQ.
- **First Sunday in February:** At-large teams selected by the Division I Wrestling Committee.
- **Second weekend (Saturday – Sunday) of February:** Team component regionals. Four, six-team regionals on campus sites.
- **Third weekend (Saturday – Sunday) of February:** NCAA Team component finals.
- **Completed by the first weekend (Friday – Sunday) of March:** Conference tournaments.
- **Second week (Monday – Wednesday) of March:** Individual component at-large selections.
- **Third weekend (Thursday – Saturday) of March:** NCAA Individual component championships. NCAA Team Champion awarded.

Rationale

Teams compete during the regular season in both dual meets and individual tournaments, thus the national championship should incorporate both components to best represent a National Championship Team. The proposal places a priority on team competition and enhances the values associated with that form of competition; while maintaining the integrity of the current individual championship structure.

BENEFITS

- Makes team competition more relevant as the addition of a team component has a significant bearing on determining the NCAA Team Champion.
- Enhance the team experience for the student-athletes by providing the opportunity for more student-athletes to have a direct impact on their team by competing in every weight class to earn a spot in the team component.
- Maintains team scoring at the NCAA Division I Wrestling Championships and crowns one NCAA Team Champion.
- The Division I Wrestling Championship is thriving. The team component capitalizes on the traditional model of competitive sports, where one institution competes against another institution and produces a winner. It is simple to understand for new and casual fans of the sport.
- Creates additional compelling television and digital media inventory.
- Does not affect the Directors Cup Scoring.

STATISTICS

- Broadcast coverage continues to increase. ESPN expanded their coverage in 2014 covering “every mat, every match” all three days of the championship, demonstrating their continued appetite for wrestling programming.
- The 2016 championships reached over 8.6 million viewers on ESPN and ESPNU. More than 150 hours of live coverage across ESPN networks.
- ESPN promoted the championships on all of their platforms, 655,000 viewers for the Championship Finals on ESPN with an additional 20.8 million minutes consumed through ESPN3 and Watch ESPN Usage.
- NCAA wrestling has a great social media following; reaching more than 13 million on Facebook during the 2016 championship, with over 1 million engaged unique users. The hashtag #WrestleNYC was used 77,800 times during the 2016 Championships.
- The current championship is very successful and enjoys tremendous support as evident by five consecutive sell-outs, fueled by an avid fan base. However, two-thirds of fans attending the championships are repeat attendees. The vast majority of these attendees are male Caucasians with an average age of 42, and 35% are over the age of 50, most of them have participated in wrestling as a coach or student-athlete. The team component helps expose the championship to a more diverse group of fans that may not have a history in the sport, but have a connection to an institution or is a casual sports fan exploring other sports and entertainment options in their area.
- Approximately one-half of current NCAA Division I Wrestling Championship attendees are college graduates. Fan affinity studies show that fans draw a more personal connection to TEAM sports because of the tangible connection to the institution that team represents. The colors, traditions, fight songs, and all the pageantry that comes along with college sports makes being a fan a thrilling experience. The team component allows wrestling to attract more of that fan affinity so deeply rooted in traditional team sports.
- Nearly half of attendees (48%) travel 500 miles or more to attend the championships. The team component provides a platform to attract families and younger fans that may not have the time or resources to attend the NCAA individual component championships over multiple days, or large invitational events that last several hours. However they can commit two hours to attend a dual match at a nearby college or university.

PROJECTED OUTCOMES

- More focus on team competition during the season.
- Increase in fan affinity, and attraction of more casual fans.
- Additional media exposure and increased broadcast opportunities.
- Additional recognition opportunities for wrestling teams and institutions.