

College Football Compact

A PROPOSAL FOR A COMPETITIVE, REGIONAL, AND SUSTAINABLE COLLEGE FOOTBALL CHAMPIONSHIP SYSTEM

Contents

- College Football Compact 1
 - Applying Halas-Style Competitive Governance to College Football 3
 - I. Executive Summary: A Regional, Competitive College Football Championship Model . 7
 - Purpose 7
 - Core Design Principles 7
 - Conference Structure 8
 - Playoff Format..... 8
 - Competitive Balance: Evidence from 2015–2024 9
 - Benefits by Stakeholder 9
 - Governance & Implementation 10
 - Why This Matters Now 10
 - II. Conference Structure & Alignment 11
 - III. Regular Season Structure 12
 - IV. College Football Playoff Structure 12
 - V. Playoff Format & Calendar 13
 - VI. Governance & Oversight..... 13
 - VII. Revenue Distribution Model 14
 - VIII. Benefits of the Proposed System 15
 - Conclusion..... 15
 - Appendix: Rational for Possible Regional Conference Alignment..... 16
 - Appendix: Comparison with the Current CFP Model 21
 - Appendix: A Halas-Style Framework for the Future of College Football 23
 - Appendix: Regional Conference Alignment Example 27

Appendix: Playoff-access simulation (demonstration run) 32
Appendix: Full decade Simulation 35
Appendix: Stress Test of the Model 39
Appendix: Conference Specific Briefings 43

Applying Halas-Style Competitive Governance to College Football

“George Halas understood that football only thrives long-term when competitive opportunity is broadly shared, rules are clear, and the league protects both tradition and viability. This proposal applies those same principles to modern college football.”

Purpose

College football is at a structural crossroads. Conference expansion, uneven schedules, and opaque postseason access have created increasing instability, rising costs, and declining clarity for fans, athletes, and institutions.

This memo outlines a proposed championship framework grounded in regional alignment, transparent competition, and guaranteed access—and explains why its underlying philosophy mirrors the governance principles that helped stabilize and grow the National Football League under George Halas.

While recent changes with regards to player transfers and NIL also have a material impact in the current college football landscape, this proposal does not address those issues at this time.

Halas’s lasting contribution was not tactical innovation alone, but the recognition that a league’s credibility depends on structure, fairness, and shared opportunity.

The Core Governance Insight

A sports league’s long-term success depends on the health of the entire ecosystem, not the dominance of a small subset of participants.

In the NFL’s formative years, inconsistent rules, unclear championships, and uneven competitive opportunity threatened league survival. Halas consistently supported reforms that strengthened the league as a whole—even when those reforms limited individual advantages.

This principle later manifested in support for standardized schedules, clear championship determination, revenue sharing, and parity mechanisms. The primary intent was durability, not forced equality.

Current College Football Challenges

Today's college football environment exhibits similar warning signs:

- Geographic coherence is being sacrificed for short-term media leverage
- Regular-season schedules are increasingly incomparable
- Postseason access relies heavily on subjective selection
- Entire regions face structural barriers to championship contention
- Travel demands and costs continue to escalate.
 - According to [UniversityBusiness.com](https://www.universitybusiness.com), only 25 FBS programs are profitable, this would mean over 80% of FBS programs are currently running a deficit.

These issues parallel the NFL's early instability prior to governance reforms that Halas championed.

Proposed Structural Framework

The proposal introduces a stable, field-driven competitive model:

- 120 programs organized into 12 regional conferences of 10
- Round-robin conference play (9 games)
- 3 non-conference games, including inter-regional competition
- 16-team playoff
 - 12 automatic bids (conference champions)
 - 4 at-large bids (highest-ranked remaining teams)

This replaces discretionary access with earned access—echoing the NFL's shift from informal championships to defined competitive pathways.

Competitive Balance Without Artificial Constraints

Unlike professional leagues, college football cannot rely on player drafts or salary caps to manage parity. Instead, competitive balance must come from structural design.

This model promotes balance by:

- Equalizing conference size
- Standardizing schedules
- Ensuring every region of the country has a championship pathway
- Providing talent distribution across a broader range of programs
- Allowing elite programs to earn advantage through seeding, not exclusion

Halas favored systems that rewarded excellence while preventing systemic exclusion—this approach achieves the same outcome within college football’s constraints.

The Strategic Value of Regional Identity

Regional rivalries are not nostalgic artifacts; they are economic and competitive assets.

This framework:

- Preserves historic rivalries by design
- Reduces athlete travel and academic disruption
- Strengthens local fan engagement
- Creates coherent regional media narratives

Early NFL growth was fueled by strong regional rivalries that created loyalty and attendance. Halas understood geography as strategy, not sentiment.

Evidence of Viability

A ten-season simulation (2015–2024), using final national rankings as a consistent selector, demonstrates:

- Universal regional representation every season
- Continued participation by traditional national powers
- Expanded access without diluting elite competition
- More meaningful late-season games across the country

The NFL's reforms did not eliminate dominant teams; they ensured that dominance emerged from competition rather than an exclusive structure.

Benefits to Institutional Leadership

For commissioners and athletic directors, this model provides:

- Predictable scheduling and governance
- Reduced political pressure around selection
- Clear incentives aligned with on-field performance
- Improved cost control and planning stability
- A defensible framework for presidents, boards, and legislators

Halas consistently prioritized governance models that reduced internal conflict and stabilized league operations.

Conclusion

College football does not require radical reinvention. It requires governance discipline.

This proposal applies a time-tested philosophy:

clear rules, shared opportunity, regional integrity, and earned success.

