

**An Analysis of the Sears Cup Scoring Structure:  
Recent Revisions Alter Strategic Planning Criteria  
For Departments of Athletics**

**by**  
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The Sears Cup scoring structure has undergone a number of revisions and modifications in recent years in order to adapt to changing sports offerings and philosophical criteria within the controlling entity, the National Association of Collegiate Director's of Athletics (NACDA). Some of these modifications and their implications are indicated and discussed briefly below. Indeed, athletics programs whose organizational culture and performance goals place appreciable value on their standing in the Sears Cup rankings will need to monitor these changes continuously for the purpose of strategic planning, including resource allocation and other factors.

First, major changes in the Sears Cup scoring structure are: (a) points for all NCAA tournament appearances were increased from the previous point structure, except for 1<sup>st</sup> place (NCAA Championship) which remains at 100 points (see *Attachments 1 & 2*) -- thus, selection of a team to the NCAA tournament is now worth 20 points rather than 10 points (see *Attachments 1 & 2*); (b) points for team sports are awarded based upon the size of the bracket (see Attachment 1); (c) individual sports now have a separate scoring structure (see *Attachment 2*) -- meaning not that each individual team member scores points for the institution, but rather that the team's final placement is earned by the cumulative total of all individuals who participated in the NCAA tournament<sup>1</sup>; and (d) now, an institution can use all three scores earned for the sports of indoor track, outdoor track and cross country, rather than being limited to the use of two of the three scores.

Therefore, athletics departments reasonably should ask: How do these changes affect our potential standing in the Sears Cup competition and thus how should this affect our strategic planning?

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<sup>1</sup> For example, the aggregate score of a men's golf team determines its final placement, e.g. a team total of 275 strokes might place 50<sup>th</sup> and earn 34 Sears Cup points (see *Attachment 2*).

Regarding factors that impact a department's standing, consider the increased, weighted importance of advancing multiple teams to the NCAA tournaments. The double award in points for being selected to NCAA Championships (from 10 to 20 points) rewards broad-based scoring. It is vital to be selected to participate in the NCAA Championship field in the majority of sponsored sports to have a hope of finishing in the top 10%. Below, are examples from our sample institution, the University of Maryland:

1. In 1999-00, women's tennis, women's swimming, and men's golf each were selected to participate in their respective NCAA Championship, earning a total of 30 points (10 each). By failing to make similar post-season appearances the following year, these three teams missed out on a total of 60 points, rather than 30 points, due to the new scoring structure that doubled the number of points earned for being selected. That alone would have resulted in a finish nine places higher for Maryland in 2000-01.
2. The Maryland softball team's top-16 finish in 1998-99 earned 30 points (the team lost in the Region 2 Championship Game). Merely being selected to the postseason under the new structure would have earned two-thirds as many points (20) as the previous year's impressive advancement to the Sweet 16.
3. Amazingly, five Maryland teams simply participating in the first round of their respective NCAA Championship now earn the same number of Sears Cup points as the Maryland men's basketball National Championship (100).<sup>2</sup>

Athletic departments across the NCAA will benefit from careful consideration of the Sears Cup scoring structure as it evolves. Departments will also benefit from careful strategic planning with regard to expectations, funding, and other factors in reference to meeting their goals for placement within the annual Sears Cup rankings for their overall competitive excellence relative to peer institutions. That strategic planning process should take into consideration the revised scoring basis for Sears Cup rankings.

### **Formula For Planning**

The basic formula for this kind of comprehensive and detailed planning is briefly shown in the following flow chart and discussion. A detailed discussion of this strategic planning process can be found in the chapter entitled "Overview of Strategic Planning" in our recently published book, Strategic Planning for Collegiate Athletics by Yow, Bowden, et. al. (Haworth Press: Binghamton, NY). We conclude this article with this brief look at the planning process. The application of this process to an athletics department's pursuit of a preferred standing in the Sears Cup standings is strategic and obvious.

