

# Proposal to Modernize the NCAA Swimming & Diving Championship Format and Automatic Qualification Procedures

The College Swimming & Diving Coaches Association of America (CSCAA), on behalf of its Division I membership, respectfully submits the attached proposal to the NCAA Division I Swimming & Diving Committee. This two-part proposal is designed to support collegiate swimming and diving by modernizing the championship format to better align with broadcast needs while expanding institutional access through an updated qualification process — all without imposing additional financial burdens on institutions or the NCAA.

## Intent of the Proposal

- **Expand the sports reach by meeting the needs of broadcast partners**, ensuring the championship is an attractive and accessible product for linear exposure.
- **Increase the value of college swimming & diving** by updating the qualification process, increasing access without impacting any scoring and maintaining the overall competitive integrity of NCAA Championship.

## Part I: Modernizing the Championship Format

Attachment 1 - *Proposed Updated Championship Format*

### Proposal:

Modernize the NCAA Division I Swimming & Diving Championship by creating a high-stakes, heavyweight experience—where every session matters and every race or dive has the power to shift the standings, elevating both the intensity and visibility of the championship and the sport.

Adopted an updated event order to create a more fan-friendly and broadcast-ready championship experience. Marquee events will now anchor the final days of competition, enhancing excitement and visibility. Consolation finals will be scored directly from prelims. Relays remain a timed-final event with the Top 8 seeds racing in a finals showdown, made for TV.

These changes—developed in consultation with ESPN producers—are strategically designed to elevate the championship’s linear broadcast potential without negatively impacting student-athletes. The meet will remain a four-day championship for each gender with the same event offerings, keeping the championship financially net-zero or better for both the NCAA and participating institutions. The potential to reduce the length, modify event offerings, or combine into one championship in future years still exists after initial adjustments take hold. Those updates will be assessed and recommended by the CSCAA annually.

### Key updates include:

- **Prelims carries more weight:** Ninth through 16th will be scored directly from prelims. Top 8 swimmers, divers and relays will race during finals in a heavyweight fight for a national title.
- **Moving award ceremonies:** Reposition award presentations to allow the finals competition to flow more smoothly, minimizing interruptions and improving the viewer experience. It also meets the request of broadcast, preparing the championship for future linear exposure.

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- **Enhancing diving coverage:** Splitting diving finals into two segments doubles exposure for the sport within each finals session while shortening each segment for a more viewer-friendly experience. This change meets the request of broadcast, preparing the championship for future linear exposure. This format also provides strategic rest periods for swimmers competing in multiple events, contributing to overall athlete performance and session flow.
- **Reordering events for maximum impact:** Place the fastest and most exciting events on the final days of the championship and allow for stronger storytelling, narrative buildup and viewer engagement, as recommended by ESPN producers.

### **Part II: Updating Automatic Qualification Procedures**

See Attachment 2 - *Proposed Qualification Model*

#### **Proposal:**

Modify the current qualification process to allow for broader institutional representation while preserving the competitive integrity of the National Championship Meet. The proposed updates simplify the selection process for the general public, enhancing transparency and engagement. Additionally, this approach enables institutions to spotlight their qualifiers in real time—both as they win their conference championships and during the selection process.

#### **Proposed Model:**

- Establish one NCAA Championship swimming qualifying standard.
- Swimmer who wins their conference championship event *and* meets or exceeds the qualifying standard receives an automatic bid to the NCAA Division I Championship.
- The remainder of the championship field is filled with those who meet or exceed the qualifying standard following the same process that is currently in place.

#### **Benefits of the Proposed Model:**

- **Increased institutional representation:** Expand championship access for schools and conferences without compromising competitive integrity or increasing the size of the meet.
- **No additional participants or cost:** All qualifiers must meet or exceed the qualifying standard and no change is made to the championship field size.
- **No changes to the diving qualification process:** Divers continue to qualify through their Zone regional meets and no changes are necessary as it relates to this model.
- **Team standings and competitive balance will remain intact:** Historical data shows minimal impact to team representation and athletes who scored at the NCAA Championship meet would be untouched.

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## **Impact Summary**

By adopting this proposal, the NCAA Championship will:

- Meet the needs of broadcast media, positioning the championship for linear exposure
- Remain cost-neutral or better to the NCAA and institutions
- Retain its competitive integrity and prestige
- Increase accessibility and representation

## **Statement from the Executive Director**

This proposal reflects extensive research, data analysis, and meaningful collaboration among Division I swimming and diving coaches, key stakeholders, and media and governing body partners. Guided by the CSCAA and shaped through consultation with administrators and industry leaders, this model embodies a modern, equitable, and forward-thinking approach to championship competition.

