



# BASKETBALL

## 2025-26 NCAA DIVISION I MEN'S BASKETBALL CHAMPIONSHIP PRINCIPLES AND PROCEDURES FOR ESTABLISHING THE BRACKET

There are three phases to the process:

- I. *Select* the 37 best at-large teams;
- II. *Seed* the field of 68 teams; and
- III. *Place* the teams into the championship bracket.

### Process Principles for Selection, Seeding and Bracketing

The Selection, Seeding and Bracketing process for the Division I Men's Basketball Championship adheres to the following principles:

- The committee **selects the 37 best teams** not otherwise automatic qualifiers for their conference to fill the at-large berths. There is no limit on the number of at-large teams the committee may select from one conference;
- The committee endeavors to **achieve reasonable competitive balance** in each region of the bracket;
- A committee member ("member") shall not be present during any discussion regarding the selection or seeding of a team the individual represents as an athletics director or commissioner;
- A member is permitted to answer only general, factual questions about teams in the conference the individual represents;
- At no point in the process shall a member vote for a team the individual represents as an athletics director or commissioner;
- A member representing a conference office shall not be present during any discussion about, or participate in a vote for, a team that has formally declared their intent to transition to the conference the member represents;
- A committee member shall not be present during any discussion regarding the selection or seeding of a team in which an immediate family member is a student-athlete on the men's basketball team, is a member of the men's basketball coaching staff or is a senior athletics administrator at the institution (however upon returning to the room committee members will be updated on relevant discussion by the NCAA's vice president of men's basketball);
- At no point in the process shall a member vote for a team in which an immediate family member is a student-athlete on the men's basketball team, is a member of the men's basketball coaching staff or is a senior athletics administrator at the institution;
- If the team the chair represents remains on the under consideration board, the individual shall not be in the room during the selection process once the committee has selected all but four of the at-large teams;
- If an institution represented by the chair is among the last four at-large teams on the overall

seed list, he or she may not publicly comment on the school's inclusion into the field. Rather, the vice chair will answer all questions regarding the team;

- All votes will be by secret ballot.

Committee members have a wide range of observation, consultation, and data resources available to them throughout the season and during selection week. These resources provide the foundation for a thorough and educated process that is reinforced by the committee member's discussion and deliberation. Among the resources available to the committee are an extensive season-long evaluation of teams through watching games, conference monitoring calls and NABC coaches rankings, complete box scores and results, head-to-head results, results versus common opponents, imbalanced conference schedules and results, overall and non-conference strength of schedule, the quality of wins and losses, road record, player and coach availability and various computer metrics. Each of the 12 committee members uses these various resources to form their own opinions, resulting in the committee's consensus position on teams' selection and seeding.

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*The Principles and Procedures are part of a comprehensive annual review of the Division I Men's Basketball Championship conducted after each year's championship. This document was revised and approved by the Division I Men's Basketball Committee, Summer 2025, and will be in effect for the 2026 championship.*

## I. Selecting At-Large Teams

### Initial Ballot

1. Prior to the selection meeting, each committee member receives an “initial ballot” comprised of two columns listing all eligible Division I teams in alphabetical order.

Each committee member will submit the ballot by a designated time on the first full day of selection meetings:

- a. In the first column, each member shall identify not more than 24 teams that, in that member’s opinion, should **be at-large selections (AL)** in the tournament based upon play to date, regardless of whether the team could eventually represent its conference as the automatic qualifier.
- b. In the second column, each member shall identify all teams that **should receive consideration (C)** for an at-large berth. There is no minimum or maximum limit in the second column; however, only teams meriting serious consideration should receive votes.
2. Any team receiving all but three of the eligible votes in Column 1 (AL) is moved into the tournament field as an at-large selection.
3. The committee will form an **“under-consideration” board** consisting of an alphabetical listing of teams that:
  - a. Received **at least four** votes in either of the columns of the initial ballot but did not receive enough votes to be an at-large team; or
  - b. Won or shared the regular-season conference championship, as determined by the conference’s tie-break policy where applicable. This does not include teams that won or shared a division title but were not the regular-season conference champion.
4. A team may be **removed** from the “under-consideration” board at any time if it receives **all but three** eligible votes. When a motion is made to remove multiple teams at once, and one of the schools is represented by a member of the committee, two separate motions shall be made:

one inclusive of only the team represented by a member, and another inclusive of all other teams.

5. A team may be **added** to the “under-consideration” board at any time provided it receives **at least four** eligible votes.
6. Verbal nominations are permitted.

