



A PLAYBOOK FOR UNIVERSITIES TO ADD MORE STUDENT-ATHLETES

ACHIEVING 1 MILLION STUDENT-ATHLETES IN U.S. UNIVERSITIES

#AddMoreAthletes

01. 08. 2026

ALL IT TAKES IS ONE LEADER, TAKING ONE SMALL STEP IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION

- The playbook for progress already exists, and anyone can use it
- All it takes is ONE university willing to lead, starting with ONE pilot sport on campus
- With one, or a few, there will be many that follow
- We can 2x participation and have 1 million high-level student-athletes in college, adding to campus culture, tuition revenue, donor activation, and graduating more leaders with unique skills into public & private sectors

THE FIRST MOVES: SIMPLE, FAST, & ECONOMICALLY VIABLE

This presentation is about giving a clear, simple and fast playbook for any university to act immediately

Get in the Game: Lowest Hurdle to Get Going

- 1 **Pick a sport** (or a few sports) at your University
- 2 Within that sport(s), **add another highly competitive team** as either a JV squad (organized under Athletics) or a Varsity Club (organized under club/rec)
—Criteria outlined on slide 15 should be met to make the team attractive to prospective student-athletes
- 3 **Determine the winning economic and admissions model** to ensure school goals are met (slides 16 – 18)

Make a Mark: 2x Athletes at a University

Some schools have gone bigger, out of the gate. If that fits your university...

- 4 **Brand the house of sports** at the University to create clear hierarchy of sport from intramural to varsity, with clear development pathways across the spectrum
- 5 **Reorganize NCAA Varsity and Club/Intramural** to work hand-in-hand and **ensure full facility and staff utilization**
- 6 **Add more sports**



THE CHALLENGE & OPPORTUNITY

THERE IS A LARGE IMBALANCE IN YOUTH → COLLEGE SPORTS

The “system” of college sports was built a generation ago, and it no longer meets the realities of the market, nor the desires of 75 million youth sports parents and student-athletes around the country. This group is interested in tiered competitive offerings in colleges. The old two solution “Varsity” or “Intramural/Club” model is out of touch with today’s reality.

8M → .5M

8M high school athletes and only 500,000 college roster spots available

47%

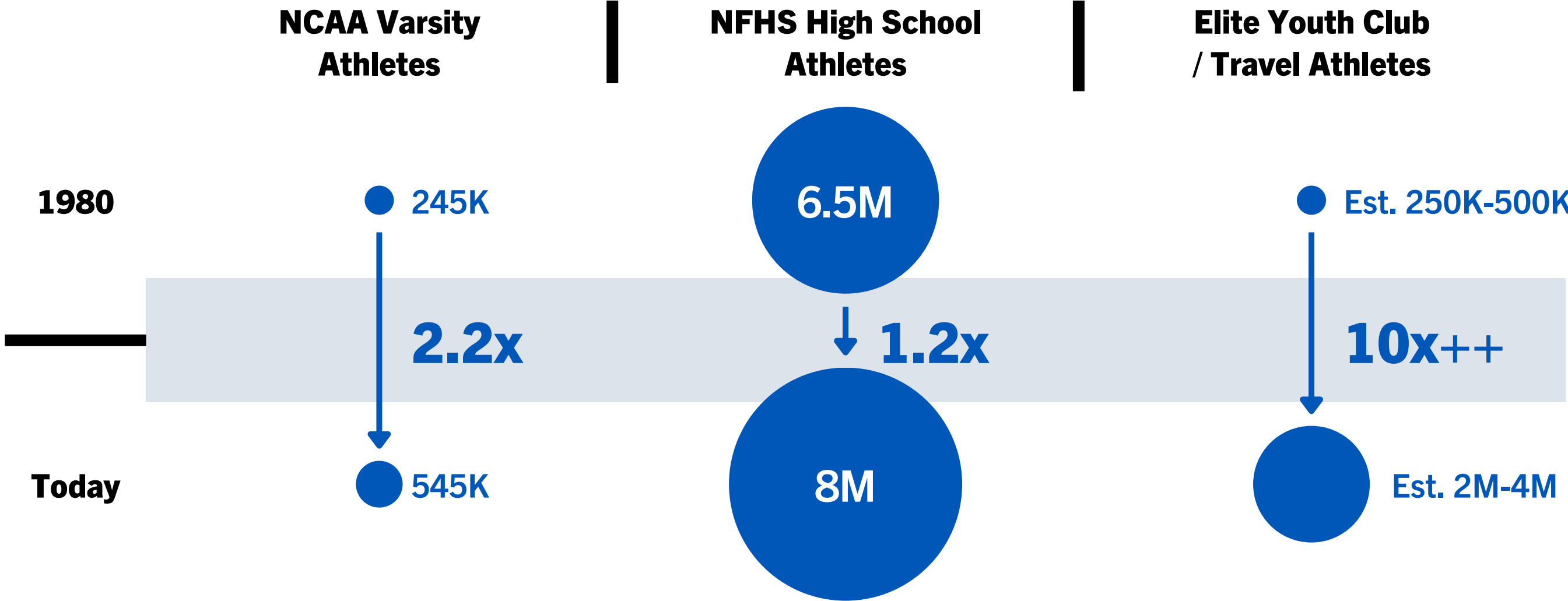
of families are interested in sports in college, without requirement of a scholarship

