



Knight Commission On Intercollegiate Athletics

A PROJECT OF THE JOHN S. AND JAMES L. KNIGHT FOUNDATION

Knight Commission Calls for Bolder Changes to NCAA Division I Governance

Time is right for separating the sport of FBS football and protecting
collegiate Olympic sports

INDIANAPOLIS - During its Tuesday, May 20, meeting the Knight Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics urged leaders to make far more sweeping changes to the governance of NCAA Division I sports than the NCAA currently has under review. Reflecting the new realities of the looming *House v. NCAA* settlement, the Commission reiterated its proposal for a new entity to govern the sport of FBS football, separate from the NCAA.

"FBS football is having a warping effect on all of Division I college sports," warns Knight Commission Co-Chair Len Elmore. "The resulting loss of current and future opportunities in collegiate Olympic sports is a core failure of the Division I governance and financial model."

Division I governance must include objective and expert oversight by adding independent directors and greater athlete representation to the division's governing boards.

"The presence of independent directors and college athletes on any NCAA or college sports governing body is essential to correcting the conference and institutional self-interest that has, repeatedly, pushed Division I sports to this point of great instability," said Pam Bernard, Knight Commission Co-Chair.

Division I leaders are considering changes to its internal governing boards and regulatory procedures, with the goal of approving a revised governance structure by July 2025.

Highlights of additional recommendations and information about ongoing efforts:

- **Future of Collegiate Olympic Sports**

The Commission will continue to convene and collaborate with leaders associated with the USOPC, collegiate coaches' associations, Olympic and college athletes, athletics administrators, and policymakers to find innovative solutions to protect collegiate Olympic sports from cutbacks.

- **Opportunity Incentives**

The Commission [reiterated its prior proposal](#) that expands incentives for collegiate Olympic sports by changing the NCAA revenue distribution formula that rewards more than \$150 million annually to institutions for the athletics scholarships their programs provide...

- **Academic Incentives**

...the [Commission re-stated its position from July 2024](#) for the Division I Board to reconsider one aspect of the internal payment plan to fund (*House*) damages...the Knight Commission requests that the Division I Board protect the Academic Performance Fund incentives and recommends alternative approaches to funding the \$10 million in (damages) payments now scheduled to come annually from a reduction of those incentives...

The full press release and photos for media use are available [here](#).

Key Comments from Panelists



Charlie Baker, President, NCAA

"...there is educational and developmental value in playing a sport that I think is wildly underappreciated. And so for me, goal number one is I want as many opportunities for young people to play sports as possible."

Bubba Cunningham, Director of Athletics, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill Board of Directors, U.S. Olympic & Paralympic Committee

"I think if I look 5 to 10 years (from now), I think we'll probably have a bifurcated system. I do think that football and basketball, maybe a handful of others, will be compensated...and we're going to have a whole group of sports that are going to be subsidized by a different funding model."

Jaime Gordon, CEO, American Volleyball Coaches Association, advocating for protecting funding levels of collegiate Olympic sports as well as Division I sports sponsorship requirements:

"The piece of the pie that has been allocated to Olympic sports has stayed remarkably the same. And that's consistent based on whatever classification of institutions. The median FBS schools in 2003 invested 65% of their operational costs on football and basketball. 35% on all other sports at the FBS level. 20 years later, those percentages are remarkably the same...the second (recommendation) is to also protect the sports sponsorship minimums of 16 for FBS and 14 for all others."

Rocky Harris, Chief of Sport & Athlete Services, U.S. Olympic & Paralympic Committee

"(NGBs) manage it from the cradle to grave. That's what national governing bodies do. The one place they don't have a seat at the table is within the NCAA system...They know more about their sport, how to govern it, how to monetize it."

"...our system is the envy of the world. And part of that is that it's integrated, and it's not separating sport from education and the human experience."

Max Siegel, CEO, USA Track & Field

"It's time for us in today's age to be innovative, to maintain the integrity of the education experience, to maintain the integrity of the governance structure—but at the same time we have to think very creatively on how to continue to grow our resource base, fund programs, and provide these opportunities..."

Victoria Jackson, Sports Historian and Clinical Associate Professor of History, Arizona State University

"(A federal sports gambling tax) could be one resource to continue to move federal monies through higher education to support Olympic and Paralympic development...which is an opportunity to support both top of pyramid elite development, and those broad-based participation opportunities."

"...If there is one takeaway from today's meeting it's a call to constructive action and a refusal to become frozen by doomsday fatalism..."

Session Video Recordings



Session 1: A Conversation with NCAA President Charlie Baker



Session 2: The Future of Collegiate Olympic Sports in a New Era for Division I

Knight Commission in the News



Can NCAA Thread the Needle with New Governance Structure?

Ben Portnoy, *Sports Business Journal*
May 20, 2025



Power Conferences Will Enforce House Settlement, Not the NCAA

Amanda Christovich, *Front Office Sports*
May 20, 2025



NCAA and Genius Sports Extension Seeks to Protect College Athletes from Negative Prop Bets

Maura Carey, *Associated Press*
May 20, 2025



NCAA Reforms Put Olympic Sports on the Ropes: What's at Stake for Swimming and Beyond

Editorial Staff, *Swimming World*
May 16, 2025



Knight Commission Hosts Meeting Discussing Future of Olympic Sports in NCAA

James Sutherland, *SwimSwam.com*
May 20, 2025

About the Knight Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics

The Knight Commission, founded by the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation in 1989, is an independent group that leads transformational change to prioritize college athletes' education, health, safety, and success. The Commission has a legacy of influencing NCAA policies that have helped propel record-high graduation rates of Division I athletes. The Commission's ongoing efforts focus on governance, equity, opportunity, and financial reforms, as well as providing education on the changing landscape of college sports. For more, visit knightcommission.org.