### Remaining Ballots

1. The committee then begins evaluating those teams on the “under consideration” board.
2. Each committee member will select the best eight teams from the “under consideration” board, in no particular order, to be added to the at-large field:
  - a. When **20 or more** teams are under consideration in “list” ballots, each member shall select **eight teams**;
  - b. When **14 to 19** teams are under consideration in “list” ballots, each member shall select **six or fewer teams**;
  - c. When **13 or fewer** teams are under consideration in “list” ballots, each member shall select **four teams or fewer**.
3. When 24 or fewer teams remain in the pool of teams (during the selection or seeding process), a member may not participate in “list X teams” votes if a team he or she represents as a commissioner or athletics director is included in the “pool.”
4. The eight teams receiving the most votes comprise the next at-large ballot.
5. Committee members then rank the eight teams, using a “ranking” scoring system (i.e., the best team is valued at one point).
6. The four teams receiving the fewest points shall be added to the at-large field. The other four teams will be held for the next ballot.
7. Each committee member then submits a list of the best eight teams remaining on the “under consideration” board to be added to the at-large field. The four teams with the highest vote totals are added to the teams carried over from No. 6 to comprise the next at-large ballot.

8. Steps No. 5, 6 and 7 will be repeated until all at-large berths are filled.
9. If a team fails to be included among the four teams receiving the fewest points (Step No. 6) for two consecutive "rank" ballots, it shall be returned to the "under consideration" board, without prejudice.
10. At any time during the process, the number of teams eligible to receive votes may be increased or decreased by the chair if circumstances warrant. Further, the chair has the option to revise the number of teams from four to fewer than four to be moved into at-large berths per No. 6.
11. A team may be removed from the at-large field by a vote of all but three of the eligible votes. Such a team would be returned to the "under consideration" board, without prejudice.
12. After the completion of three rounds of secret voting, if the voting results are still tied, the Chair shall break the tie.
13. At any time during the process of selecting the at-large teams, the committee may elect to begin seeding the teams (Section II). This allows the committee to proceed while learning results of games played during selection weekend.

## II. Seeding Teams

The committee will create a "seed list" (i.e. rank of the teams in "true seeds" 1 through 68) which reflects the relative qualitative assessment of the field in descending order, and is used to assess competitive balance of the top teams across the four regions of the championship. The seed list reflects the sequential order with which teams will be placed in the bracket. Once the "seed list" is finalized, it remains unchanged while the bracket is assembled.

Importantly, various principles may preclude a team from being placed in its "true" seed position in the bracket.

### Procedures for Seeding

1. Each committee member will submit a list of the best eight teams, in no particular order, from teams that are in the tournament as automatic qualifiers or at-large selections:

- a. When **20 or more** teams are on the list ballot, each member shall list **eight teams**;
- b. When **14 to 19** teams are on the list ballot, each member shall list **six or fewer teams**;
- c. When **13 or fewer** teams are on the list ballot, each member shall list **four or fewer teams**.

*Note: When 24 or fewer teams are on the list ballot to be seeded, a member may not participate in "list X teams" ballots if a team he or she represents as a commissioner or athletics director, or has an immediate family member conflict, is included in the "pool."*

2. The eight teams receiving the most votes comprise the next seed list ballot.
3. Committee members rank the eight teams from No. 1, using a "ranking" scoring system (i.e., the best team is valued at one point).
4. The four teams receiving the fewest points are moved onto the seed list in ascending order of vote total. The other four teams are held for the next rank ballot.
5. Each committee member then submits a list of the best eight remaining teams that are in the tournament as automatic qualifiers or at-large selections. The four teams with the highest vote totals are added to the teams carried over from No. 4 to comprise the next seed list ballot.
6. Steps No. 3, 4 and 5 are repeated until all the teams are seeded.
7. At any time during the process, the number of teams eligible to receive votes may be increased or decreased by the chair if circumstances warrant. Further, the chair has the option to revise the number of teams from four to fewer than four to be moved onto the seed list per No. 4.
8. After a team has been voted into the seed list, it may be moved by a simple majority of eligible votes. This "scrubbing" of the seed list allows the committee to affirm true seed accuracy throughout selection weekend and ultimately, in the bracket. Scrubbing is exclusively for teams that are in the field.

9. After the completion of three rounds of secret voting, if the voting results are still tied, the Chair shall break the tie.
10. The committee is not obligated to assemble the seed list in sequential order. For example, the committee may use the procedures to determine the fourth quadrant of teams at any time.

### III. Building the Bracket

Sixteen levels are established (i.e., the seeds, 1 through 16) in the bracket that cross the four regions, permitting evaluation of four teams simultaneously on the same level. Teams on **each seed line** (No. 1, No. 2, No. 3, etc.) **should be as equal as possible**.

Each region is divided into quadrants with four levels in each, permitting the evaluation of four different sections within each region against the same sections in each of the other regions.

The committee will assign all four teams in each bracket group (seeds 1, 16, 8, 9), (4, 13, 5, 12), (2, 15, 7, 10), (3, 14, 6, 11) to the same first-/second-round site. There will be two "pods" at each first-/second-round site which may feed into different regional sites.