57%

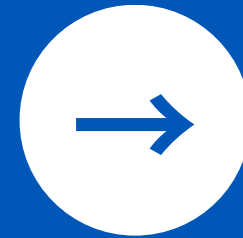
of families, equating to millions of athletes, would be interested in a “varsity-lite” JV sports experience in college

THERE IS A LARGE IMBALANCE IN YOUTH → COLLEGE SPORTS

What is often overlooked in participation data is the intensity of participation. The growth of serious youth sports is approx. 5x higher than roster spot growth in the NCAA. There are not enough NCAA roster spots, and college club/intramural sports is often too casual for this large and growing group.



PARENTS AND EMPLOYERS SEE SPORTS AS CRITICAL EDUCATION



UNIVERSITIES OFTEN TREAT IT AS NON-CORE EXTRA-CURRICULAR

Parents see sports as critical life education to be continued in college. Students see sports as their identity, and they will make yes/no college decisions based on roster availability. Employers see student-athletes as leaders in the workforce. For everyone involved, serious sports (when paired with academics) is critical education.

Are we treating it that way in academic institutions?

87%

of families list “Life Skills Development” through sport as the most important factor

7%

only 7% of families list “Money, NIL & Other Financial Benefits” as important to them

TECHNOLOGY IS CHANGING HIGHER EDUCATION. SPORTS IS AN IMPORTANT PART OF THE FUTURE.

Online education is improving, enrollment challenges are widening, and social media is changing the youth experience...



Going the Distance: Why Online Learning Works

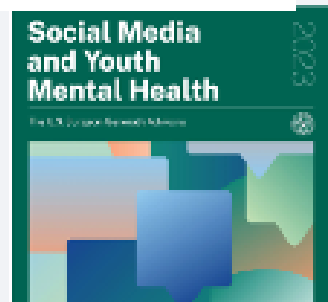

Today, online learning is the **fastest growing segment of education**, even as overall enrollment at postsecondary institutions declines. It's no wonder that **65 percent of institutions** report that online learning is critical to their long-term strategic plans.



October 27, 2021

The Enrollment Cliff Is Worse Than We Think


The challenge is far greater if we pay attention to college-readiness data.



This Advisory describes the current evidence on the impacts of social media on the mental health of children and adolescents. It states that we cannot conclude social media is sufficiently safe for children and adolescents and outlines immediate steps we can take to mitigate the risk of harm to children and adolescents.

[Download advisory \[PDF, 1.03 MB\]](#)

The future of campus-based education will (likely) be led by unique only-in-person experiences, and a growing focus on more intentional life skills development. Sports is perfect for both...




New chief experience officer named


Andrea Thomas, assistant dean of undergraduate studies at the David Eccles School of Business, school year.

TAYLOR RANDALL - PRESIDENT, UNIVERSITY OF UTAH

Last March, I want to reimagine the future of education at the U by creating an unparalleled student experience—one that gives prospective students a sense of "FOMO" (fear of missing out) if they don't attend the University of Utah. We want them to stand in line to come here—and we want to do this at scale.



Resilience: A High-Demand Skill of Tomorrow



Resilience, flexibility, agility, and leadership and social influence were heralded as some of the most important skills distinguishing declining jobs from those expected to proliferate. As leadership refers to the ability to influence others, and it should come as

NORD ANGLIA EDUCATION'S COLLABORATION WITH IMG ACADEMY CREATES EXCITING NEW OPPORTUNITIES FOR STUDENT PERFORMANCE, LEADERSHIP, AND WELLBEING



Andrew Fitzmaurice, Chief Executive Officer at Nord Anglia Education, said: "It's striking that three of the top five most valued workplace skills — leadership, motivation, and resilience—are deeply rooted in sport. These are the very qualities our collaboration with IMG Academy is helping our students to further develop while learning from some of the

THERE IS DEMAND FOR 1 MILLION COLLEGE ROSTER SPOTS

Currently there are c. 500,000 NCAA varsity roster spots, and we believe there is demand to 2x the participation in highly-competitive college women's and Olympic sports. If Universities create the supply, there can be wins across the board.

