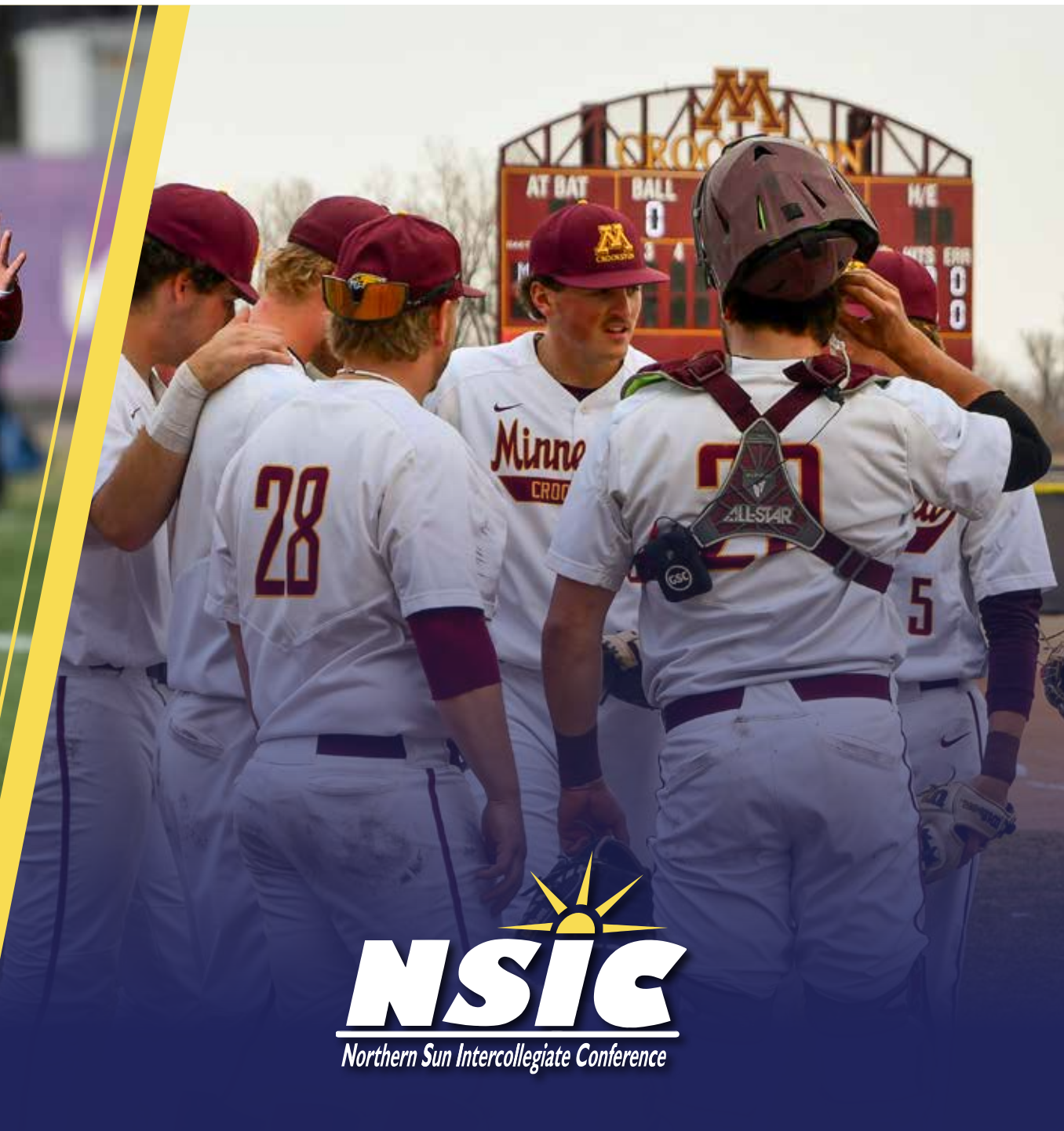


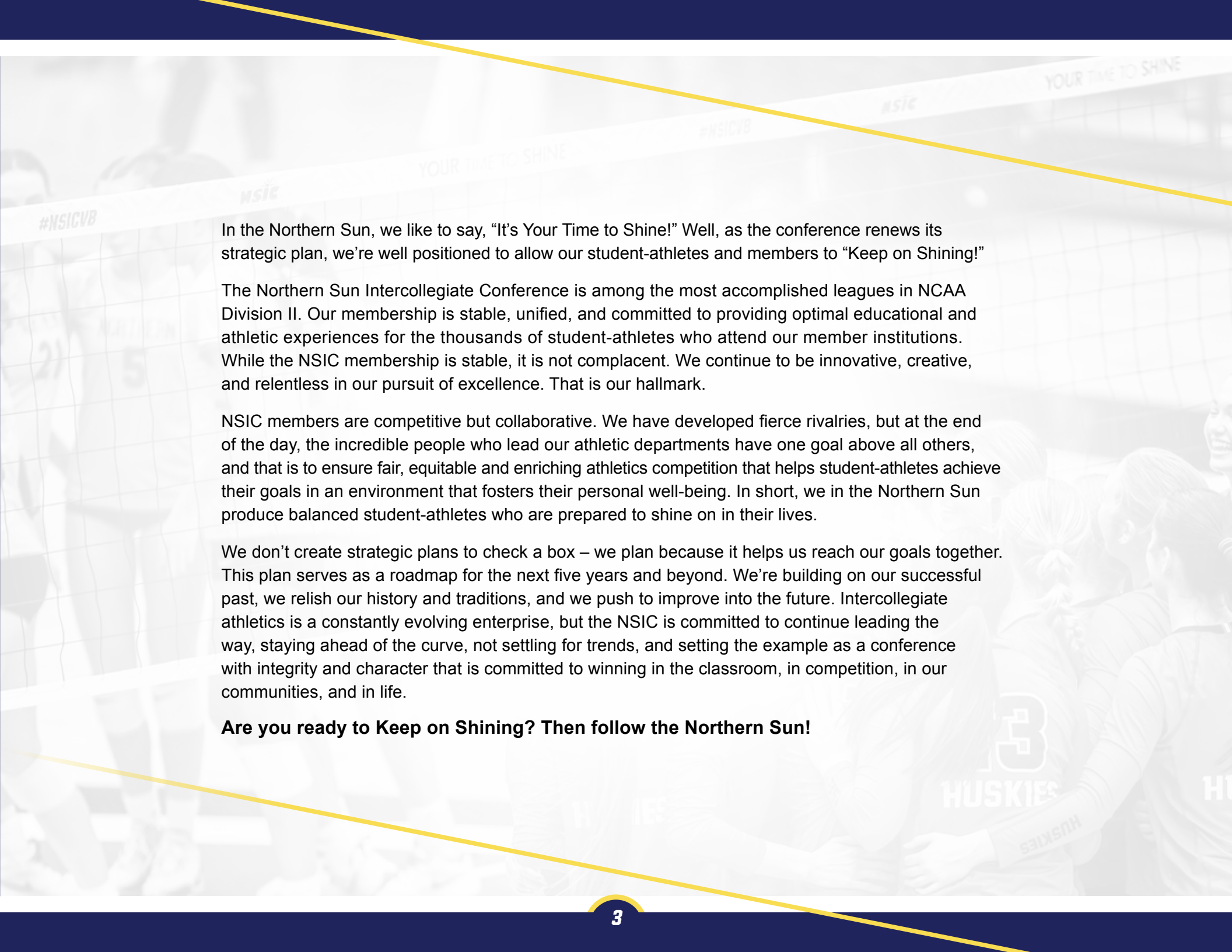


# ***YOUR TIME TO SHINE***

**Northern Sun Intercollegiate Conference**  
**Strategic Plan, 2025-30**



**NSIC**  
*Northern Sun Intercollegiate Conference*



In the Northern Sun, we like to say, “It’s Your Time to Shine!” Well, as the conference renews its strategic plan, we’re well positioned to allow our student-athletes and members to “Keep on Shining!”

The Northern Sun Intercollegiate Conference is among the most accomplished leagues in NCAA Division II. Our membership is stable, unified, and committed to providing optimal educational and athletic experiences for the thousands of student-athletes who attend our member institutions. While the NSIC membership is stable, it is not complacent. We continue to be innovative, creative, and relentless in our pursuit of excellence. That is our hallmark.