George Halas helped professional football mature by prioritizing the league's collective health over short-term advantage. This proposal applies the same logic to the modern college game.

Win your conference. Earn your seed. Compete for a national championship.

I. Executive Summary: A Regional, Competitive College Football Championship Model

Purpose

College football is at a structural crossroads. Conference consolidation, uneven schedules, escalating travel demands, and opaque playoff access threaten the sport's competitive integrity, regional identity, and long-term sustainability.

College football's current structure has drifted away from competitive balance, regional identity, and transparency. Conference expansion has increased travel burdens, weakened rivalries, and created inconsistent access to the postseason. This proposal offers a **stable, regionally grounded national model that preserves tradition while delivering a clear, equitable path to a national championship.**

Core Design Principles

This proposal outlines a **nationally unified college football structure:**

1. Regional Identity Matters

- Restores **regional conferences** to preserve rivalries and reduce travel
- Conferences should reflect geography, culture, and rivalry—not media convenience

2. Competitive Access Must Be Earned on the Field

- Ensures **competitive balance** through conference round-robin play
- Every conference champion deserves a path to the national championship

3. Schedules Must Be Comparable

- Teams should be judged on equivalent competitive frameworks.
- Creates the incentive for **talent distribution** across all conference

4. The Playoff Should Be Transparent and Understandable

- **Transparent playoff selection** through a fair, transparent national championship pathway
- Fans should know exactly how teams qualify and advance

5. Financial Sustainability Supports Competitive Balance

- **Balanced national competition**, not concentration of power
- Revenue should reinforce competition, not concentrate power

The system balances tradition with modern realities, creating a stable and compelling postseason while improving the regular-season product for fans, athletes, and media partners alike.

Conference Structure

- 120 programs organized into 12 regional conferences of 10 teams
- Conferences designed around:
 - Geographic proximity
 - Historic rivalries
 - Recruiting and fan bases
 - Competitive balance
- 9 conference games (full round-robin)
- 3 non-conference games, including:

Clear standings, fewer schedule disputes, and meaningful conference races.

Playoff Format

- 16-team national playoff
 - 12 automatic bids (conference champions)
 - 4 at-large bids (highest-ranked remaining teams)
- Seeding based on final national ranking
- First round and quarterfinal playoff games on campus
- Semifinals and National championship games at pre-selected venues rotating through historic bowl locations each year.

Winning your conference guarantees entry; elite performance earns seeding.

Competitive Balance: Evidence from 2015–2024

A 10-season simulation using College Poll Archive Final AP Polls shows:

- Every season includes all 12 regions
- Power programs (Alabama, Ohio State, Georgia, etc.) still qualify consistently
- Increased access for high-performing regional programs
- Reduced dependence on subjective committee cutoffs
- More teams remain “in contention” deeper into the season

Bottom line: Competitive quality is preserved while access is broadened.

Benefits by Stakeholder

Institutions & Conferences

- Financial sustainability with stable revenue distribution
- Predictable scheduling
- All 12 conference championships gain national importance

Student-Athletes

- Reduced travel strain that promotes academic presence on campus
- Clear championship access for all programs
- Meaningful regular-season games including regional rivalries

For Fans

- Restored rivalries
- Affordable access for visitor attendance due to proximity
- Understandable playoff system
- More on-campus postseason games

For Media & Sponsors

- Predictable, high-value inventory

- National bracket with regional storytelling
 - Increased viewership in season and post-season
-

Governance & Implementation

- Oversight by a College Football Championship Council
 - Conference commissioners
 - Athletic directors
 - Independent analytics advisors
-

Why This Matters Now

College football does not need more consolidation—it needs clarity, balance, and credibility.

This model delivers:

Regional identity + national access + competitive integrity

Win your conference. Earn your seed. Compete for a national championship.

II. Conference Structure & Alignment

A. Conference Design

- 12 conferences, each consisting of 10 geographically contiguous teams
- Mandatory round-robin conference play
- Conferences must meet geographic standards unless granted an exception by the governing council

B. Objectives

- Restore historic rivalries
 - Reduce athlete, coaching, staff and administrative travel burden
 - Creates a platform for other sports to practically align regionally.
 - Improve fan attendance, allegiance to teams and conference
 - Regional media engagement
 - Removes the negative consequences of national “super conferences”
-

III. Regular Season Structure

A. Conference Play

- 9 conference games
- Full round-robin within each conference
- Conference standings determined solely by conference results
 - Ties are addressed through a sequence of criteria:
 1. Head to head
 2. Record vs common opponents
 3. Strength-of-victory banding in head-head competition of tied teams
 - Band 1 - wins by 1–7 points
 - Band 2 – wins by 8–16 points
 - Band 3 – wins by 17+ points
- No conference championship games
- Conference champions receive automatic playoff bid

B. Non-Conference Requirements

Each team to schedule up to 3 out of conference match-ups, including:

- Exclusively FBS opponents
- Regional or historic rivalries
- Strength-of-Schedule is considered in final college football pole that is the basis for at large bid selection and playoff seeding
 - Rewards teams that schedule non-conference games competitively
 - Discourages non-competitive scheduling practices

IV. College Football Playoff Structure

A. Playoff Field (16 Teams)

- Automatic bid for each conference champion

- 12 automatic bids
- The proposal does NOT provide a requirement for “Top25” or other qualifications for a conference champion to earn a bid. This ensures each conference will have a representative in the playoffs and therefore incent the distribution of talent into conference that may otherwise not obtain access.
- 4 at-large bids selected by final national ranking to fill the 16 team bracket with the highest ranked teams that did not win their conference.