Admissions: Drive high-quality student athlete enrollment funnels

Campus Culture & Donor Activity: Athletes and competition drive culture, school pride and donors

Education to meet the moment: With tech innovation, life skill development and experiential education are ways to win, and sports can lead the way on both fronts

Facility Utilization: Better utilize prized sports facilities, often funded by taxpayer \$ and donor gifts

Development Pipelines for Varsity: Homegrown talent is far more attractive for the university and its sports programs than the current transfer portal musical chairs.

Opportunities for advancement and compensation growth for coaches: with more revenue and responsibility come opportunities for advancement.

Budget Benefits: There are a variety of attractive models for adding student-athletes at financial contribution similar to or more favorable than the broader student enrollment base.



A SIMPLE SOLUTION

MULTIPLE TEAMS PER SPORT

THE SIMPLE SOLUTION: MULTIPLE UNIVERSITY-SPONSORED COMPETITIVE TEAMS PER SPORT

- The existing college set up is driven by history and NCAA legal frameworks, not by rationale allocation of resources and market demand.
- Walk onto youth sports fields in America and you will see club/high-school sports operating many teams, across ages, abilities and genders.
- Youth sports field owners and club operator would likely shut-down if only serving one team. Yet that is often the model of college sports.
- **In college, we need a path that allows multiple competitive teams within a single sport**

One Sport \neq One Team

One Field \neq One Team

**ONE SPORT
=
MULTIPLE
COMPETITIVE
TEAMS**



START SMALL, MOVE FAST

A PLAYBOOK TO GET GOING

START SMALL, MOVE FAST

Three simple and economically viable steps that any University can take, today.

Get in the Game: Lowest Hurdle to Get Going

- 1 **Pick a sport** (or a few sports) at your University
- 2 **Within that sport(s), add another highly competitive team** as either a JV squad (organized under Athletics) or a Varsity Club (organized under club/rec)
—Criteria outlined on slide 15 should be met to make the team attractive to prospective student-athletes
- 3 **Determine the winning economic and admissions model** to ensure school goals are met (slides 16 – 18)

START SMALL, MOVE FAST

1 PICK A SPORT

Work with athletic department leadership using simple criteria:

1. **Assess Sport Demand:** Which Olympic and women's sports is your school know for? / Which sports have inbound recruiting demand exceeding roster spot supply?
2. **Assess Field / Court Capacity:** Looking across day-parts and the entirety of campus (i.e. student rec + varsity facilities) does the sport have capacity to add additional hours on field / court?
3. **Assess Sport Leadership Capacity:** Which sports want innovate, to build talent pipelines, to add additional compensation and coaching opportunities for staff?

It should be clear which sport(s) are best to start with at your University.

START SMALL, MOVE FAST

2 ADD ANOTHER COMPETITIVE TEAM(S)

To drive demand from the youth sports market, the Varsity-Lite (or call it JV, or Varsity Club) program must meet certain criteria. This is where most club and intramural sports are falling short at Universities.

- ✓ **Recruited to University as a valued student-athlete, with a roster spot available**
- ✓ **Qualified coaching and administration (ie not student led, nor crossover faculty coached)**
- ✓ *Some additional resources consistent with high-level sports (strength, nutrition, tutor, etc.)*
- ✓ *Some access and crossover with varsity athletes and varsity facilities (i.e. the more it feels like a JV squad the better)*
- ✓ *Some ability to advance to Varsity rosters if performance warrants opportunity*
- ✓ *Some preferred class scheduling – like varsity athletes – to allow for better field utilization.*

START SMALL, MOVE FAST

3 DETERMINE THE WINNING ECONOMIC & ADMISSIONS MODEL THAT FITS YOUR UNIVERSITY

Depending on the level of coaching, recruiting and travel resources, Universities can expect the cost of Varsity-Lite sports delivery to be in the \$5k - \$15k per student range.