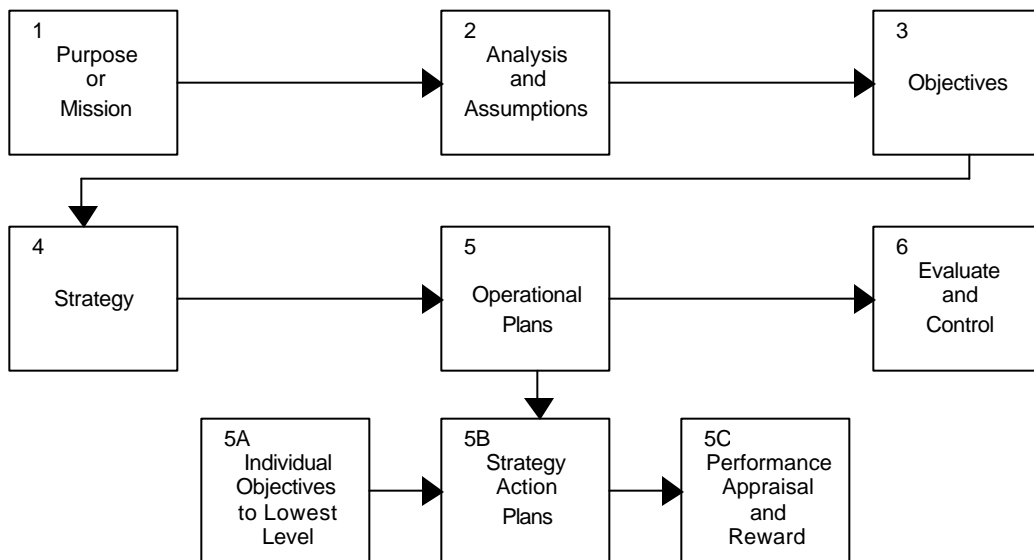
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<sup>2</sup> Notably, increased numbers of automatic qualifiers by conference might not prove to be beneficial to some institutions, since it decreases opportunities to be selected to participate based exclusively on competitive excellence and, instead, rewards the fact that six schools in a given sport are participating in a conference.

The work strategic means “pertaining to strategy.” Strategy is derived from the Greek word *strategia*, which means generalship, art of the general or, more broadly, leadership. The work “strategic,” when used in the context of planning, provides a perspective to planning that is long-term in nature and deals with achieving specified end results. In comparison, as military strategy has as its objective the winning of a war, and strategic planning has as its objective the achievement of departmental goals.

Strategic decisions must be differentiated from tactical decisions, however. Strategic decisions outline the overall game plan or approach, while tactical decisions involve implementing various activities that are necessary to carry out a strategy.

The strategic planning process is basically a matching process involving the department’s resources and opportunities. The objective of this process is to peer through the “strategic window” (an opportunity that may have a relatively short shelf life) and identify opportunities that the individual department is equipped to take advantage of or respond to. Thus the strategic management process can be defined as a managerial process that involves matching departmental capabilities to departmental opportunities. These opportunities are created over time and decisions revolve around investing or divesting resources to address these opportunities. The context in which these strategic decisions are made is: (a) the department’s operating environment, (b) the department’s purpose of mission, and (c) its objectives. This overall process is depicted in the flow chart below. Strategic planning is the process that ties all these elements together to facilitate strategic choices that are consistent with all three areas and the implements and evaluates these choices.



The successful results of planning with regard to Sears Cup standings and any other strategic departmental goal can be achieved through implementing an effective strategic planning process (Bradford and Cohen, 1984, p. 258). The following breakdown of this process is a complete outline of the system capable of creating authentic change in the attitudes of personnel as well as in productivity. Such a philosophy involves:

1. Defining a department's purpose and reason for being.
2. Analyzing the environment in which it operates, realistically assessing its strengths and weaknesses, and making assumptions about unpredictable future events. The environment would include the department's institutional setting as well as its city, state, and region, along with its conference milieu.
3. Prescribing written, specific, and measurable objectives in principal result areas contributing to the department's purpose.
4. Developing strategies for how to use available resources to reach objectives.
5. Developing operational plans to meet objectives, including establishing individual objectives and strategies.
6. Evaluating performance to determine whether it is keeping pace with attainment of objectives and is consistent with defined purpose and changing objectives, strategies, or operational plans in light of the evaluation.

It is important to recognize at this point what we call "the two observable Ps." The first P means *product* -- get the plan in writing. The plan must be something you can hold in your hand, a written observable product of your efforts. If the plan is not in writing, it is called daydreaming. When it is in writing, you are indicating to yourself and others that you are serious about it. The second P represents *process* -- every plan must have maximum input from everyone. Those who execute the plan must be involved in construction of the plan. The best way to ensure failure in planning is to overlook either the product or the process. They are equally important.

While there are many different ways in which an athletics department can approach the strategic planning process, a systematic approach that carries the organization through a series of integral steps helps to focus attention on a basic set of questions each organization must answer:

1. *What will we do?* This question focuses attention on the specific needs that the department will try to meet.
2. *For whom will we do it?* This question addresses the need for a department to identify the various groups whose needs will be met.
3. *How will we do what we want to do?* Answering this question forces the organization to think about the many avenues through which service and activities may be channeled.

The strategic planning process used by an athletics department will require departmental leadership to deal with these questions on a continuing basis. The department evolves over time into what its mission and purpose calls for it to be and therefore into what it was established to be, to do the work that only it can do.

