



## Understanding the College Divisions

### NCAA Division I

Division 1 is home to the **largest universities** and colleges, whereas Division II and Division III member schools are smaller in size. A common misunderstanding among athletes is that the level of Division II is by definition weaker than in Division I; or Division III compared to Division II. While it's true on average that D-I schools are stronger than D-II schools and D-II schools stronger than D-III schools, it is important to understand that a school's decision whether to compete in Division III or Division I is of strategic nature. A school decides whether it wants to be a D-II school or D-III school and must apply for membership accordingly. It is not possible to move up or down the divisions based on athletic success and performance, but it is possible to transfer from one division to another, following a **transition period**, if the school makes the strategic decision to do so.

Running a Division I athletic program comes with the **highest price tag**, as the largest number of sports are required; consequently, most scholarship money, recruiting budget, and travel costs needed. A school is required to sponsor at a minimum:

- 7 men's sports & 7 women's sports; or
- 6 men's sports & 8 women's sports

### NCAA Division II

**Smaller universities** participate in Division II athletics. Division II has the fewest member schools compared to the total number of D-I and D-III institutions.

The requirements to compete in Division II are lower and thus less expensive, such as a school must sponsor at least:

- 5 men's sports & 5 women's sports; or
- 4 men's sports & 6 women's sports

### NCAA Division III

Division III is the **largest of all NCAA divisions**, with its member schools being predominantly private schools (roughly 80%). D-III schools are on average the smallest in student enrollment and the student experience of playing D-III sports is different than competing in D-I: The overarching guideline for all student athletes ("Student first, athlete second") is emphasized

to the greatest extent in NCAA Division III, with the smallest number of competitions scheduled and organized team practice at the lowest level in terms of hours permitted.

Division III programs may **not award** any **athletic scholarships** to its student athletes. Athletes may receive any other form of financial aid, such as academic financial aid or need-based aid, making the potential scholarship offers from a school often more interesting than an offer from another division, which does have athletic scholarships to award to students.

## NAIA

The NAIA calls itself “The expert in the business of small college athletics”. The NAIA used to run 2 divisions for men's and women's basketball, but competition moved to a single division set-up (again) with the start of the academic year 2020-2021, which means there is no NAIA I and NAIA II any longer.

NAIA schools are most comparable with NCAA II and NCAA III schools in terms of size, enrollment numbers, and level of competition, although there are exceptions with some of the strongest NAIA programs (across sports) competing on a level comparable to D-I schools.

## NJCAA

The NJCAA governs intercollegiate athletics for **community colleges and junior colleges**; 2-year colleges which offer associate degrees before a student transfers to a 4-year university and completes an undergraduate degree.

College coaches on the JUCO (**J**unior **C**ollege) level are able to provide a great college experience with highly competitive games and tournaments. Because JUCO is a steppingstone for its athletes, college coaches are instrumental in putting together an attractive schedule to offer athletes the right platform to transfer to another school once they have earned enough college level credits. There are several reasons why JUCO is a **great place** for a number of athletes in case they are limited by:

- Poor results in high school could make it impossible for you to get accepted by a 4-year school.
- Insufficient academic results to fulfill NCAA or NAIA Eligibility requirements.
- Lower financial possibilities to invest in education (2 years on 2-year and 2 years on 4-year school is often more affordable)
- Best path to getting a four-year college roster spot or a chance to stay close to home, earn college credit, and continue athletic career.