

# Moving Away from the NCAA: Possible Future Governance Models for Intercollegiate Athletics and the American Sports Ecosystem

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## Abstract

“The days may be numbered for NCAA intercollegiate athletic governance as we know it. A large bureaucratic organization of 1200 colleges and universities in three divisions, the National Collegiate Athletic Association has existed in some form for well over 100 years with various degrees of success and failures with its stated goals. Although its mission is defined as “Providing a world-class athletics and academic experience for student-athletes that fosters lifelong well-being” (NCAA, 2023), there are reasonable claims and evidence that suggest that is far from the case. Consequently, the NCAA and future governance of intercollegiate athletics is on trial-figuratively and literally for its future. The long-standing model of amateurism and a higher education tradeoff for intercollegiate athletic participation is essentially over and changes in governance are frankly overdue. Whether in the halls of congress, courtrooms, the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB), and even from the NCAA itself. This along with changes of public opinion that favor some type of revenue sharing, if not outright employment status for college athletes, it is more than clear that change will happen, and the only variable is time. It is important to empirically assess and propose models to have potential pathways forward. The U.S. is the only country in the world with a significant portion of its elite sport development model largely embedded in the educational system. Between calls for reform and a burgeoning athletes’ rights movement, major change is inevitable. This is not necessarily bad as it can provide the country a chance to reframe its entire sport development system. This research project is a qualitative effort for a forthcoming book building off intensive historical and current research plus interviews with major stakeholders on all sides of the intercollegiate athletics reform debate. From this deep dive, the researcher proposes several different models that can potentially work for college sports governance and other alternative elite sport development models in the future for the U.S. This includes, proposing potential new organizations to replace the NCAA, financial modeling, sport by sport governance, commercialized sport acting as an auxiliary to the institution with no academic or entrance requirements, athlete unionization and compensation, and a return to more mass participation club sports in the primary, secondary and higher education space. The proposals are intended to be a resource and add to the conversations that are sure to come.”