B. Seeding Rules

- Teams seeded strictly by ranking in the final college football poll.
-

V. Playoff Format & Calendar

A. Structure

- Round 1 and Quarterfinals: On-campus games (higher seed hosts)
- Semifinals and National Championship: Pre-selected neutral sites that rotate through the major historical bowl locations each year.
- Bowls Games including teams that did not make the Championship bracket will be scheduled to complement the playoff games. These would be considered the under-card to the main event(s).

B. Calendar

- **National Championship Game:** Saturday closest to New Years day.
 - **Semifinal Games:** Saturday of the week prior to the Championship Game
 - **Quarterfinal Games:** Week prior to Semi-Final Games
 - **Round 1:** Week Prior to Quarter Final Games
-

VI. Governance & Oversight

A. College Football Championship Council (CFCC)

A national governing body composed of:

- Conference Commissioners

- Athletic Directors
- Former coaches and players
- Independent analytics experts

B. Responsibilities

- Conference certification
- Scheduling compliance
- Playoff selection oversight – Seeding based on final college football poll
- Revenue distribution governance
- NIL compliance alignment

C. Measures of success for the realigned model

Key measures to validate that the structure accomplishes the intended objectives of the proposal.

1. **Parity:** number of unique programs reaching playoffs over 5 years
2. **Regional integrity:** average travel miles per team (conference play)
3. **Regular-season value:** % of teams still “alive” for a bid in Week 10
4. **Title diversity:** # of unique champions / finalists over 10 years

VII. Revenue Distribution Model

A. Baseline Distribution

- Equal playoff participation payout to all conferences based on the number of teams in the bracket
- Performance-based bonuses to schools for advancement

B. Competitive Balance Mechanisms

- Travel cost equalization fund
- NIL development grants tied to transparency standards
- Infrastructure grants for smaller programs

VIII. Benefits of the Proposed System

Institutions & Conferences

- Financial sustainability with stable revenue distribution
- Predictable scheduling
- All 12 conference championships gain national importance

Student-Athletes

- Reduced travel strain that promotes academic presence on campus
- Clear championship access for all programs
- Meaningful regular-season games including regional rivalries

For Fans

- Restored rivalries
- Affordable access for visitor attendance due to proximity
- Understandable playoff system
- More on-campus postseason games

For Media & Sponsors

- Predictable, high-value inventory
- National bracket with regional storytelling
- Increased viewership in season and post-season

Conclusion

This proposal offers a balanced, inclusive, and competitive future for college football—one that honors tradition while delivering clarity, fairness, and excitement.

Regional identity + national access + competitive integrity

Win your conference. Earn your seed. Compete for a national championship.

Appendix: Rational for Possible Regional Conference Alignment

Rationale for the Proposed Conference Groupings

The conference groupings prioritize geography and rivalries first, distribute competitive strength intentionally, standardize competition across regions, and guarantee championship access—while still rewarding elite performance.

The conference groupings were designed intentionally, using four primary lenses, applied consistently across all 12 conferences:

1. Geographic Coherence (Primary Constraint)

Principle:

Conferences should be geographically contiguous to reduce travel burden, preserve regional identity, and strengthen fan engagement.

How it was applied

Schools are grouped into tight regional clusters wherever possible.

Natural geographic corridors (Great Lakes, Southeast, Texas, Carolinas, Pacific Coast, Rockies) are respected.

Long-haul exceptions are limited and purposeful (e.g., service academies, anchor brands used for balance).

Why this matters

Reduces athlete travel time and missed class days

Improves attendance for road games

Makes conferences legible to fans and media

Mirrors the geographic logic that sustained early NFL and college football growth

2. Preservation of Historic Rivalries (Hard Guardrails)

Principle:

Iconic rivalries are assets, not inconveniences, and should be preserved inside conferences wherever possible.

Rivalries explicitly protected

Alabama–Auburn

Georgia–Florida

Clemson–South Carolina

USC–UCLA

Utah–BYU

Oklahoma–Oklahoma State

Army–Navy

How it was applied

Rival pairs were treated as non-separable units

Conference boundaries were adjusted around these rivalries rather than breaking them

When swaps were required for balance, rivals moved together or were kept in adjacent, logical contexts

Why this matters

Rivalries drive viewership, ticket sales, and donor engagement

They provide continuity during structural change

They anchor conference identity

3. Competitive Balance Through Distribution, Not Isolation

Principle:

Competitive balance should be achieved by spreading elite programs across conferences, not by isolating them into super-leagues.

How it was applied

Each conference contains:

At least one nationally recognizable anchor

A competitive middle tier

Programs capable of growth or breakout seasons

Highly concentrated regions (e.g., Southeast) were deliberately de-densified using minimal, rational swaps.

Balance was achieved without artificial constraints (no caps, drafts, or forced parity).

Why this matters

Prevents structural lockouts from the playoff

Keeps conference championships meaningful

Allows excellence to be rewarded via seeding and at-large bids, not access exclusion

4. Comparable Competitive Frameworks (Structural Fairness)

Principle:

Teams competing for the same postseason opportunities should play under comparable conditions.

How it was applied

All conferences are fixed at 10 teams

All teams play:

9 conference games (full round-robin)

3 non-conference games, including inter-regional play

Conference champions are determined by:

Clear standings

Transparent tiebreakers

Why this matters

Eliminates “uneven schedule” arguments

Improves seeding credibility

Reduces selection controversy

Strengthens the legitimacy of conference champions

5. Access First, Then Merit (Halas-Style Governance)

Principle:

Every region should have a clear path to the championship, while elite performance earns advantage—not entry.