NSIC members are competitive but collaborative. We have developed fierce rivalries, but at the end of the day, the incredible people who lead our athletic departments have one goal above all others, and that is to ensure fair, equitable and enriching athletics competition that helps student-athletes achieve their goals in an environment that fosters their personal well-being. In short, we in the Northern Sun produce balanced student-athletes who are prepared to shine on in their lives.

We don’t create strategic plans to check a box – we plan because it helps us reach our goals together. This plan serves as a roadmap for the next five years and beyond. We’re building on our successful past, we relish our history and traditions, and we push to improve into the future. Intercollegiate athletics is a constantly evolving enterprise, but the NSIC is committed to continue leading the way, staying ahead of the curve, not settling for trends, and setting the example as a conference with integrity and character that is committed to winning in the classroom, in competition, in our communities, and in life.

**Are you ready to Keep on Shining? Then follow the Northern Sun!**





## OUR MISSION

The NSIC is a model Division II conference that uses high-level athletics competition to develop champions in the classroom and community while empowering student-athletes to be impactful and positive leaders.

# OUR VISION

We will create a culture that inspires personal and professional growth for all student-athletes, coaches and administrators, and we will operate with integrity to ensure fair, equitable and enriching athletics competitions.







# OUR VALUES

## OPPORTUNITY

Our member institutions offer comprehensive athletics programs that allow student-athletes to achieve their full potential in and beyond competition and provide coaches and administrators with the resources and professional development necessary to fulfill career goals.

## WELL-BEING

We promote a balanced, safe and healthy experience in which student-athletes, coaches and administrators can achieve their personal and professional goals.

## LEADERSHIP

Our athletics programs prepare student-athletes, coaches and administrators to serve as engaged citizens and leaders.



## **RESPECT**

We foster an environment of cohesiveness and collaboration that values all persons.

## **CHARACTER**

We believe participation in college sports builds personal integrity and accountability.

## **COMMUNITY**

We exemplify servant leadership and celebrate the student-athletes, coaches, administrators, faculty, alumni and supporters who embrace and enhance their local communities as part of the NSIC family.

# OUR MEMBERS

From its modest origin as a six-team alliance more than nine decades ago, the Northern Sun Intercollegiate Conference has matured into a 16-team union of upper Midwest colleges and universities to form arguably the strongest affiliation in NCAA Division II.

The NSIC traces its roots to 1932 when six institutions – Bemidji State University; Minnesota State University, Mankato; Minnesota State University Moorhead; St. Cloud State University; University of Minnesota Duluth; and Winona State University – signed on as charter members. All six remain as active members today.

In 1992 the NSIC became a true athletics showcase for both men and women with the merger of the traditional Northern Intercollegiate Conference (NIC) and the Northern Sun Conference (NSC), the home of women's athletics since 1979.