- Head Coach
- Regional Travel & Competition
- Gear & Misc
- Optional: Shared 360 Support (Strength, Conditioning, Study, etc.)
- Optional: Assistant Coach / Shared

\$150k - \$300k
per team*

\$5k - \$15k
per student-
athlete*

START SMALL, MOVE FAST

(Continued)



MANY WAYS TO MAKE THE MATH WORK

Right or wrong, most Universities require a financial equation to neutralize incremental sports delivery costs. There are a variety of profitable or cost neutralizing models in practice today:

1. Normalize the Discount Rate

- More tuition paying student-athletes = more opportunities for financial aid for families that need it
- Balance the pay vs aid equation to get to the same net tuition as the rest of the enrolled student body, after accounting for the unique delivery cost of sports
- See appendix slides outlining math

2. Charge Sports Fees (to Participating Athletes)

- Some schools charge sports fees for participating athletes
- Consistent with youth sports market (elite travel club sports fees are separate from academic tuition)
- College Families are paying for many such add-ons (study abroad, Greek life, etc.)
- Paying athletes (tuition and fees) create opportunities for financial aid to families that need it

3. Create Work / Volunteer Opportunities

- Some schools are creating on-campus work / volunteer opportunities for student-athletes, including working the Varsity games (concessions, tickets, clean-up crew, etc.)
- Saves money on school P&L, freeing up financial resources for more intensive sports coaching and delivery

4. Fundraise & Sponsor

- Schools can deploy a variety of fundraising tactics to support varsity-lite / sports more broadly. These initiatives will be popular with donors
- Schools can work with their varsity sponsors (e.g. brands) to extend their sponsorship beyond varsity and into varsity-lite and club sports, creating a new income stream

5. Properly Allocate Costs

- While student-athletes require sport specific resources unique vs other students, athletes are also very likely burdening the university to a lesser degree in other areas. This should be accounted for.

3

MANY WAYS TO MAKE THE MATH WORK

University A

- \$25k Avg Tuition (pre aid)
- Varsity-lite costs university \$(10)k per athlete rel. to student body
- Varsity-lite discount rate -20pts vs avg student body
- Charges \$5k fee for varsity-lite athletes not on financial aid

Equivalent Financial Impact to Broader Student Body Enrollment

University B

- \$40k Avg Tuition (pre aid)
- Varsity-lite costs university \$(10)k per athlete rel. to student body
- Varsity-lite discount rate -10pts vs avg student body
- Varsity-lite athletes opportunity to work 5hrs per week, saving university c. \$5k per year in costs

Equivalent Financial Impact to Broader Student Body Enrollment

University C

- \$60k Avg Tuition (pre aid)
- Varsity-lite costs university \$(15)k per athlete rel. to student body
- Varsity sponsors (e.g. Gatorade) add rights to varsity-lite for impact of \$2k per incr. athlete
- Donors +[5]% to all Varsity giving to support varsity lite / club / rec, amounting to \$5k/athlete
- Adjusts athlete costs \$(8)k given lower univ. burdens elsewhere

Equivalent Financial Impact to Broader Student Body Enrollment



TAKE A BIGGER SWING

THE 'NEXT STEPS' PLAYBOOK TO 2X STUDENT-ATHLETES

TAKE A BIGGER SWING

Some schools are already taking a bigger swing and adding hundreds of student-athletes in this new Varsity-Lite model, if that fits your University...

Make a Mark: 2x Athletes at a University

Some schools have gone bigger, out of the gate. If that fits your university...

