

#FIXCFB

Solution 1: 16-Team Playoff

Objective Selection, Guaranteed Access, Merit-Based Competition

Part of the comprehensive Fix CFB proposal

16-Team Playoff with Objective Selection

Ten conference champions automatically qualify. Six at-large bids selected by objective criteria published in advance. No weekly rankings—committee meets once after all games are complete. Legally defensible, revenue positive, solves selection controversies—and will never be adopted because power conferences want controlled access.

The Problem: Selection by Bias, Not Merit

The [2025 College Football Playoff selection](#) generated [seven major controversies](#) despite expanding to 12 teams. Alabama (9-3, three conference losses) received an at-large bid over undefeated Group of 5 champions. The committee's justification? "Strength of schedule" and the "eye test"—subjective measurements that conveniently favor SEC and Big Ten brands.

- **Weekly rankings create narrative lock-in:** Teams ranked #5 in October stay in the top 10 even after multiple losses. Early rankings become self-fulfilling prophecies.
- **No guaranteed conference champion access:** Win your conference? Doesn't matter if the committee decides your conference is "weak." Group of 5 champions routinely excluded despite undefeated records.
- **Conference bias is explicit:** Committee members openly discuss "protecting" certain conferences. SEC gets 4-5 teams in 12-team playoff while other conferences get 0-1.
- **Subjective criteria enable manipulation:** "Eye test," "quality wins," and "strength of schedule" mean whatever the committee wants them to mean. No published algorithm, no transparency, no accountability.

Structure

- **10 Conference Champions:** Automatic qualifiers from all 10 FBS conferences
- **6 At-Large Bids:** Best remaining teams regardless of conference
- **Objective Selection Criteria:** Published priority order (win-loss, head-to-head, SOS)
- **No Weekly Rankings:** Committee meets once for final selection, eliminating narrative lock-in

Why It Works

- **Merit-Based Access:** Win your conference, you're in—regardless of conference affiliation
- **Preserves Quality:** Six at-large bids ensure top teams from strong conferences still qualify
- **Objective Criteria:** Published algorithm removes subjective committee manipulation
- **Revenue Positive:** 16 teams = 15 games. More TV inventory than 12-team format

Example Scenarios

Scenario 1: Undefeated G5 Champion

MAC champion goes 13-0. They automatically qualify as conference champion. No committee debate, no exclusion arguments. Merit-based access.

Scenario 2: Three 11-1 SEC Teams

SEC champion gets automatic bid. Two 11-1 non-champions compete for at-large spots based on objective criteria (win-loss record, head-to-head, SOS). Room for quality teams.

Scenario 3: 9-3 Power Team

Team doesn't win conference, has three losses. Under objective criteria, unlikely to get at-large bid unless other conferences are significantly weaker. No committee bias saving them.

Legal Framework & Antitrust

NCAA v. Board of Regents (1984): Supreme Court ruled that restricting competition in college sports violated antitrust law. The current CFP structure, with its subjective selection favoring certain conferences, echoes the competitive restrictions that court rejected.

How 16-team playoff mitigates antitrust risk:

- **Objective criteria published in advance:** Reduces appearance of anti-competitive gatekeeping by establishing clear, transparent selection standards before the season begins
- **Guaranteed access for all conferences:** Every conference champion qualifies automatically, eliminating 'closed system' arguments that could trigger antitrust scrutiny
- **Performance-based revenue:** Playoff revenue distributed based on on-field success and participation, not conference affiliation or brand value

Why It Won't Happen (Feasibility: 3/10)

Power conferences want controlled access, not merit-based systems. The SEC and Big Ten don't want objective criteria threatening their ability to ensure 4-5 teams from their conferences get in. ESPN wants weekly ranking shows for Tuesday night programming. "16 teams dilutes the brand" translates to "we don't want Group of 5 teams in our playoff even if they earned it."

References

- **Playoff Selection Data:** [CFP Official Site](#), [ESPN CFP Coverage](#)
- **Legal Precedent:** [NCAA v. Board of Regents \(1984\)](#)
- **Professional Sports Models:** [NFL Playoff Format](#), [NBA Play-In Tournament](#)

Contact & Resources

- **Email:** contact@fixcfb.com
- **Website:** fixcfb.com
- **Full Proposal:** 30-page comprehensive document available at fixcfb.com
- **Executive Summary:** 10-page overview available at fixcfb.com