

Finding Data to Cover College Athletics

Christopher Schnaars, USA TODAY
cschnaars@usatoday.com, @chrisschnaars

The best data available to help you cover college athletics is housed in financial reports submitted to the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) and college coach contracts. You can use these documents to write about skyrocketing coach salaries, perks and bonuses; ever-increasing student fees and athletic scholarships, among other stories. Input the numbers you care about into a spreadsheet to run some quick calculations. For richer stories, input data from other schools in the same conference as the schools you cover.

Financial Reports

The NCAA won't give you these reports – which are submitted each year in mid-January – but you can FOIA them from public schools. These reports break down all revenues and expenses into about 40 categories, and these numbers are broken down further by individual sport. Some of the most interesting categories are ticket sales, student fees, athletic aid, severance payments and facilities debt.

Tips:

- Focus on the big numbers.
- Read NCAA documentation for the revenue and expense categories you're interested in.
- Read the comments page in the report.
- Look at how numbers have changed from year to year.
- When looking at numbers from different years, adjust for inflation.

Coach contracts

Rather than just pull out the big numbers, look for information on severance, bonuses and perks. The best time to request contracts is right before the practice season begins, but they can be amended year round.

Tips:

- Know the meeting schedule of the school's governing board in case a contract is on the agenda and you can get these documents in advance.
- When requesting contracts, ask for contract amendments and outside income reports (though most schools no longer collect these). Also, ask for records of bonuses paid.
- Call the school to fact check any numbers you're not sure of, but be careful of being spun.

Resources

USA TODAY Data: <http://sports.usatoday.com/ncaa/salaries>, <http://sports.usatoday.com/ncaa/finances>

NCAA Financial Reporting System: <http://www.ncaa.org/about/resources/finances/ncaa-membership-financial-reporting-system> (This webpage includes links to the full documentation (agreed-upon procedures) as well as an Excel spreadsheet that many schools use to input their data.)