- 4 Brand the house of sports** at the University to create clear hierarchy of sport from intramural to varsity, with clear development pathways across the spectrum
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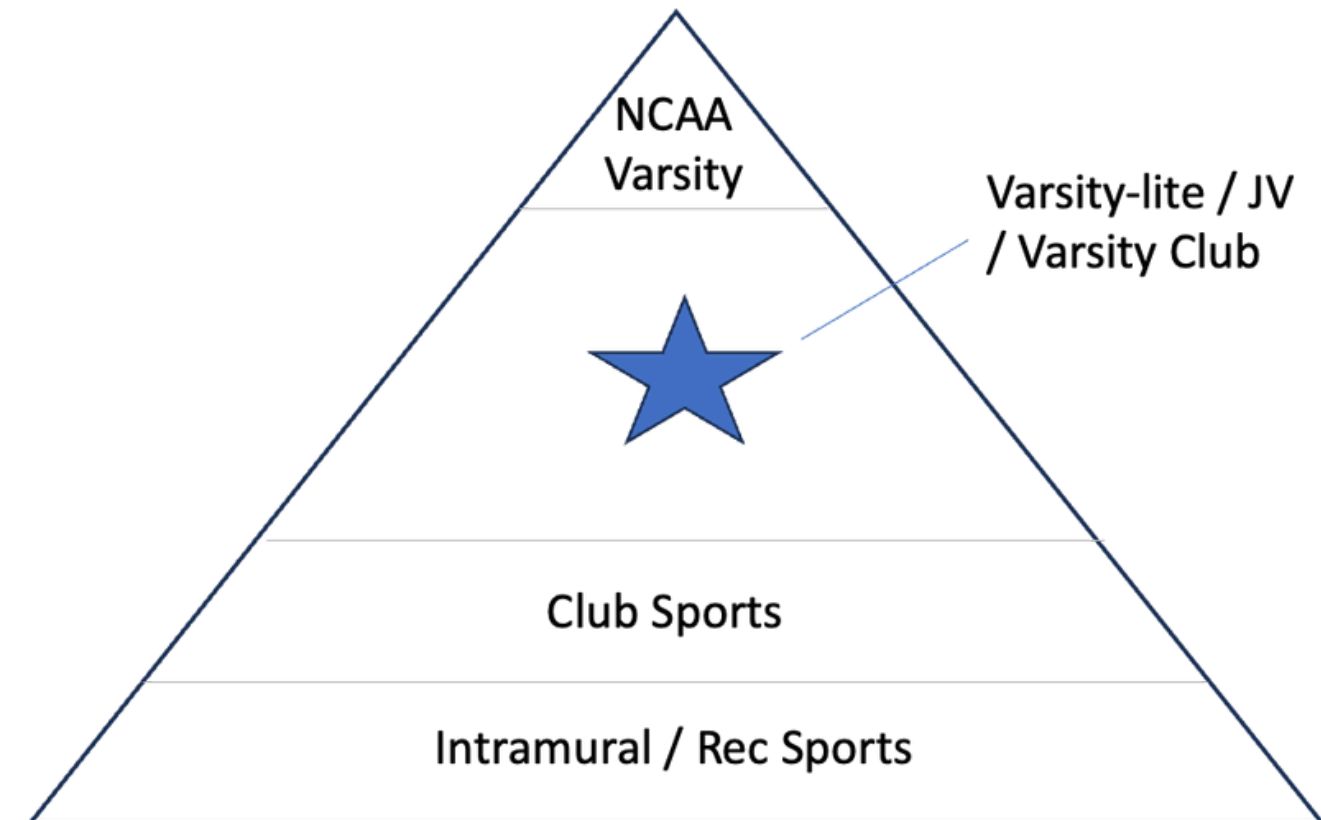
TAKE A BIGGER SWING

4 BRAND THE HOUSE WITH CLEAR SPORTS PATHWAY AND HIERARCHY

MLB Example



College



TAKE A BIGGER SWING

(Continued)

4 BRAND THE HOUSE

Create clear and consistent branding across the institution, with clear expectations for each program. Bring web and other collateral together to make sports a unified story at your university.



Varsity

- Our NCAA Varsity Student-Athletes, representing us at the highest-level of competition
- 15-20 hours / week commitment

Club

- Student-led competitive sports, playing for the love of competition, team bonds and individual growth
- 2-6 hours / week with flexibility

JV / Varsity-Lite / Varsity Club

- School-sponsored and staffed athletics, recruited athletes, competitive schedules and opportunity to try out for Varsity
- 5-15 hours / week commitment

