



**APPLIED
SPORT
MANAGEMENT
ASSOCIATION**

**2022 Applied Sport Management
Association Conference
Case Study Competition**

2027 Joint Final Four Proposal



The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) believes in cultivating an environment that emphasizes academics, fairness and well-being across college sports. After much research, our team found that there are many common misconceptions involving gender equality associated with the NCAA Men's and Women's Final Four basketball tournaments. Overall, there was not as much effort and attention put into the 2021 Women's tournament as the Men's. In order to change the narrative of inequality between Women and Men in their respective Final Fours, a joint Final Four bid needs to be made.

In order to start the process of a joint Final Four, a schedule needs to be made. All Men's and Women's Final Four and championship games will be hosted at Lucas Oil Stadium, home of the Indianapolis Colts, throughout the entirety of the tournament. Beginning with the Final Four games, we have decided to start the Men's tournament with both games on the Thursday of Final Four week. Game start time will be at 4:00pm, with the next game following around 8:00 pm to allow for proper change over between games. Following Thursday night's games, the Women's teams will begin their Final Four games Friday night, with the times remaining at 4:00 pm and 8:00pm. On Saturday, we will allow the winning teams to rest, and host a fun fan experience outside of Lucas Oil Stadium. There will be a fan experience village, where fans can hang out starting at 11:00am, playing games and having fun with friends and families, leading into a concert at 6:00pm that night. In the fan experience village, there will be games and activities set up throughout the outside of Lucas Oil Stadium. Activities will include corn hole, pop-up basketball courts and rims for shooting and dribbling competitions, and virtual reality machines. Having these activities will keep fans interested in the tournament, while the games themselves have an off day, and will be able to satisfy fans of all ages. Once that concludes, it's on to championship Sunday for the Women. The championship game will begin at 7pm. Finally,

Monday will be Men's championship game day. The Men's championship game will begin at 7pm. After all of this, the events will come to an end. By having the Men's tournament first, it will peak the interest of fans, as the Men's tournament is usually what draws in the most amount of media and public attention. This will cause these same fans to potentially attend the Women's tournament as well, because they will already be in the area while waiting for the championships later in the week. The concert on Saturday is a good break in the middle, and will be good for everyone to hangout and relax to prepare for the championship games.

Now that the men's and women's Final Four tournaments are both in Indianapolis competing in one joint event, gender equality will be addressed. A major problem with the two tournaments is media coverage. For example, CBS/Turner owns and operates the March Madness Live app, which does not include coverage or information about women's basketball (Hecker & Fink, 2021). In 2024, the ESPN media rights deal expires for the Women's NCAA tournament. When this deal (created in 2001) expires, the NCAA must look to separate Women's basketball from the other 28 national championship sports to attract potential bidders for the media rights. It will be important to modernize and take advantage of the changes in media when the current deal expires. In doing this, it will bring significantly more media attention to the Women's tournament in the long run, and help bridge the gap between the two tournaments.

In the world of marketing and promotion, in order to create synergy an event has to create a greater response as a whole, instead of two separate entities. Our job is to create a promotional strategy that brings the excitement of both tournaments into one unified event. One aspect that is important is the use of "March Madness". As of now the term "March Madness" is only used for the Men's tournament (Hecker & Fink, 2021). We will now use the term "March Madness" for both Men's and Women's tournaments leading into the joint Final Four, which will

then be rebranded. For our case we want to keep the iconic madness slogan, but rename the Final Four “Total Madness”. This will be used in all promotional activities as well as in the media. The term “March Madness” is certainly what the public is used to. However, we believe that in order to stray away from the reputation that the slogan has with separate men’s and women's tournaments, we need a new identity that represents both sides of the Final Four.