We are proud to submit this proposal with the support of Division I coaches, endorsements from ESPN producers, and alignment with national and international governing bodies. This cost-neutral update offers a timely and necessary opportunity to elevate, modernize, and expand the value of collegiate swimming and diving.

We believe these thoughtful updates will strengthen the future of NCAA swimming and diving. Thank you for your consideration and continued support of our sport. I remain available for any questions, recommendations, or feedback.

— *Samantha Barany, Executive Director, CSCAA*

*Phone: (804) 426-3422*

*Email: [sbarany@cscaa.org](mailto:sbarany@cscaa.org)*

## **Attachments:**

- **Attachment 1** – Proposed Event Order (2 Options)
- **Attachment 2** - Frequently Asked Questions
- **Attachment 3** - Letters of Support (submitted independently)

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## **SAMPLE ORDER OF EVENTS - A**

### **DAY 1:**

#### **TRIALS**

- 1,650-yard Freestyle - Times Finals
- 200-yard Medley Relay
- 800-yard Freestyle Relay

#### **FINALS (EST 40 MIN)**

- 1,650-yard Freestyle - Seeds 1-8
- 200-yard Medley Relay
- 800-yard Freestyle Relay

### **DAY 2:**

#### **TRIALS**

- 400-yard Individual Medley
- 200-yard Freestyle
- 200-yard Butterfly
- 400-yard Medley Relay
- One-Meter Diving

#### **FINALS (EST 81 MIN)**

- 400-yard Individual Medley
- 200-yard Freestyle
- One-Meter Diving - Rounds 1-3
- 200-yard Butterfly
- One-Meter Diving - Rounds 4-6
- 400-yard Medley Relay

### **DAY 3:**

#### **TRIALS**

- 500-yard Freestyle
- 200-yard Breaststroke
- 100-yard Freestyle
- 200-yard Backstroke
- 200-yard Freestyle Relay
- Three-Meter Diving

#### **FINALS (EST 81 MIN)**

- 500-yard Freestyle
- 200-yard Breaststroke
- Three-Meter Diving- Round 1-3
- 100-yard Freestyle
- 200-yard Backstroke
- Three-Meter Diving - Rounds 4-6
- 200-yard Freestyle Relay

### **DAY 4:**

#### **TRIALS**

- 100-yard Butterfly
- 200-yard Individual Medley
- 100-yard Breaststroke
- 100-yard Backstroke
- 50-yard Freestyle
- 400-yard Freestyle Relay
- Platform Diving

#### **FINALS (EST 81 MIN)**

- 100-yard Butterfly
- 200-yard Individual Medley
- Platform Diving - Rounds 1-3
- 100-yard Breaststroke
- 100-yard Backstroke
- 50-yard Freestyle
- Platform Diving - Rounds 4-6
- 400-yard Freestyle Relay

# Proposal to Modernize the NCAA Swimming & Diving Championship Format and Automatic Qualification Procedures

## **SAMPLE ORDER OF EVENTS - B**

### **DAY 1:**

#### **TRIALS**

- 1,650-yard Freestyle - Times Finals
- 200-yard Medley Relay
- 800-yard Freestyle Relay

#### **FINALS (EST 40 MIN)**

- 1,650-yard Freestyle - Seeds 1-8
- 200-yard Medley Relay
- 800-yard Freestyle Relay

### **DAY 2:**

#### **TRIALS**

- 100-yard Butterfly
- 400-yard Individual Medley
- 200-yard Freestyle
- 100-yard Backstroke
- 200-yard Freestyle Relay
- One-Meter Diving

#### **FINALS (EST 81 MIN)**

- 100-yard Butterfly
- 400-yard Individual Medley
- One-Meter Diving - Rounds 1-3
- 200-yard Freestyle
- 100-yard Backstroke
- One-Meter Diving - Rounds 4-6
- 200-yard Freestyle Relay

### **DAY 3:**

#### **TRIALS**

- 500-yard Freestyle
- 50-yard Freestyle
- 200-yard Backstroke
- 200-yard Breaststroke
- 400-yard Medley Relay
- Three-Meter Diving

#### **FINALS (EST 81 MIN)**

- 500-yard Freestyle
- 50-yard Freestyle
- Three-Meter Diving- Round 1-3
- 200-yard Backstroke
- 200-yard Breaststroke
- Three-Meter Diving - Rounds 4-6
- 400-yard Medley Relay

### **DAY 4:**

#### **TRIALS**

- 200-yard Individual Medley
- 100-yard Freestyle
- 200-yard Butterfly
- 100-yard Breaststroke
- 400-yard Freestyle Relay
- Platform Diving

#### **FINALS (EST 81 MIN)**

- 200-yard Individual Medley
- 100-yard Freestyle
- Platform Diving - Rounds 1-3
- 200-yard Butterfly
- 100-yard Breaststroke
- Platform Diving - Rounds 4-6
- 400-yard Freestyle Relay

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**Note 1:** All events will be conducted in a prelims/finals format except the 1,650 and relays.