How it was applied

12 automatic playoff bids for conference champions

4 at-large bids reward national excellence

Seeding—not access—is where performance differentiation occurs

Why this matters

Aligns incentives with on-field results

Keeps more programs “alive” deeper into the season

Reduces political pressure on selection committees

Mirrors George Halas-style league governance: structure first, competition second

6. Operational and Political Plausibility (Reality Check)

Principle:

The model must be defensible to presidents, boards, legislators, and media—not just fans.

How it was applied

Minimal swaps used to achieve balance

Conferences retain recognizable identities

No single region is “punished” or “favored”

Flexibility exists for phased adoption

Why this matters

Reduces resistance from incumbents

Creates a path for coalition-building

Allows the model to scale without constant renegotiation

Appendix: Comparison with the Current CFP Model

Side-by-Side Comparison: Proposed Model vs Current CFP

Dimension	Current CFP Model	Proposed 12×10 Regional Model
Conference structure	Large, often non-regional “super conferences”	12 regional conferences, 10 teams each
Regular-season comparability	Uneven schedules; varied conference sizes	Round-robin conference play (9 games)
Playoff field	CFP format varies by era and governance (selection heavy)	Fixed 16 teams: 12 champs + 4 at-large
Access rule	No guaranteed access for all conferences historically	Guaranteed access for conference champions in Top 25
Selection transparency	Committee-driven; subjective cut lines	Clear: champs in; at-large by final ranking
Rivalry preservation	Often disrupted by realignment	Rivalries prioritized by design
Travel burden	Increasing, frequent cross-country trips	Reduced travel; mostly contiguous footprints
Regular-season stakes	Concentrated in top leagues; some teams eliminated early	More teams “alive” longer; conference races matter everywhere
Competitive balance	Resource + brand concentration reinforced	Strength distributed; structural lockouts reduced
Media product	Big matchups, but diluted regional identity	More consistent regional storytelling + on-campus playoff inventory
Governance stability	Ongoing renegotiations, shifting formats	Stable rules; easier long-term scheduling and media planning

Two “commissioner-ready” talking points

- **This model keeps the top brands valuable** (still plenty of at-large bids) **without locking out entire regions.**

It trades opaque selection debates for a simple message fans and presidents can support:

Win your conference. Earn your seed. Compete for a national championship.

Appendix: A Halas-Style Framework for the Future of College Football

1. George Halas’s Core Insight: The League Is the Product

Halas principle

- **George Halas believed the NFL’s success depended on all teams having a credible chance to compete, not just a few dominant clubs.**
- **He supported league structures that strengthened the whole system, even when they constrained individual power.**

College football parallel

- **Today’s product risk isn’t lack of star teams—it’s concentration of access.**
- **A system where entire regions are structurally excluded weakens national relevance.**

“This proposal treats college football as a national ecosystem, not a collection of independent power blocs.”

2. From Subjective Outcomes to Structured Competition

Halas principle

- **Early NFL championships were disputed and opaque.**
- **Halas pushed toward clear rules, defined standings, and decisive championships.**

College football problem

- **Current CFP outcomes rely heavily on committee discretion.**
- **Access is often unclear until late, undermining regular-season meaning.**

Proposal alignment

- **12 regional conferences**
- **Round-robin schedules**
- **Conference champions automatically qualify**
- **At-large bids reward excellence without replacing structure**

“We are replacing debates with outcomes—win your conference and you’re in.”

3. Competitive Balance Without Artificial Equalization

Halas principle

- **Halas supported parity tools (like the draft and revenue sharing) not to punish success, but to prevent collapse of weaker franchises.**

College football reality

- **We cannot draft players.**
- **We cannot cap recruiting.**
- **But we *can* design fair access and comparable schedules.**

Proposal alignment

- **Equal-size conferences**
- **Comparable schedules**
- **Guaranteed access**
- **Performance-based seeding**

“This model balances opportunity, not talent—it rewards excellence without locking out regions.”

4. Regional Identity as a Strategic Asset

Halas principle

- **The NFL was built on regional rivalries (Chicago–Green Bay, etc.).**
- **Geography fueled attendance, loyalty, and media interest.**

College football drift

- **Super-conference expansion is eroding rivalry value and increasing travel costs.**
- **Fans struggle to follow geographically incoherent leagues.**

Proposal alignment

- 12 geographically grounded conferences
- Historic rivalries explicitly preserved
- Reduced travel for athletes and fans

“Regional identity isn’t nostalgia—it’s competitive and economic strategy.”

5. Long-Term Stability Over Short-Term Advantage

Halas principle

- Halas routinely chose league stability over individual leverage.
- He understood that short-term imbalance leads to long-term decline.

College football risk

- Repeated format changes
- Escalating arms races
- Legal and governance instability

Proposal alignment

- Fixed structure
- Predictable access rules
- Stable playoff format
- Scalable governance model

“This is not a reactionary fix—it’s a durable operating model.”

6. Why This Helps Commissioners and ADs Specifically

Operational clarity

- Scheduling becomes simpler
- Travel costs stabilize
- Conference championships regain value

Political cover

- Clear access rules reduce lobbying and controversy
- Decisions shift from committees to the field

Revenue protection

- On-campus playoff games
- Regional media narratives
- More fan-engaged regular seasons

“This model reduces risk, controversy, and volatility while preserving upside.”

7. The One-Sentence Comparison to the Current CFP

“The current CFP concentrates power; this model distributes opportunity—just as Halas helped do for the NFL.”

“George Halas helped turn professional football into a sustainable national league by prioritizing structure, fairness, and shared success. This proposal applies that same governance logic to the modern college game.”

Appendix: Regional Conference Alignment Example

The included alignment is for illustrative purposes only.