The Final Four gives companies a great opportunity to promote their brands through sponsorships, and can truly make an impact through sponsorship activation plans. The first activation plan that we will use is to have Coca-Cola sponsor the fan experience village. According to the Coca-Cola website, they have created the Coca-Cola Company Global Women’s Leadership Council. Coca-Cola has also stated “the company’s commitment to gender parity, which includes pursuing an ambitious goal to be 50% driven by women by breaking the glass ceiling and creating a culture where equal leadership is celebrated and balance is a common goal” (Coca-Cola CFO John Murphy on Company's Gender Equality Agenda, 2019). With the gender equality vision we have for “Total Madness”, we chose Coca-Cola as they are a top tier corporate sponsor who shares our same vision. The next sponsorship activation will be Buffalo-Wild Wings. Saturday night all coaches and athletes of the remaining schools will be able to attend the local Buffalo Wild Wings and get bottomless wings for free. This will be a little piece of the solution for the meal inequity, as this will be a paid in full meal of great quality for both the final men’s and women’s teams. This will also be good for Buffalo Wild Wings, as it shows that they are supporting these student athletes and is good publicity for their brand. The final sponsorship activation that we will use is Great Clips. Everyone knows the saying you look good, you play good, so we will use the sponsorship with Great Clips to make sure the athletes and coaches look good. We will have Great Clips create a pop up shop within the hotel,

so players and coaches can get a haircut or styling for free at any time during the Final Four. Great Clips offers haircuts for both men and women, which aligns with our vision of gender equity. These activation plans ensure gender equality and make sure both men and women's basketball teams are taken care of.

In a case like this, we will be addressing major expenses and plans for revenue generation. To generate revenue we will charge a small entry fee for the fan experience village, being hosted outside the stadium on Saturday. This charge will include an all day pass for the fan experience and concert following that night. A major way to gain revenue will be through the sale of tickets and incorporating different ticket plans. For our case we will include ticket deals for people attending both men's and women's sets of games. For example, if someone purchases a ticket to the men's game, they will then be directed to an email for the same ticket for the Women's game. The catch is, the women's ticket will be for a twenty percent discounted rate. Other deals will include buying many tickets in bulk and suite deals throughout the tournament. Then, we will be able to generate revenue through our use of sponsorships. Our sponsors will be incorporated throughout the entire tournament through commercials, signage advertisements, court advertisements, and merchandising. Some final areas of revenue generation will be through parking, concessions, and merchandise sales throughout 'Total Madness.'

Along with generating revenue, there will also be major expenses to keep in mind, while putting on a tournament like this. As shown in the KHF Gender Equity Review Phase I Report, there are basketball direct game expenses, basketball other direct expenses, and basketball support expenses (Hecker & Fink, 2021). In the chart relayed in the report, basketball direct game expenses include, facilities, ticket taxes/fees and credentials, honorariums, personnel, signage, equipment, media production, staff travel, hospitality and catering, apparel, officials,

awards, promotion, and office and professional services. The other direct expenses include team travel, per diem and lodging costs, and committee expenses. Lastly, total direct expenses are fan experience, promotion, and presentation, NCAA marketing and ticketing expense, credit card fees, NCAA champs functional group expenses, playing rules and officiating improvement, and insurance (Hecker & Fink, 2021). All of these are valuable and useful to account for in a situation like. If one little thing is not accounted for it could mess with the whole budget, so perfecting the budget is a must in cases like these. Looking at past tournaments, the budget for the 2019 men's tournament was \$28 million, almost twice the women's tournament (Hecker & Fink, 2021). The result was that the men's tournament made a revenue of \$864.6 million, while the women had a loss of \$2.8 million (Dinich, 2021). On the surface, you can see why the NCAA would not budget as much money for the women's tournament as they have for the men. However, we believe that the changes we have proposed would not only allow the NCAA to budget more money for the women's tournament but also have a much higher income than in years past. Instead of having two separate budget Not only will having both tournaments in the same location help with this, but having the men's tournament first will help bring more revenue to the women's tournament.

In conclusion, Total Madness is the beginning of a new era in college sports. An event that brings together male and female student athletes in an effort to create an environment unlike any other in the sports world. What makes this event so special is the way it breaks the barrier of gender inequality in sports. Both the men and women participating in the event will practice and play in the same facilities, have access to other facilities to prepare for games, and receive the same benefits from our sponsors. All in all, Total Madness will be the stepping stone to breaking the gender equality issues that are present in our sports today.

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