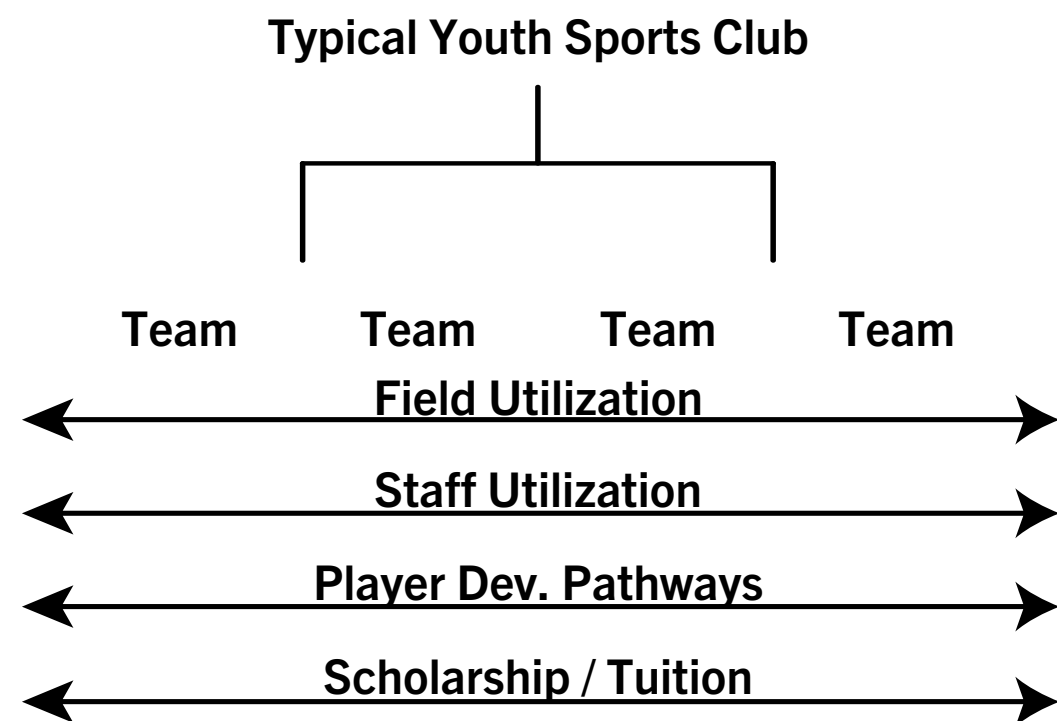
Rec - Fun for Everyone

- Easy access and fun for everyone, with opportunities for all levels and limited time commitments

TAKE A BIGGER SWING

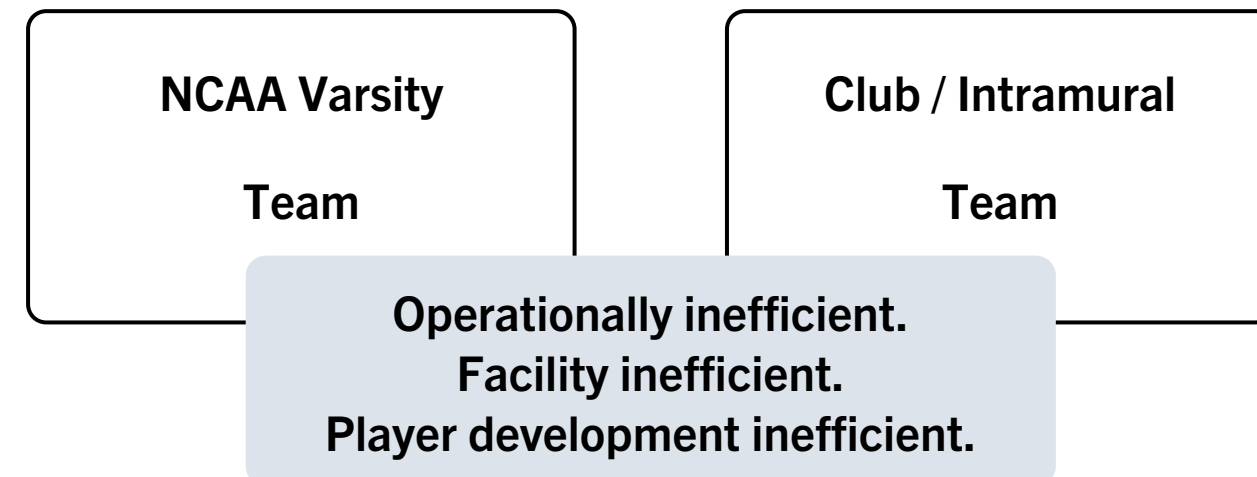
5 ORGANIZE MORE EFFICIENTLY AND MORE EFFECTIVELY FOR STUDENTS

Youth Sports



Optimizes single sport by hosting multiple teams, and considering 100+ players

College Sports (Today)



