

SBJ College: Esports stays in the game -- even without NCAA

By [Michael Smith](#)

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It was a unique scene last night in Boone, N.C., where five of the last six Appalachian State football coaches gathered in the same room for a charity event. Mack Brown, Sparky Woods, Jerry Moore, Scott Satterfield and Shawn Clark raised money for a local nonprofit -- High Country Caregivers.

Different strokes for different folks with collegiate esports

The NCAA decided four years ago that it would not govern collegiate esports. ADs and commissioners were skeptical that esports qualified as an athletic endeavor, while the esports community was resistant to NCAA amateurism laws, which would have restricted players' ability to win prize money.

But that didn't mean college esports went away, as conferences, schools and event organizers have each taken their own paths.

The MEAC, for example, sponsored an esports competition around its conference basketball tournament in Norfolk in March. MEAC Commissioner Sonja Stills at last week's Esports Rising virtual conference told SBJ's Kevin Hitt that this sort of crossover was important in helping grow enrollment at member schools -- and corporate sponsors are on board. "Coca-Cola sponsored our first in-person esports tournament," she noted. "Coke, they pay for the jerseys, so they get their name and their brand out there on the jerseys. Verizon built three of the gaming labs at our institutions."

The world's biggest esports event organizer, ESL Facelt Group, also sees opportunity in college. "It gets people in the pipeline," said Facelt Director of Collegiate Esports Duran Parsi. "You can participate in events through the Facelt collegiate program or through programs that we have run for publishers -- like Collegiate Valorant for Riot -- or Ubisoft's Rainbow Six program, for example. But, then through that, it's almost like a gateway for us, where you get exposed to the platform, then you can start playing in other events."

Investigation into Iowa, Iowa State athletes doesn't mirror Alabama case

When news broke that athletes at Iowa and Iowa State were under investigation for prohibited online sports betting, right on the heels of the situation at Alabama, the collective "Oh, no, here we go again" was prevalent.

But the cases at Iowa and Iowa State don't appear to be similar to Alabama, which fired its coach, Brad Bohannon, last week for suspicious gambling activity.

What we already knew was that the integrity police for sports wagering is really good, and the monitoring seems to be working. Any hint of illegal activity is going to trigger the gaming commission and likely prompt some type of investigation. No charges have been filed against the 41 Iowa and Iowa State athletes, and it's possible there won't be.

But it is a gaming commission's job to flag everything. This won't be the last time this story plays out in college athletics. It's also a good time to reiterate the call for transparency in college sports [as my colleague Bill King did in his last sports betting newsletter](#).

USTA's Lake Nona facility hosting all NCAA tennis championships for first time

The USTA wants its Lake Nona National Campus in Orlando to become for college tennis what Omaha has become for college baseball -- an annual, and spiritual, home, notes my colleague Bret McCormick.

That effort kicks up another gear beginning this week, when the facility, which includes nearly 100 tennis courts, hosts the NCAA Division I, II and III tennis championships simultaneously. It'll be the first time in NCAA history, in any sport, that all three divisions will compete for men's and women's season-ending trophies at a single site.

Over 1,000 student-athletes and coaches will descend on the site over the course of the 17 days (through May 27). Tennis Channel will broadcast the semifinals of the men's and women's D-I championships on May 19-20, while the 65-acre, \$63 million facility (designed by HKS) will also host a collegiate wheelchair tennis exhibition and the Intercollegiate Tennis Association's annual coaching convention.



The USTA's Lake Nona campus is hosting all NCAA tennis championships simultaneously for the first time

Altius, Coaches+ Media team up for media content

Altius Sports Partners is partnering with Coaches+ Media to create and develop premium media content. The property is designed to amplify coaches' unique stories and values of leadership, education, inclusion, service and advocacy.

The new partnership will develop philanthropic projects, instructional videos, and media collectibles, and will also offer coaches the opportunity to create their own content through its "Coaches Creator" platform.

Coaches+ Media is a content production company launched in 2022 with investment from the National Association of Basketball Coaches, the Women's Basketball Coaches Association, Altius Sports Partners and TeamWorks Media.

Speed reads

- The football and basketball venues at Kansas [will soon undergo massive transformations](#), and the Jayhawks are bringing Legends on board as part of a comprehensive partnership to maximize their premium spaces and fan experiences.
- LED video display provider GoVision founder Chris Curtis revealed plans to purchase the firm after it was merged with ANC under the Learfield umbrella in 2019, [notes the Dallas Business Journal](#). Curtis sold GoVision to Learfield in 2016. Now, Curtis is partnering with ANC Chief Administrative Officer Kevin Faciane for the deal set to make GoVision into an independent entity once again.
- An [interesting NIL nugget from my colleague Liz Mullen](#). WME Sports reps college players for NIL but did not rep Aliyah Boston, the No. 1 pick in this year's WNBA Draft, in college at South Carolina. She had been repped by Klutch Sports Group for NIL and WME Sports competed with other agencies to sign her as she heads to the WNBA.
- Providence has brought on data and management platform Affinaquest to analyze ticket and merch sales, fundraising and other data. Affinaquest adds the Big East school to its portfolio of 40+ programs and will use the tech to increase revenue and enhance the fan experience. Affinaquest's products, among other things, can be used to predict fan interests and behavior as a means of driving new revenue.