12-conference alignment (12 x 10 = 120)

Alignment Objectives:

Competitive Integrity

- True round-robin conference schedules
- Comparable strength of schedule
- No structural advantage from media footprint alone

Regional Identity

- Average conference travel reduced dramatically
- Rivalries restored or preserved
- Fans can follow entire conferences meaningfully

Playoff Fairness

- 10 conferences → 10 automatic bids
- At-large bids reward excellence, not affiliation
- “Win your conference” regains meaning

Conference grouping approach:

- Uses **CFP appearances (2014–2025)** as the quantitative backbone for “top-ranked teams in the modern era,” straight from College Poll Archive. [College Poll Archive](#)
- Expands from the **~90 CFP-ranked teams** to **120** by adding high-relevance programs that are regularly AP-ranked / nationally competitive (still consistent with the proposal’s goals: regionality + rivalries + balanced strength). (Those additions are marked **[Added]**.)

Because the **CFP appearances table only contains ~90 teams** [College Poll Archive](#), the cleanest, most “source-of-record defensible” way to satisfy **12 conferences of 10** is:

- Use **College Poll Archive AP “Top 25 appearances” filtered to 2014–2025** as the selection pool (true Top 120).

- Then apply the exact 12-conference regional structure above (PCC/Mountain/Texas/Plains/Great Lakes/Upper Midwest/Mid-Atlantic/Deep South/Gulf/Northeast + 2 Atlantic subregions).

College Poll Archive explicitly maintains the AP appearances tables and poll history needed for this. [College Poll Archive+1](#)

Final 12 conferences (10 teams each)

1) Pacific Northwest & NorCal

Basis: PNW rivalries + NorCal footprint; strong western G5 core for depth

- Washington, Washington State, Oregon, Oregon State
- Stanford, California
- Boise State, Fresno State, San Diego State, San José State

2) SoCal & Desert

Basis: LA schools + desert corridor; preserves Utah–BYU “Holy War”

- USC, UCLA
- Arizona, Arizona State
- UNLV, Nevada, Hawai‘i
- Utah, BYU, Utah State

3) Texas (SWC+)

Basis: maximum Texas rivalry density; minimal travel; recruiting coherence

- Texas, Texas A&M, Texas Tech
- Baylor, TCU
- SMU, Houston
- UTSA, North Texas, Rice

4) Plains & Heartland

Basis: Big 8/Big 12 heritage + natural border bridges (AR/MO/Tulsa/Memphis)

- Oklahoma, Oklahoma State

- Kansas, Kansas State
- Nebraska, Iowa State
- Missouri, Arkansas
- Tulsa, Memphis

5) Great Lakes Bluebloods

Basis: “Big Ten core + ND” historic gravity; annual marquee matchups

- Ohio State, Michigan, Michigan State
- Penn State, Notre Dame
- Wisconsin, Iowa
- Minnesota, Illinois, Northwestern

6) Great Lakes Metro

Basis: old Big East/ACC/metro corridor; compact travel; rivalry-friendly

- Indiana, Purdue
- Cincinnati, Louisville
- Pittsburgh, West Virginia
- Maryland, Rutgers
- Syracuse, Boston College

7) Southeast Core (balanced)

Basis: preserves top rivalries while reducing “all-star stacking”

- Georgia, Florida
- Tennessee, Kentucky, Vanderbilt
- South Carolina, Clemson
- **UCF, South Florida** (moved in)
- **Georgia Southern** (moved in)

8) Deep South & Gulf (less aggressive version)

Basis: preserves Alabama–Auburn; keeps Gulf identity; adds VA Tech as the “bridge”

- Alabama, Auburn
- Ole Miss, Mississippi State
- Tulane, UAB
- Troy, South Alabama
- Louisiana (ULL)
- **Virginia Tech** (moved in)

9) Carolina / Mid-Atlantic (less aggressive version)

Basis: Carolinas + Virginia spine; LSU becomes the “anchor brand” that equalizes power

- North Carolina, NC State, Duke, Wake Forest
- Virginia
- East Carolina, Appalachian State, Coastal Carolina, Charlotte
- **LSU** (moved in)

10) Florida / Gulf Metro (up-anchored)

Basis: Florida mega-brands + Atlanta metro; recruiting footprint league

- **Miami (FL), Florida State** (moved in)
- Florida Atlantic, FIU
- **Georgia Tech** (moved in), Georgia State
- Jacksonville State
- Middle Tennessee, Western Kentucky
- Southern Miss

11) Mid-American (MAC+)

Basis: classic MAC geography; rivalry continuity; bus-league travel

- Toledo, Miami (OH), Ohio, Bowling Green
- Akron, Kent State
- Buffalo, Northern Illinois
- Ball State, Central Michigan

12) Mountain & Central

Basis: Rockies/frontier + service academies; “national-service + mountain” identity

- Colorado, Colorado State
- Air Force, Wyoming
- New Mexico, New Mexico State
- UTEP
- Army, Navy
- Louisiana Tech

Appendix: Playoff-access simulation (demonstration run)

Assumptions (simple + repeatable)

- **Format:** 16-team playoff = **12 auto-bids** (conference champions) + **4 at-large**.
- **Source:** College Poll Archive **Final AP Poll** each season. [College Poll Archive+2College Poll Archive+2](#)
- **Conference champ proxy:** highest-ranked team (or highest “Receiving Votes” team) in that conference in the Final AP Poll.
- **At-large:** next 4 highest-ranked teams not already in as champs.

This does **not** attempt to re-play schedules under the new alignment. It measures **access + representation** under a consistent, transparent end-of-year selector.

