
TABLE TENNIS AS AN NCAA SPORT

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Given that the NCTTA, USATT, USOC, and ITTF all would like to see table tennis become an NCAA sport, this brief describes the steps necessary to reach this goal.

OVERVIEW

In order for a sport to become a full NCAA sport, it must successfully go through the “emerging sports” process, also known as emerging sports for women. As the name may indicate, the primary criterion used to judge a potential new sport is its viability as a women’s sport. There is no corresponding “emerging sports for men”; inclusion of table tennis as an NCAA men’s sport is dependent on the development of table tennis as a women’s sport.

The process has no shortcuts. Many colleges must agree to participate, and they must support the sport for the long term.

EMERGING SPORTS PROCESS

The full details about emerging sports can be found on the NCAA web site. There is a list of requirements which must be fulfilled, however the primary and most difficult requirement is based on the number of colleges which provide full support for a women’s table tennis program at their institution.

STEP 1: LETTERS OF COMMITMENT

10 NCAA colleges must submit formal letters of commitment that they either currently sponsor or intend to sponsor table tennis as an NCAA women’s sport. It may be possible to get these letters from existing NCTTA member schools.

STEP 2: 10 YEARS OF DEVELOPMENT TOWARD 40 PROGRAMS

Once table tennis becomes an NCAA emerging sport, it is given 10 years to develop and show growth. During this period, reports must be filed to maintain this status. In order for table tennis to become a championship (full) NCAA sport, 40 colleges must have varsity women’s teams and fully support the sport.

If table tennis shows some growth during this period, but not enough to have 40 participating colleges, table tennis might be granted an extension as an emerging sport. However if the target is not reached within 10 years and table tennis does not show sufficient growth, table tennis would be removed from NCAA altogether. Therefore it is not advantageous to become an emerging sport until the table tennis community has planned and positioned itself to help create these college programs. Historically, the majority of emerging sports have failed to achieve full championship status.

STEP 3: CHAMPIONSHIP STATUS AND SUSTAINED GROWTH

After table tennis becomes an NCAA championship sport, it must maintain the level of activity or risk removal. Inclusion of table tennis as a men’s sport or a coed sport could be considered at this point.

CREATION OF COLLEGE PROGRAMS

Of the tasks described above, Step 1 is likely the easiest of the three, and Step 3 may be largely a matter of maintenance and continued effort; Step 2 is the most challenging. Given the current state of table tennis in the US, the creation of 40 women’s varsity college table tennis programs is a monumental task.

In 2014, 51 women's teams participated in the NCTTA college table tennis league. However, almost all of those teams were college "club" teams organized by the students themselves, rather than full college varsity programs. Students themselves cannot create full college programs; nor can the NCTTA, USATT, or ITTF. The programs must be created and run by the colleges themselves. However table tennis organizations can help encourage colleges to create programs, and act as catalysts to development. Here are some reasons why a college might choose to create a table tennis program:

GENDER EQUITY

NCAA colleges are expected to provide equal opportunity to participate in sports, regardless of gender. College athletic departments need to find women's sports to provide balance for their men's sports, and women's table tennis would be one option for such colleges. In this situation, the challenge would be to show that table tennis is the best choice.

RECRUITMENT TOOL

A prospective student will consider many factors in deciding which college to attend, and the opportunity to compete in college table tennis may be one of them. In particular, this may help attract international students.

TARGETED DONATIONS

Some college athletic programs exist due to targeted funding from alumni or other donors who wish to fund their favorite sport. As the college table tennis league continues to grow and create "college table tennis alumni", the potential for these types of donations also increases.

AN ENVIRONMENT CONDUCIVE TO GROWTH

While the creation of 40 varsity women's programs is the base target, there are additional factors which will affect the NCAA's view of table tennis, as well as positioning the sport well for growth.

CONTINUED NCTTA EXPANSION

The existence of table tennis as a club sport can help with the transition to a fully sponsored college sport. The overall size and depth of the college table tennis league creates more benefits and opportunities for those colleges which choose to support table tennis.

DOMESTIC CLUB DEVELOPMENT

At this time, a significant number of athletes in the NCTTA league are international students. Graduate students also compete. A healthier sport, in the NCAA's eyes, would involve a higher proportion of domestic students; graduate students would not be permitted. This requires higher numbers of US high school table tennis players.

WOMEN'S DEVELOPMENT IN CLUBS

USATT membership is quite imbalanced, with about a 1:10 ratio of women to men; this must improve. The growth of full-time table tennis clubs in the US will help remedy this, as these clubs tend to have more gender balance.

HIGH SCHOOL PROGRAMS

The existence of high school leagues and programs is important to the NCAA, and provides a natural path for a student to participate in college table tennis.

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