

Investigating the Diverse Landscape of Championship and Playoff Site Selection Procedures Across American High School Athletics

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**Session 11: Governance
Poster**

Thursday, May 31, 2007

4:00 PM - 4:55 PM

The current presentation's purpose was to reveal the differences and similarities various interscholastic athletic state governing bodies possess with regard to championship or playoff site selection procedures. Currently, secondary sources persist as the main supplier of information on the selection process of championship or playoff sites for interscholastic athletics. This study describes the various methods involved with championship/playoff site selection through an investigative survey of the nation's 51 state high school athletic associations and their executive directors. The researchers collected a total of 26 (51.0%) questionnaires, but utilized only 24 in the analysis of data due to incomplete or non-responses. Items on the survey instrument asked participants if (a) their state provided a bid process for championship/playoff events, (b) what criteria was used to select playoff sites, and (c) if any championship contests enjoyed a permanent home or host location.

The study found not every state provides communities and/or schools the opportunity to host state high school championships or playoffs. For instance, over one-half (13) of the respondents indicated no official bid process existed. In these instances, we found the executive director/commissioner and a small number of athletic board members often selected playoff/championship locations. When bids were accepted to host championship/playoffs, we found some criteria emerged more frequently than others during the evaluation process. For example, facility and hotel availability, facility size, city amenities, and monetary guarantees surfaced as the greatest focus for bid evaluators. Interestingly, the media and size of the city imposed little influence in most states during the bidding process. Another finding of this study suggests some sports accepted permanent homes for their contests but many did not. Generally, the typical revenue producing sports (football and boys/girls' basketball), along with cross-country, were most likely to enjoy a permanent home. While other sports frequently fail to support their championships in a permanent home, a large majority of states (84.6%) reported that at least one sport within their state acquired a permanent home for their playoff contests.

This investigation appears helpful to sport management studies because it identifies the various methods or criteria, which exist among states with regard to playoff site selection. Ultimately, this should help those in site selection positions reevaluate their procedures and standards to provide for a fairer bidding process to all potential host communities. Suitably, this work appears helpful to those communities attempting to design a bid proposal for the hosting of a playoff because it identifies the major criteria most states utilize during the decision-making process. Interestingly, respondents did not recognize safety concerns and security issues as a major area of emphasis when determining host sites despite the fact we live in a more security conscious time. Clearly, the sport management industry might pursue the promotion of this concern into the selection criteria because it benefits state associations from potential legal problems, which could arise during what we might agree to be highly passionate contests. Matching a secure and safe facility with an event likely yields a more fan friendly environment, which could potentially encourage more spending and a greater image to the surrounding region.

Finally, a few state association-governing bodies mentioned the importance of the media, student-athlete, and financial concerns, but they appeared disproportionately low compared to what was anticipated. The lack of focus on media attention when selecting sites appears to suggest that championships could be more valuable as a marketing and financial tool in the future for many states. Specifically, if more importance was placed on the opportunities for increased media coverage, state associations could increase financial gains that would benefit both the state association and the student-athletes. For instance, student-athletes could better secure health, travel, and overall experience benefits with greater media attention.