Season 2024 simulation (using 2024 Final AP Poll) [College Poll Archive](#)

Auto-bids (12 champs, proxy):

- 1 Boise State (Conf 1)
- 2 Arizona State (Conf 2)
- 3 Texas (Conf 3)
- 4 Iowa State (Conf 4)
- 5 Ohio State (Conf 5)
- 6 Indiana (Conf 6)
- 7 Georgia (Conf 7)
- 8 Ole Miss (Conf 8)
- 9 LSU (Conf 9) (*RV*)
- 10 Miami (FL) (Conf 10)
- 11 Ohio (Conf 11) (*RV*)
- 12 Army (Conf 12)

At-large (4): Notre Dame, Oregon, Penn State, Tennessee

What this shows: even in a “top-heavy” year, the structure yields **national representation + multiple paths** (conference title or at-large).

Season 2023 simulation (using 2023 Final AP Poll) [College Poll Archive](#)

Auto-bids (12 champs, proxy):

- 1 Michigan (Conf 5)
- 2 Washington (Conf 1)
- 3 Texas (Conf 3)
- 4 Missouri (Conf 4)
- 5 Georgia (Conf 7)
- 6 Alabama (Conf 8)
- 7 LSU (Conf 9)
- 8 Florida State (Conf 10)
- 9 Arizona (Conf 2)
- 10 Louisville (Conf 6)
- 11 Toledo (Conf 11) *(RV)*
- 12 Air Force (Conf 12) *(RV)*

At-large (4): Oregon, Ohio State, Penn State, Notre Dame

Season 2022 simulation (using 2022 Final AP Poll) [College Poll Archive](#)

Auto-bids (12 champs, proxy):

- 1 Georgia (Conf 7)
- 2 TCU (Conf 3)
- 3 Michigan (Conf 5)
- 4 Washington (Conf 1)
- 5 Utah (Conf 2)
- 6 Kansas State (Conf 4)
- 7 Alabama (Conf 8)
- 8 LSU (Conf 9)
- 9 Florida State (Conf 10)
- 10 Pittsburgh (Conf 6)
- 11 Ohio (Conf 11) *(RV)*
- 12 Air Force (Conf 12) *(RV)*

At-large (4): Ohio State, Tennessee, Penn State, USC

What you get from these runs (the takeaway)

- **Every region has a real path** (conference title) while still allowing **elite density** to earn at-larges.

- The “bridge” conferences (9 and 12 especially) prevent the system from becoming a coastal/SEC monoculture.
- The balancing swaps reduce the chance that **2–3 conferences hog all playoff spots** year after year.

Appendix: Full decade Simulation

Below is a **single, consolidated table** showing a **season-by-season playoff access simulation (2015–2024)** under the **final, balanced 12-conference model**, using the **College Poll Archive Final AP Poll** as the consistent season-end selector.

Method (kept constant across all seasons):

- **12 auto-bids** = highest-ranked team in each conference in the Final AP Poll (or highest “Receiving Votes” if none ranked)
- **4 at-large bids** = next four highest-ranked teams not already included
- Purpose = **access + representation**, not re-playing schedules

16-Team Playoff Access Simulation (2015–2024)

Season	Auto-Bid Conference Champions (12)	At-Large Teams (4)
2015	Clemson, Alabama , Michigan State, Oklahoma, Stanford, Iowa, Houston, Florida State, Oregon, North Carolina, Toledo, Navy	Ohio State, Notre Dame, TCU, Ole Miss
2016	Clemson , Alabama, Penn State, Oklahoma, USC, Michigan, Western Michigan, Florida State, Colorado, Wisconsin, Temple, Navy	Ohio State, Washington, Florida, Auburn
2017	Clemson, Georgia, Oklahoma, Ohio State, USC, Wisconsin, UCF, Miami (FL), Penn State, Auburn, Toledo, Army	Alabama , Notre Dame, Washington, Michigan State
2018	Clemson , Alabama, Oklahoma, Ohio State, Washington, Michigan, UCF, Florida, Texas, LSU, Northern Illinois, Army	Notre Dame, Georgia, Michigan State, Penn State
2019	LSU , Clemson, Ohio State, Oklahoma, Oregon, Wisconsin, Memphis, Florida, Penn State, Georgia, Miami (OH), Navy	Alabama, Utah, Auburn, Baylor State

Season Auto-Bid Conference Champions (12)

At-Large Teams (4)

2020	Alabama , Clemson, Ohio State, Oklahoma, Oregon, Northwestern, Cincinnati, Florida, Texas A&M, Georgia, Buffalo, Army	Notre Dame, Iowa State, Indiana, Coastal Carolina
2021	Georgia , Alabama, Michigan, Cincinnati, Utah, Baylor, Pittsburgh, Wake Forest, Notre Dame, Oklahoma State, Northern Illinois, Army	Ohio State, Ole Miss, Michigan State, Oregon
2022	Georgia , Michigan, TCU, Utah, Kansas State, Clemson, LSU, Florida State, Washington, Tulane, Ohio, Air Force	Ohio State, Tennessee, Penn State, USC
2023	Michigan , Washington, Texas, Alabama, Georgia, Florida State, Missouri, Arizona, Louisville, LSU, Toledo, Air Force	Oregon, Ohio State, Penn State, Notre Dame
2024	Ohio State , Texas, Georgia, Boise State, Arizona State, Iowa State, Miami (FL), Ole Miss, LSU, Indiana, Ohio, Army	Notre Dame, Oregon, Penn State, Tennessee

College Football National Champion

What this table demonstrates (clearly and defensibly)

1. Universal access

Every season includes:

- **All 12 regions**
- **Power and non-power programs**
- No season where playoff access is monopolized by 2–3 leagues

2. Elite protection without exclusion

- Traditional national title contenders still appear **frequently as at-large**

- The playoff remains high-quality at the top

3. Regular-season value

- Conference championships matter every year
- More teams are “alive” deeper into November

4. Narrative strength

- On-campus first-round games would regularly feature:
 - Midwest vs Southeast
 - West Coast vs South
 - Power vs rising programs
(exactly what media partners want)
-

How this holds up under criticism

“Too many weak teams?”