The six steps of the strategic planning process, as illustrated in the flow chart, are important because they require that the organization consider certain essential questions. Just as each step requires the people at various organizational levels to discuss, study, and negotiate, also the process as a whole develops a planning mentality within the department. This is a very important corollary benefit of the strategic planning process. When the six steps are completed, the result is a strategic plan specifying why the organization exists, what it is trying to accomplish, and how resources will be utilized to accomplish objectives and fulfill its purpose.

The application of this strategic planning process in an attempt to reach specific goals, such as goals related to Sears Cup standing, is critical to the success of reaching these goals.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Michael Lipitz, JD, Assistant Athletics Director for Administration, University of Maryland, provided research and statistical assistance for this document.

## TEAM SPORTS SCORING

- The following sports are scored as Team Sports in the current scoring structure (implemented in 1999-00):

### Sport (Bracket Size)

Baseball (64)	Men's Soccer (32)
Men's Basketball (64)	Women's Soccer (48)
Women's Basketball (64)	Softball (48)
Field Hockey (16)	Men's Tennis (64)
Men's Lacrosse (12)	Women's Tennis (64)
Women's Lacrosse (16)	Volleyball (64)

PLACE	64	48	32	16	12	8	4	2
1 <sup>st</sup>	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
2 <sup>nd</sup>	90	90	90	90	90	80	70	50
3-4	75	75	75	75	75	55	20	
5-8	60	60	50	40	40	20		
9-16	50	50	30	20	20			
17-32	30	30	20					
33-64	20	20						

* 3	80	80	80	80	80	60	40	
* 4	70	70	70	70	70	50	20	

- All sports were scored as Team Sports in the previous scoring structure (in effect from 1997-98 through 1998-99):

PLACE	64	48	32	16	12	8	4	2
1 <sup>st</sup>	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
2 <sup>nd</sup>	80	80	80	80	80	75	50	50
3-4	60	60	60	60	60	50	10	
5-8	40	40	30	20	20	10		
9-16	30	30	20	10	10			
17-32	20	20	10					
33-64	10	10						

\* The new scoring structure awards separate points for 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> place in those NCAA Championships that determine such places.

## INDIVIDUAL SPORTS SCORING

64-Team		48-Team		32-Team		16-Team		12-Team		8-Team	
Place	Points	Place	Points	Place	Points	Place	Points	Place	Points	Place	Points
1	100	1	100	1	100	1	100	1	100	1	100
2	90	2	90	2	90	2	90	2	90	2	80
3	83	3	80	3	80	3	80	3	80	3	70
4	80	4	75	4	75	4	75	4	70	4	60
5	79	5	73	5	71	5	70	5	60	5	50
6	78	6	71	6	68	6	65	6	50	6	40
7	77	7	69	7	65	7	60	7	45	7	30
8	76	8	67	8	62	8	55	8	40	8	20
9	75	9	65	9	59	9	50	9	35		
10	74	10	63	10	56	10	45	10	30		
11	73	11	61	11	53	11	40	11	25		
12	72	12	59	12	50	12	36	12	20		
13	71	13	57	13	47	13	32				
14	70	14	55	14	44	14	28				
15	69	15	54	15	41	15	24				
16	68	16	52	16	38	16	20				
17	67	17	51	17	35						
18	66	18	50	18	34						
19	65	19	49	19	33						
20	64	20	48	20	32						
21	63	21	47	21	31						
22	62	22	46	22	30						
23	61	23	45	23	29						
24	60	24	44	24	28						
25	59	25	43	25	27						
26	58	26	42	26	26						
27	57	27	41	27	25						
28	56	28	40	28	24						
29	55	29	39	29	23						
30	54	30	38	30	22						
31	53	31	37	31	21						
32	52	32	36	32	20						
33	51	33	35								
34	50	34	34								
35	49	35	33								
36	48	36	32								
37	47	37	31								
38	46	38	30								
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57	27										
58	26										
59	25										
60	24										
61	23										
62	22										
63	21										
64	20										

- The following sports are scored as Individual Sports in the current scoring structure (implemented in 1999-00):

### Sport (Bracket Size)

Men's Cross Country (31)  
 Women's Cross Country (31)  
 \*Football (25)  
 Men's Golf (64)  
 Women's Golf (48)  
 Gymnastics (36)  
 Men's Swimming (64)  
 Women's Swimming (64)  
 Men's Track (# of qualifying schools)  
 Women's Track (# of qualifying schools)  
 Wrestling (21)

\*Sears Cup points in Football are awarded solely based on a team's final ranking in the Top 25 of the ESPN/USA Today Coaches Poll, using the scoring for a 32-team field, above.