**Each of the first four teams selected from a conference shall be placed in different regions if they are seeded on the first four lines**, unless five or more teams from a conference are on the first four lines. In this scenario, this principle may be relaxed.

**Teams from the same conference shall not meet prior to the regional final if they played each other three or more times during the regular season and conference tournament.** This principle can be relaxed if a league has nine or more teams in the tournament.

**Teams from the same conference shall not meet prior to the regional semifinals if they played each other twice during the regular season and conference tournament.** This principle can be relaxed if a league has nine or more teams in the tournament.

**Teams from the same conference may play each other as early as the second round if they played no more than once during the regular season and conference tournament.** This principle can be

relaxed if a league has nine or more teams in the tournament.

**Any principle can be relaxed if two or more teams from the same conference are among the last four at-large seeded teams participating in the First Four. To recognize the demonstrated quality of such teams, the committee shall not place teams seeded on the first four lines at a potential "home-crowd disadvantage" in the first round.**

The last four at-large teams on the overall seed list, as well as teams seeded 65 through 68, will be paired to compete in the First Four games on Tuesday and Wednesday following the announcement of the field. (If allowed, the last at-large team on the seed list will be paired with the second-to-last at-large team on the seed list. The other First Four games will consist of the third-to-last at-large team on the seed list playing the fourth-to-last at-large team on the seed list, as well as seed 65 versus 66; and seed 67 versus 68).

First Four teams will get priority to the closest first-round site from Dayton, and then the non-First Four teams on the same seed line will be placed on the bracket, in order to have more optimal flight options for the First Four winners' travel to first-round sites.

The winners of the First Four games will advance to a first- and second-round site to be determined by the committee during selection weekend. In the event a First Four site is also a first- and second-round site, the winners of the First Four games may be assigned to that site, regardless of the days of competition.

**Teams will remain in or as close to their areas of natural interest as possible, as determined by mileage from campus to the venue.** A team moved out of its natural area will be placed in the next closest region to the extent possible. If two teams from the same natural region are in contention for the same bracket position, the team ranked higher in the seed list shall remain in its natural region.

**A team will not be permitted to play in any facility in which it has played more than three games during its season, not including exhibitions and conference postseason tournaments.**

**A host institution's team shall not be permitted to play at the site where the institution is hosting.** However, the team may play on the same days when the institution is hosting.

Teams may play at a site where the conference of which it is a member is serving as the host.

**A team may be moved up or down one (or in extraordinary circumstances) two lines from its true seed line** (e.g., from the 13 seed line to the 12 seed line; or from a 12 seed line to a 13 seed line) when it is placed in the bracket if necessary to meet the principles.

#### **Procedures for Placing the Teams into the Bracket**

1. The committee will place the four No. 1 seeds in each of the four regions, thus determining the Final Four semifinals pairings (overall 1 vs. 4; 2 vs. 3). The overall No. 1 seed has the opportunity to select its preferred first- and second-round site and preferred region.
2. The committee will then place the No. 2 seeds in each region in true seed list order. The committee may relax the principle of keeping teams as close to their area of natural interest for seeding teams on the No. 2 line to avoid, for example, the overall No. 5 seed being sent to the same region as the overall No. 1 seed. The committee will not compromise the principle of keeping teams from the same conference in separate regions.
3. The committee will then place the No. 3 seeds in each region in true seed list order.
4. The committee will then place the No. 4 seeds in each region in true seed list order.
5. After the top four seed lines have been assigned, the committee will review the relative strengths of the regions by adding the “true seed” numbers in each region to determine if any severe numerical imbalance exists. Preferably, no more than six points should separate the lowest and highest total.

6. In “true seed” order, the committee then assigns each team (and, therefore, all teams in its bracket group—e.g., seeds 1, 8, 9, 16) to first-/second-round sites.
7. The committee will then place seeds Nos. 5-16 in the bracket, per the principles. The four teams assigned to the seed line, 5 through 16, will have the same numerical value.

#### **Additional Considerations**

1. **If possible, rematches of non-conference regular-season games should be avoided in the First Four and first round.** As a secondary consideration, the committee will attempt to avoid potential rematches from non-conference regular-season games in the second round. The committee will not consider moving teams up or down its true seed line to avoid non-conference rematches.
2. **If possible, after examining the previous two years' brackets, teams will not be moved out of its natural region or geographic area an inordinate number of times.**
3. **If possible, rematches from the previous tournament should be avoided in the First Four and first round.**
4. In the event the top four seeds would naturally be assigned to Thursday/Saturday first- and second-round sites, the fourth of the No. 1 seeds would be assigned to its closest geographic site that plays first- and second-round games Friday and Sunday. This occurs because a 16 seed advancing from a First Four game on Wednesday night must go to a Friday site for its first-round game against a No. 1 seed.