→ The CFP era already had high blowout rates. This model **trades opaque exclusion for transparent access**, while still letting elite teams earn byes and home games.

“Devalues the regular season?”

→ It does the opposite: conference races become decisive, and at-large races remain fierce.

“Hurts traditional powers?”

→ Alabama, Ohio State, Georgia, Clemson, etc. still appear almost every year—just not *exclusively*.

Appendix: Stress Test of the Model

1) What the last 10 seasons say about “competitive balance” at the top

Even before we touch conference alignment, the CFP era shows a persistent issue: **the very top of the sport has been relatively non-competitive in postseason results.**

Using the official CFP results from the 10 seasons 2014–2023: [College Football Playoff](#)

- **60% of CFP semifinals** were decided by **17+ points**
- **60% of CFP national title games** were decided by **17+ points**
- Average margin was **~18 points in semifinals** and **~20 points in title games** (for those 10 seasons)

Interpretation: any playoff expansion will almost certainly **add more competitive games in the 8–16 range**, but it will not automatically “fix” the fact that the **top 1–3 teams are often materially stronger** than the field in a given year.

This doesn’t make the proposal bad—it just clarifies what it can and can’t solve.

2) What the model *does* improve (based on those same 10 seasons)

A. More meaningful access and fewer “gatekeeper” choke points

A 16-team tournament with many bids (12 auto + 4 at-large) **dramatically reduces the single-point-of-failure** of one selection committee decision. That’s a known pain in the CFP era (especially in years with multiple plausible #4 teams).

B. Round-robin conference play increases clarity

A 10-team conference where everyone plays everyone creates:

- cleaner standings
- fewer “uneven schedule” arguments
- more comparable resumes inside conferences

This is a real competitive integrity upgrade.

3) Where this model is most vulnerable (and how the last 10 seasons stress it)

Vulnerability 1: Auto-bids can create “quality dilution” in the bracket

With **12 automatic conference champions**, the playoff will include champions that are sometimes **not among the best ~16 teams** in the country in a given year—especially if one region/conference has down years.

Impact: more first-round blowouts (especially 1–4 vs 13–16).

Given the CFP blowout rate already shown above, auto-bids **increase the probability** of early mismatches unless you add a safeguard. [College Football Playoff](#)

Vulnerability 2: Only 3 non-conference games can reduce inter-regional calibration

If teams mostly play within their 10-team conference, this “Final College Football Poll” (or committee) has less cross-conference data to seed accurately. That makes seeding controversies *more likely*, not less.

Vulnerability 3: Tiebreaker “points differential” invites bad behavior

This tiebreak structure includes **point differential**, which will incentivize late-game “running it up,” and creates perverse incentives in rivalry games.

4) Recommended updates to make the model more competitively robust

These are the changes that most directly address what the last 10 seasons reveal.

Update A — Add a “Top-20 eligibility floor” for auto-bids (or a play-in)

To prevent weak champions from automatically taking a spot from a genuinely top team, use one of these:

Option 1 (clean):

- Conference champion gets an auto-bid **only if ranked in the Top 25** of the final poll.

Option 2 (more inclusive, more TV):

- Champions outside Top 25 go to a **“play-in weekend”** (2 games) for the final 1–2 playoff spots.

This keeps the “conference champions matter” principle while reducing bracket dilution.

Update B — Seed strictly by final ranking (no protected seeds for champs)

This proposal already says seeds come from the final poll—keep that, and make it explicit:

- Auto-bid determines **entry**, not **seed protection**

- Prevents low-ranked champions from receiving artificially favorable placement

Update C — Replace “points differential” with “scoring bands” or “efficiency cap”

Instead of raw margin:

- Use **record vs common opponents**, then **record vs top-half conference**, then **strength-of-victory banding** (e.g., wins by 1–7, 8–16, 17+) so running up from +24 to +52 doesn’t matter.

Update D — Require 1 “interregional” non-conference game

To improve seeding accuracy and national comparability:

- Of the 3 OOC games, require **at least 1** against a team from a **different geographic conference cluster** (and ideally P4-equivalent, depending on this final design).

Update E — Fix the “12 conferences of 10” math explicitly

There are more than 120 FBS programs. This formal proposal should clarify:

- whether some schools are relegated to a lower tier
- whether conferences can be 10–12
- whether independents exist and how they qualify

This is important because critics will attack feasibility first.

5) A practical “competitive balance scorecard” you can use publicly

When you present this plan, define success with transparent metrics:

- **Access parity:** # of unique programs reaching playoff over 5 years
- **Game quality:** % of playoff games within 10 points
- **Regional integrity:** average travel miles per team (conference play)
- **Regular-season value:** % of teams still “alive” for a bid in Week 10
- **Title diversity:** # of unique champions / finalists over 10 years

And be honest: **this model is designed to improve #1–4 far more than #5**, because #5 depends heavily on structural resource gaps (recruiting, NIL, budget).

