Opinion

The 24-team playoff will not save college football

By MAXWELL ADAMS
Staff Writer

College Football's 24-team playoff proposal was officially approved Nov. 9. The College Football Playoffs (CFP) Management Committee unanimously approved the 24-team playoff format, doubling its size from 12, which is set to start next season. The expanded format will feature 23 postseason games, allowing more programs to compete for the national championship.

While some schools may be rejoicing in this news, fans and players should be disappointed.

More inclusion does not automatically mean a better product, and the CFP has seemingly fallen victim to trying to adopt something it could never be: March Madness.

The decision reeks of desperation, as the committee has seemingly chosen to "save college football" through expansion at the expense of the regular season, player safety and the significance of traditional and historical matchups, all in the name of "inclusion."

The decision also comes off as a money grab rather than an actual improvement to the game. If they were trying to improve the game, they would have given the adjustments they made for this year's 12-team format an actual opportunity to play out, or at least adopted the NFL's format.

The NCAA hasn't even been able to settle on a consistent 12-team format since the College Football Playoff moved on from the four-team format it started with in 2014.

Originally, the 12-team plan called for six automatic bids for conference champions and six at-large selections. That changed to five automatic bids and seven at-large selections before the format debuted in 2024.

The criteria was adjusted once again, with automatic bids going to the four Power Four conference champions and the highest-ranked Group of Six teams, alongside seven at-large selections.

College football has a balance problem, and this playoff change does not solve it. The Big Ten and the SEC have been the champions in each year of the College Football Playoff except for two (2016, 2018). If it weren't for Clemson University, it would have been every year since its establishment. That will not change with this new format, it will only include more teams from both of those conferences.

The new format guarantees spots to the four Power Four conference champions and the highest-ranked Group of Six champion, while leaving 19 additional spots for the highest-ranked remaining teams.

In other words, the programs and conferences that already hold much of the sport's power could have even more opportunities to compete for a championship. More access does not automatically create more parity.

Teams could potentially lose three or four games and still find themselves in the playoff conversation, rather than having every week carry the same weight.

Not only is the CFP making the regular season for these teams mean less, but they are also giving those other conferences even less of an opportunity to compete for a championship by giving those three-or four-loss SEC or BIG 10 schools a legitimate chance to still be a part of the postseason.

So how do they fix it?

Lower levels of a sport, including college athletics, should not operate drastically differently from the professional leagues. Each league, whether it's a youth recreational league or a Power Four rivalry clash at the Division I Football Bowl Subdivision level, should be preparing its athletes to compete at the highest level.

I understand that not every athlete will make it professionally, — in fact, very few will — but the desire to reach that level is shared by everyone. With that being the case, it would make sense for the CFP to adopt some of the principles behind the NFL's playoff format.

In the NFL, every division winner is guaranteed a playoff spot, followed by the best remaining teams that did not win their divisions. This format in college would provide that same opportunity across its conferences.

To accomplish this, the Group of Six conferences should be consolidated into three, creating seven conferences, which will closely resemble the NFL's divisional structure.

The four Power Four conferences would remain intact, while the six remaining conferences would be paired together.

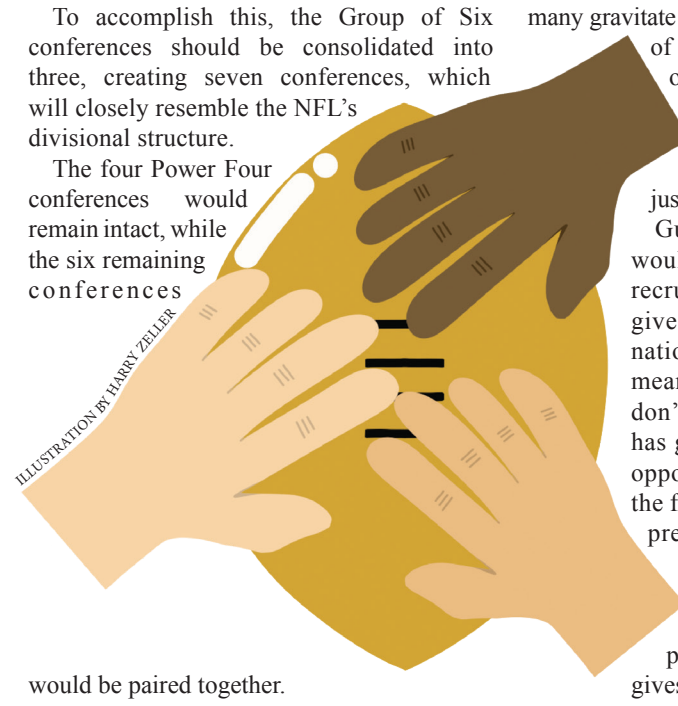


ILLUSTRATION BY HARRY ZELLER

Based on current membership, those three newly formed conferences would have 24, 27 and 18 teams, respectively. The Group of Six needs an opportunity to create a new competitive landscape.