TAKE A BIGGER SWING

5 ORGANIZE MORE EFFICIENTLY AND MORE EFFECTIVELY FOR STUDENTS

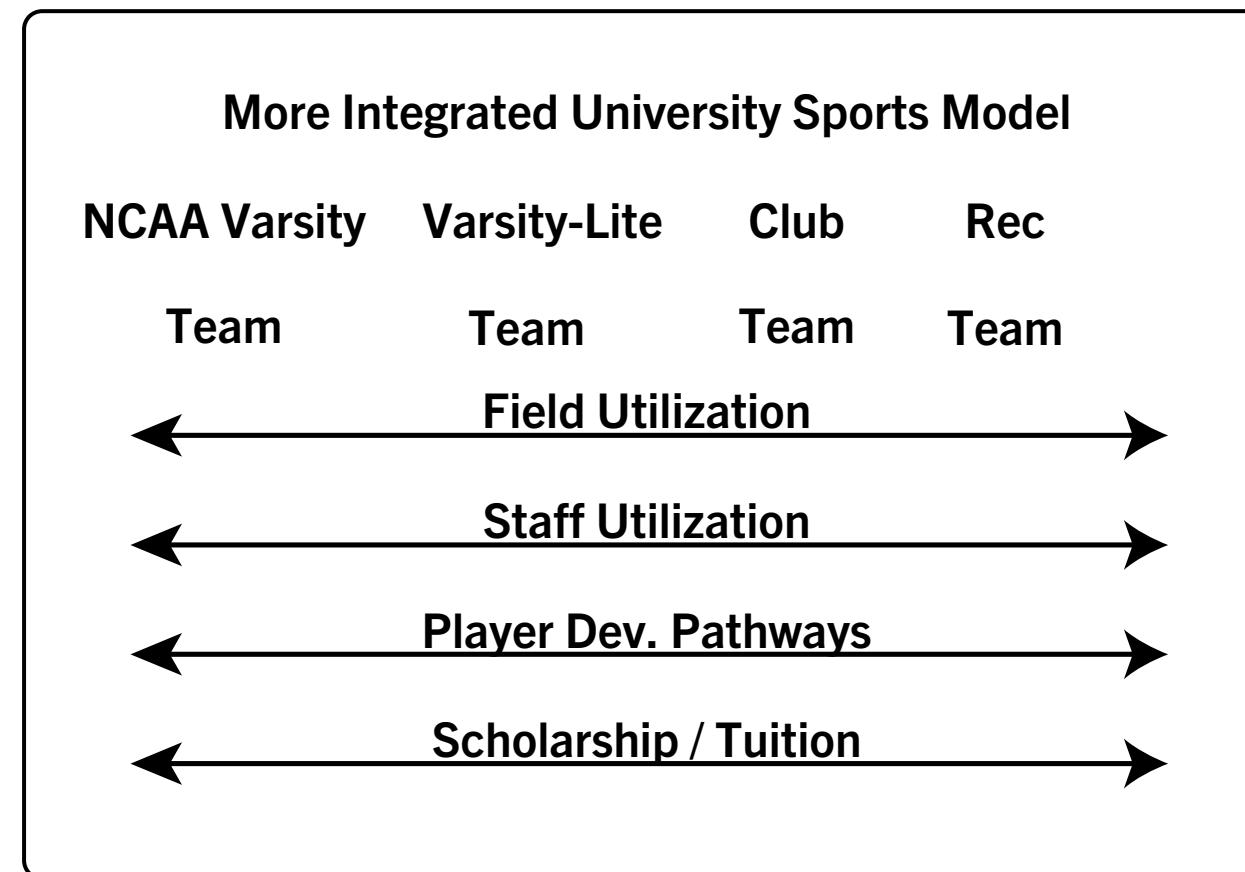
Central Oversight Model (Ideal)

Single leader overseeing all sports activities and assets (typically Universities are fragmenting leadership across two or three roles / departments). As a result, fields, budgets, financial aid, coaching and other resources are siloed and being inefficiently utilized.

Or, Central Collaboration Model

If reorganizing leaders is not viable, then increased collaboration can still be accomplish the goal, so long as clear processes and areas of collaboration exist.

New College Model (Several Universities Using)



TAKE A BIGGER SWING


6 ADD MORE SPORTS

Universities implementing this expanded model for sports are driving 50%+ growth in competitive Olympic and women student-athletes on the back of a working economic model.

IMPACT IN ACTION

LIBERTY & HIGH POINT

Several schools are already leading the way with this model. We believe that a few more high-profile adopters – especially high profile football schools – can tip the market in the right direction.



2x+ Athletes in Varsity-Lite Model

- Separated club and recreational sports
- Elevated club sports to be varsity-lite (coaching, recruiting, competition)
- Recruited pathways for high school athletes
- Work opportunities to reduce or eliminate club sports fees



800+ NEW ATHLETES IN ATHLETICS DEPARTMENT

- 50% growth to NCAA-quality Olympic & Women's sports
- Development pipelines for all levels
- Leading on life skills through sports education
- Profitable enrollment driver of mission aligned students

HIGH POINT UNIVERSITY



APPENDIX

ACKNOWLEDGING PUSHBACK

#AddMoreAthletes has been widely supported and is a popular concept. With that said, here are the areas of pushback.

From Youth Sports Families:

Pushback: This needs to help *everyone*, not only students that can afford it.

Response: 100% right.