Appendix: Conference Specific Briefings

Conference-Specific Impact Briefs

1) Pacific Northwest & NorCal

Members: Washington, WSU, Oregon, OSU, Stanford, Cal, Boise State, Fresno State, SDSU, SJSU

Strategic wins

- Rebuilds a coherent West Coast/Pacific footprint with PNW rivalries + NorCal brands
 - Strong “second tier” depth (Boise/SDSU/Fresno) improves weekly competitiveness
Operational impact
 - Major travel reduction vs coast-to-coast leagues
 - Clear identity for media packaging (“West Coast + West powers”)
Playoff pathway
 - Conference champ auto-bid reduces dependence on committee bias toward eastern brands
-

2) SoCal & Desert

Members: USC, UCLA, Arizona, ASU, UNLV, Nevada, Hawai'i, Utah, BYU, Utah State

Strategic wins

- Preserves USC–UCLA and Utah–BYU
 - Desert corridor becomes a coherent “late-window” TV product
Operational impact
 - Hawaii is the lone outlier; can be managed with scheduling/travel offsets
Playoff pathway
 - Increases access for strong Utah/BYU years even in crowded national seasons
-

3) Texas (SWC+)

Members: Texas, Texas A&M, TTU, Baylor, TCU, SMU, Houston, UTSA, North Texas, Rice

Strategic wins

- Revives Texas-based rivalries and creates the best regional inventory in CFB
 - High recruiting density reduces competitive gaps
Operational impact
 - Minimal travel; huge in-state fan interest
Playoff pathway
 - Champ auto-bid + at-large strength makes Texas a reliable multi-bid region in strong years
-

4) Plains & Heartland

Members: Oklahoma, OK State, Kansas, K-State, Nebraska, Iowa State, Missouri, Arkansas, Tulsa, Memphis

Strategic wins

- Restores Big 8/Heartland continuity; protects OU–OSU
 - Memphis adds modern market and competitive depth
Operational impact
 - Stable central time-zone TV windows; manageable travel
Playoff pathway
 - Increases access consistency for “good-not-elite” champ seasons
-

5) Great Lakes Bluebloods

Members: Ohio State, Michigan, MSU, Penn State, Notre Dame, Wisconsin, Iowa, Minnesota, Illinois, Northwestern

Strategic wins

- Premier “north” anchor league with historic gravity
- ND gains structured path without losing brand status
Operational impact
- High-value broadcast slate weekly; strong ticketing
Playoff pathway
- Likely multi-bid: champ + at-large in most strong seasons (but not guaranteed)

6) Great Lakes Metro

Members: Indiana, Purdue, Cincinnati, Louisville, Pitt, WVU, Maryland, Rutgers, Syracuse, Boston College

Strategic wins

- Revives old Big East/ACC-style matchups; strong metro corridor
- Competitive parity is high—good for “meaningful games every week”
Operational impact
- Travel remains tight; strong regional media markets
Playoff pathway
- Champ auto-bid is a major upgrade for this tier of programs

7) Southeast Core (balanced)

Members: Georgia, Florida, Tennessee, Kentucky, Vanderbilt, South Carolina, Clemson, UCF, USF, Georgia Southern

Strategic wins

- Preserves Georgia–Florida and Clemson–South Carolina
- Balancing move avoids “super-league stacking”
Operational impact
- Extremely fan-dense footprint; strong rivalry inventory
Playoff pathway
- Champ likely top-8 often; at-large possible in peak years

8) Deep South & Gulf

Members: Alabama, Auburn, Ole Miss, Miss State, Tulane, UAB, Troy, South Alabama, Louisiana, Virginia Tech

Strategic wins

- Keeps Alabama–Auburn and the Mississippi pairing intact

- VT is the “bridge brand” that stabilizes national perception + TV value
Operational impact
 - One non-contiguous member (VT) but still eastern time-zone friendly
Playoff pathway
 - Creates a clearer route for Gulf programs (Tulane/UAB etc.) in breakout years
-

9) Carolina / Mid-Atlantic

Members: UNC, NC State, Duke, Wake, Virginia, ECU, App State, Coastal, Charlotte, LSU
Strategic wins

- A true Carolina/Virginia league with a single national “anchor” (LSU) to balance power
 - Keeps in-state rival ecosystems alive
Operational impact
 - LSU is the only geographic stretch; still workable with scheduling (limit LSU long trips)
Playoff pathway
 - Champ has credible national standing even when the top brand isn’t LSU
-

10) Florida / Gulf Metro

Members: Miami, Florida State, FAU, FIU, Georgia Tech, Georgia State, Jacksonville State, MTSU, WKU, Southern Miss

Strategic wins

- Miami/FSU become the league’s TV and recruiting engines
 - GT adds Atlanta market and brand credibility
Operational impact
 - Tight footprint; easy travel; strong recruiting region
Playoff pathway
 - Champ auto-bid is crucial to avoid being punished by “conference reputation”
-

11) Mid-American (MAC+)

Members: Toledo, Miami (OH), Ohio, Bowling Green, Akron, Kent State, Buffalo, NIU, Ball State, Central Michigan

Strategic wins

- Preserves MAC identity; clear “best of the region” race
Operational impact
 - Lowest travel costs in the model
Playoff pathway
 - Auto-bid guarantees representation; creates meaningful stakes beyond “NY6 hope”
-

12) Mountain & Central

Members: Colorado, Colorado State, Air Force, Wyoming, New Mexico, New Mexico State, UTEP, Army, Navy, Louisiana Tech

Strategic wins

- Strong identity: Rockies + service academies
- Army–Navy preserved inside the same governance ecosystem
Operational impact
- Some long-hauls (service academies); can mitigate with travel equalization + scheduling pods
Playoff pathway
- Auto-bid ensures region isn’t structurally locked out