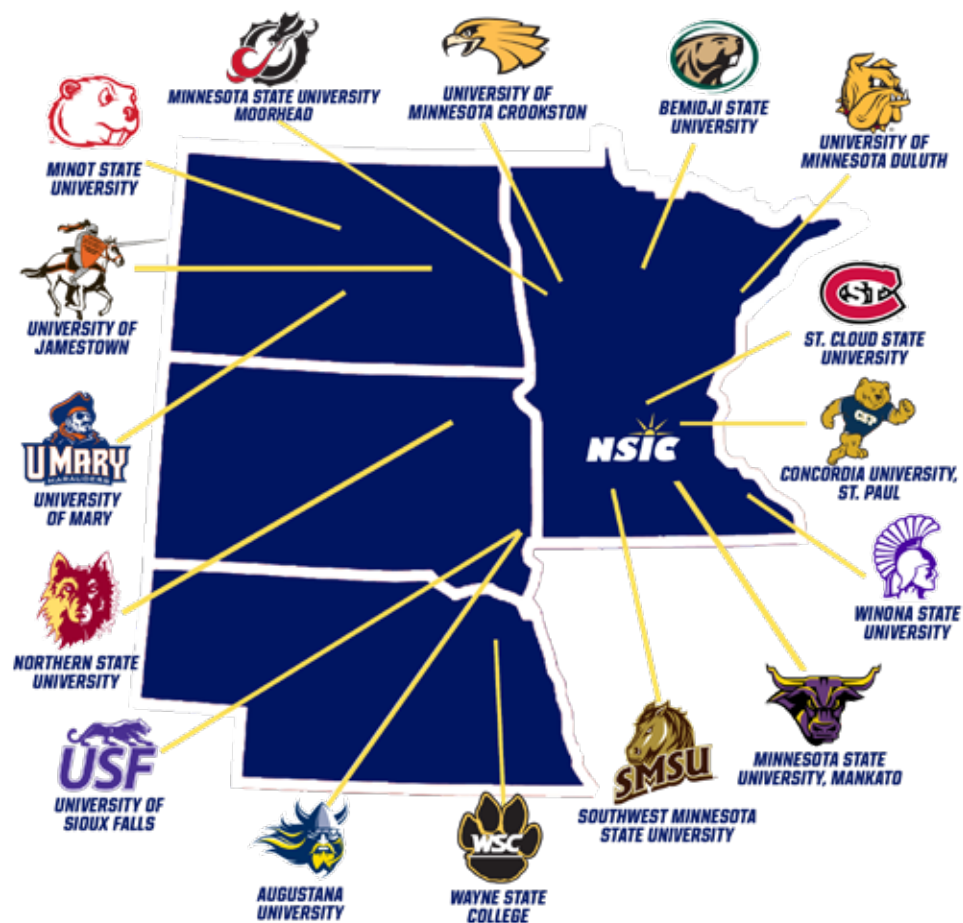
Before NSIC affiliates became certified for championship competition in the NCAA in 1995, its member institutions filled prominent roles in the NAIA. NIC and NSC clubs annually qualified student-athletes to national tournaments and captured several NAIA team and individual championships. The NSIC continues to make a major imprint nationally, winning 27 NCAA national titles since 2006.

Member schools continue to emphasize the educational, entertainment and unifying value of sports while pointing with pride to the many advantages gained by attending these colleges and universities. The NSIC is committed to providing rewarding experiences for its student-athletes now and into the future.



## CURRENT MEMBERS

- Augustana University (Sioux Falls, SD)
- Bemidji State University (Bemidji, MN)
- Concordia University, St. Paul (St. Paul, MN)
- University of Jamestown (Jamestown, ND)
- University of Mary (Bismarck, ND)
- University of Minnesota Crookston (Crookston, MN)
- University of Minnesota Duluth (Duluth, MN)
- Minnesota State University, Mankato (Mankato, MN)
- Minnesota State University Moorhead (Moorhead, MN)
- Minot State University (Minot, ND)
- Northern State University (Aberdeen, SD)
- St. Cloud State University (St. Cloud, MN)
- University of Sioux Falls (Sioux Falls, SD)
- Southwest Minnesota State University (Marshall, MN)
- Wayne State College (Wayne, NE)
- Winona State University (Winona, MN)



## IN THE NORTHERN SUN, WE ARE...

### NATIONAL CHAMPIONS

NSIC success extends deep into NCAA postseason play as evidenced by dozens of team national championships and hundreds of individual champions won by conference members.



## IN THE NORTHERN SUN, WE ARE...

### **S**TUDENT-CENTERED

The NSIC helps student-athletes achieve success in their desired academic curricula. The conference annually features dozens of national Academic All-Americans and collective graduation rates/Academic Success Rates that rank the NSIC among the top Division II conferences.

The NSIC also honors student-athlete academic success through the following:

- **Myles Brand All-Academic with Distinction Award** (honoring the former NCAA President and presented to seniors with a 3.75 GPA or higher who have exhausted their athletics eligibility and are on track to graduate).
- **Britton & Kelly Scholar-Athlete Award for Academic Excellence** (presented to the top NSIC male and female student-athlete, as voted by the conference's faculty athletics representatives).
- **NSIC Elite 18 Award:** as part of the NSIC 25th Anniversary celebration during the 2016-17 academic year, the NSIC Elite 18 Award was instituted to recognize the true essence of the student-athlete by honoring the individual who has reached the pinnacle of competition at the NSIC Championship level in his or her sport, while also achieving the highest academic standard among peers. The NSIC Elite 18 Award is presented to the student-athlete with the highest cumulative grade-point average participating at the finals site for each of the NSIC's 18 Championships.