- When looking at affordability in youth sports, the supply-demand imbalance of roster spots in college drives scarcity pressure into youth sports, and that pressure can translate to cost, time, travel, specialization and other areas of concern. Add more roster spots / supply in college, and we will see wide ranging benefits to families as the pressure comes off.
- When looking at affordability in college, the key financial model of education is in balancing enrollment from students that can afford full tuition with enrollment from students that cannot afford it (financial aid). Right now, by limiting roster spots, college sports is unable to optimize this fundamental tuition + aid model. If universities can fill more enrollment from tuition paying student-athletes, that enrollment will in turn open opportunities for more financial aid. More roster spots = more opportunity for all.

From Universities:

Pushback: We already have more applicants than available seats, and do not have a problem finding tuition and demand

Response: If this is true, your university is in the minority of universities out there right now. Most are fighting for enrollment and see sports as a differentiator. Even in these “oversubscribed” cases, there are still many good reasons to consider adding more athletes:

- c. 50%+ of every student matriculating to college played sports in high school, and 10-20% played high-level competitive travel club sports in high school. Is your student body reflecting that reality in terms of their activities in college? Most likely not. That is not a reflection of student interest; that reflects lack of opportunity.
- In a world of smartphones, social media and now AI, many aspects of academic education and socializing can be done online. The experiential side of college and life skills development is now more critical. In a decade it will be table-stakes. Sports is not the only answer, but there are very few educational activities that must be done in person, on a team. Sports is a differentiator.

ACKNOWLEDGING PUSHBACK (CONT.)

#AddMoreAthletes has been widely supported and is a popular concept. With that said, here are the areas of pushback.

From Universities:

Pushback: Olympic and women's college sports are not economically viable

Response: See the preceding presentation.

- If sports could not be strong, profitable source of tuition and value for universities, then non-FBS football schools simply would not have sports. Yet there are thousands of schools that have very little media money or ticket sales, and they are thriving in women's and Olympic sports. Sports are economically viable.
- If tuition and fee driven (balanced with aid) intensive sports models didn't work, then youth club sports would not exist and flourish. These activities have grown ten-fold over recent decades. Sports are economically viable.
- It is notable that limiting sports to 1 team = 1 sport as a baseline set up, is a huge economic handicap, and this is how most universities are choosing to play the game. Universities – who have spent tens of millions on sports facilities – are not optimizing facility utilization, staff and brand resonance to attract more student-athletes in sports.

NORMALIZING DISCOUNT RATES: ILLUSTRATIVE MATH

Student-athletes bring value in higher than typical donor focus, and student-athletes also likely carry a lower burden on other parts of the university cost structure. While those adjustments should be considered, the math below simply shows how any university can get to like-for-like net tuition between new varsity-lite student-athletes and the rest of the student body through **normalizing discount rates**.

Illustrative Net Tuition Math	
Student Body	
University Tuition	40,000
Avg Discount Rate	50%
Avg Discount \$	(20,000)
Net Tuition Student-Body	20,000
JV / Varsity-Lite Squad	
University Tuition	40,000
Cost of Varsity Lite per Student	(10,000)
Tuition net of Sport Costs	30,000
Student-Athlete Discount Rate	25%
Student-Athlete Discount \$	(10,000)
Net Tuition Student-Athlete	20,000

Student-Athlete Discount Rate to Achieve Equal Net Tuition							
		University Tuition (Before Discount/Aid)					
		25%	\$ 25,000	\$ 40,000	\$ 55,000	\$ 70,000	\$ 85,000
Average	27.5%		-13%	3%	9%	13%	16%
Discount	35.0%		-5%	10%	17%	21%	23%
Rate	42.5%		3%	18%	24%	28%	31%
Student	50.0%		10%	25%	32%	36%	38%
Body	57.5%		18%	33%	39%	43%	46%

IT SHOULD NOT BE SO HARD TO HAVE MULTIPLE TEAMS IN ANY GIVEN SPORT

1

Bottoms-up: University-led Innovation Adding a “Varsity-Lite” Model

Uplevel club sports: Universities can create structured and tiered multi-sport competition by more closely and intentionally aligning “club” and “varsity” sports programs.

This is happening, and one or a few high-profile schools adopting it will create the needed momentum.

2

Top-Down: Modify one NCAA Rule

Talk with your NCAA peers or Congress:

The NCAA rule limiting schools’ ability to run multiple teams in a single sport – while rational in the context of generations-old football history – is perhaps the singular-most reason the market is not realizing it’s potential for scalable, profitable, growth in women’s and Olympic college sports.