**Note 2:** The 1,650-yard freestyle will be conducted as a timed final event, slowest to fastest during prelims. Seeds 1-8 will race during finals.

**Note 3:** Relays will be conducted as a timed final event during prelims. Seeds 1-8 will race during finals.

**Note 4:** Ninth through 16th place will be scored directly from preliminary sessions.

**Note 5:** Eight lanes will be used in all swimming events.

**Note 6:** The first place winner(s) will be interviewed immediately after the championship final of that given event and awarded their first place trophy. All other awards ceremonies will be held following the championship final session.

**Note 7:** Diving will be conducted in two rounds during final sessions.

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## Frequently Asked Questions

### **1. Will the dates of the NCAA Championship Change?**

Will the dates of the NCAA Championship change?

This proposal does not directly address changes to championship dates. It was developed to position the meet for linear broadcast coverage and is designed to be implemented as early as 2026 as a proof of concept for potential broadcast partners. If ESPN or another network requires alternate dates (e.g., mid-February or April) to accommodate linear coverage, the CSCAA would work with the membership to recommend the date adjustment—using the proposed format as the foundation.

### **2. Does the CSCAA recommend that the championships combine men and women?**

While this proposal primarily focuses on aligning the championship with broadcast needs and increasing the sport's visibility, it does not explicitly recommend a combined format. However, the CSCAA recognizes the potential benefits of combining the championships, including enhanced fan engagement and reduced operational costs for the NCAA. Should the NCAA express interest in a combined format, the CSCAA is prepared to provide a formal recommendation that ensures the best possible experience for student-athletes, coaches, and all stakeholders.

### **3. Will the NCAA Championship move to one “home” location?**

On behalf of its membership, the CSCAA recommends that the NCAA Committee explore a long-term partnership with a consistent host site for the Division I Swimming and Diving Championships. Indianapolis emerges as a strong candidate to host both men's and women's meets annually. That said, the CSCAA acknowledges that hosting rights have already been awarded through 2028 (Georgia Tech, Texas, and Texas). A formal recommendation will be submitted during the next RFP cycle. The CSCAA also acknowledges that the needs of Division III programs must be carefully considered as part of this conversation and planning process.

### **4. What is the timeline for the addition of new events?**

No additional events are recommended at this time.

### **5. What are the additional costs of this proposal to the NCAA or to institutions?**

The proposal is designed to be cost-neutral—or potentially cost-saving—for both the NCAA and its member institutions. The recommendation does not expand the field size or extend the championship's duration. Future cost savings may be possible if the men's and women's championships are combined, the meet is shortened, or strategically overlapped. If such adjustments are pursued, the CSCAA is ready to support necessary format modifications.

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### **6. Does this impact roster sizes for the championship?**

Adjusting championship rosters is not part of this proposal.

### **7. What is the recommended new qualification standard?**

The CSCAA recommends that NCAA swimming qualification standards be set at the average 80th-place time over the past three years. No changes are proposed to the diving qualification process at this time. This adjustment aims to reduce the number of individual preliminary swims, potentially shortening morning sessions all without affecting overall team scores or the total number of qualifiers. Notably, this change would also enhance the competitive significance of conference championships, promoting broader access to the NCAA Championship and supporting the sport's sustainability.

### **8. Do you need to achieve the qualifying standard when winning your conference championship to earn the automatic qualification?**

Our year over year research shows that approximately 20 athletes would have earned a qualification.

### **9. Are there future opportunities to further evolve the championship?**

Yes, we believe this is the first step in a potential series of changes to evolve the championship. We look forward to implementing these adjustments and then evaluating next steps with industry leaders and experts to continue refining the championship model for the benefit of athletes, coaches, and institutions.

### **10. Are there other iterations of the event format?**

Yes, there are several possibilities. Two sample event orders were included with this proposal for the committee's review. The CSCAA is prepared to work with the NCAA Committee, broadcast partners, and experts within the swimming and diving community to fine-tune the event order—ensuring the best possible broadcast format and the most advantageous experience for student-athletes.