This would allow teams to establish their own identity and championship race, while creating a more direct path for programs outside the Power Four to compete for a national title.

Seven conference winners, seven at-large bids, more parity and a relatively similar timeline of games.

Giving every single conference a shot at the title ideally would create the balance the CFP is looking for. It will also ideally, create balance in recruiting, opening the possibility for top recruits to consider those now lower-tier teams.

Right now, recruits know the Big Ten and SEC are the major powerhouses, and naturally, many gravitate toward those programs because of their resources, exposure and opportunities to compete for championships. Smaller programs need a legitimate opportunity to catch up, not just three years.

Guaranteed playoff access would not automatically make recruiting equal, but it would give those programs more national exposure and something meaningful to build toward. I don't believe college football has given those programs enough opportunity to close that gap in the formats they had tried in years previously.

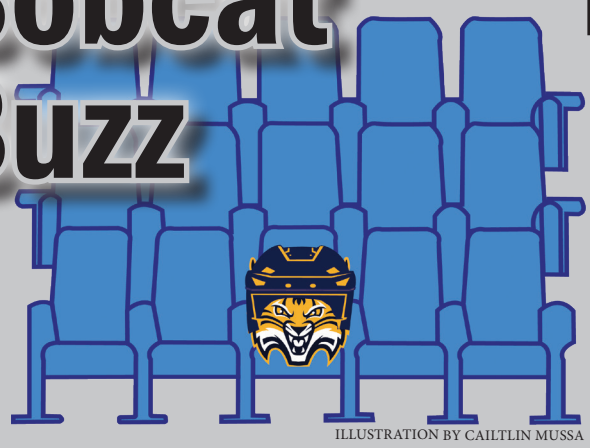
College football doesn't need more teams in the playoff to create a better championship product; It needs a system that gives every program a legitimate opportunity to compete for one.

Restructuring the conferences and guaranteeing every conference champion a playoff spot gives smaller programs something tangible to compete for, while preserving the importance of the regular season.

There is no perfect playoff format. This proposal would certainly come with its own challenges, but expanding to 24 teams shouldn't be mistaken for solving the problems that have existed in college football for years.

Sometimes, making something bigger doesn't make it better.

Bobcat Buzz



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It's time to start showing up for women's ice hockey

By RYAN SMITH
Staff Writer

As I made my way to M&T Bank Arena for the women's ice hockey game against Yale Oct. 30, I was filled with excitement as the adrenaline rushed through me.

Only a few weeks prior, I had sat with my parents and watched a packed student section celebrate a men's ice hockey victory. Now, a top 15 matchup was in store. As the shuttle made its way up to the York Hill Campus, I looked forward to being part of another packed crowd in the stands to witness the rivalry.

And then I arrived to find quite literally every seat in the student section empty.

Sadly, this has become a trend for years despite the women's ice hockey program consistently being ranked inside the top 10 in the nation, playing in arguably the best conference in the nation and hosting competitive rivalries. The team has simply not been able to draw any attention from the student body.

According to U.S. College Hockey Online (USCHO) stats, the average attendance at M&T Bank Arena for women's ice hockey is only 463 seats out of 3,386, which is 15% of the arena's capacity, and even that number may be a little generous.

For a school and a student population that prides itself on being a "hockey school," 15% capacity for a top 10 team is nowhere close to acceptable. Students and fans consistently show up for the men's team, and although the men's program may have a more illustrious past, in recent years, both teams have had similar successes.

I know for a fact that this season both teams have the same lofty, yet attainable goal of bringing home a national championship.

What makes this even more disappointing is that this season marks the 25th anniversary of the program, and they have truly come a really long way. After posting eight losing seasons to start, the program has entered somewhat of a golden era with multiple ECAC Championships and NCAA tournament appearances.

Quinnipiac women's ice hockey has made clear strides in the past decade, and I think it's long overdue that support for the team progresses as well. I would easily understand the lack of support if the program was struggling; however, this team currently sits No. 6 in the USCHO poll, two spots ahead of its male counterparts.

Yet only one team takes the ice to a raucous arena and a student section that's packed to the brim. The other plays their contests in front of a sea of empty blue seats.

So to the students, I say this: the next time it's Sunday afternoon and you're on the athletic website to get tickets, remember that there are two national championship contenders in Hamden.

And if we want to continue selling ourselves as a "hockey school," it's about time that we start showing up and getting loud for both our teams.