## IN THE NORTHERN SUN, WE ARE...

### INNOVATIVE AND INFLUENTIAL

In the NSIC, our creativity and passion to make a difference positions us as thoughtful leaders in intercollegiate athletics.



## IN THE NORTHERN SUN, WE ARE...

### COMMUNITY-MINDED

NSIC members make a positive difference and leave a lasting impression in their communities through the following initiatives:

- **It's a Slam Dunk – Don't Drive Drunk.** The NSIC Student-Athlete Advisory Committee collects signatures from fans at designated basketball games who pledge to drive responsibly.
- **Engagement at NSIC Championships.** The NSIC incorporates community engagement activities at many of its championships, including hosting youth sport clinics and providing opportunities for NSIC student-athletes to interact with elementary school kids and community members at other local organizations.
- **Mental Health Awareness.** The NSIC Student-Athlete Advisory Committee creates PSAs and schedules special events to emphasize mental wellness as a priority for all affiliated with NSIC member institutions.





# OUR SPORTS

The NSIC sponsors the following 18 championship sports, eight for men and 10 for women:

## MEN

- Baseball
- Basketball
- Cross Country
- Football
- Golf
- Indoor Track & Field
- Outdoor Track & Field
- Wrestling

## WOMEN

- Basketball
- Cross Country
- Golf
- Soccer
- Softball
- Swimming & Diving
- Tennis
- Indoor Track & Field
- Outdoor Track & Field
- Volleyball







## ***OUR PLAN***

Our strategic plan to further enhance our success as a conference encompasses the following priorities:

- Academics and Life Skills
- Athletics Operations and Compliance
- Game Day and Championships
- Membership and Positioning
- Health and Wellness

# ACADEMICS AND LIFE SKILLS

We foster the holistic development of student-athletes, coaches and administrators through leadership and life skills that produce healthy and productive lifestyles, meaningful engagement with community and long-term contributions to society.

## GOALS/ACTION STEPS:

- Integrate SAAC Summit elements into the academic year with shared resources.
- Further celebrate academic achievement across the conference and on campuses.
  - Review all current academic awards to ensure they reflect the current student-athlete population considering the many paths student-athletes are taking (e.g., freshmen enrolling with several credits from high school, graduate students, fifth-year students).
  - Evaluate adding team academic awards (e.g., recognize teams with a team GPA of 3.2 or higher).
  - Recognize graduates.
  - Recognize prominent civic/community engagement.
  - Celebrate academics at championships.
- Develop a Student Success Model, including resources and a framework for faculty athletics representatives and the membership to use.
  - Create a sharing platform for faculty athletics representatives that includes job descriptions, attendance policies, academic expectations, and best practices for different aspects of the role.



## ***GOALS/ACTION STEPS CONT:***

- Develop initiatives to help student-athletes transition to life after college.
  - Evaluate type of programming to target different years in college – potentially life skills learned through sport for freshmen and sophomores (e.g., time management, navigating playing time) and after college life skills for juniors and seniors (e.g., creating resumes, financial literacy, health insurance).
  - Expand programming to reach all student-athletes on campus, not just SAAC members.
  - Educate students on what campus resources are available for different academic/career pursuits.
  - Create an NSIC Leadership Academy to which student-athletes apply and are matched with administrators and coaches as mentors (similar to the D2ADA mentor program).
- Raise the bar for academic success.
  - Create an “All-Academic Standings” and announce by season.



# ATHLETICS OPERATIONS AND COMPLIANCE

— We expect a commitment to compliance and integrity from all NSIC stakeholders and strive to provide operational consistency for athletics competitions.

## GOALS/ACTION STEPS:

- Regularly share information regarding compliance.
  - Create a feeder program for compliance – graduate assistants or internships.
  - Create a compliance manual and transition packet for on-campus responsibilities.
  - Develop onboarding/training information for new hires in compliance.
  - Continue with compliance administrators' collaboration across the conference, sharing best practices, and monthly compliance administrator meetings.
- Create a resource to update student-athletes on key initiatives.
  - Provide updates on changes in Division II and how they affect the NSIC (i.e., quick hitters via a newsletter or podcast on new legislation and what it means).



## ***GOALS/ACTION STEPS CONT:***

- Provide compliance education/training for other departments on campus that have a stake in compliance (e.g., registrar, financial aid, admissions, academic advising, FARs, etc.).
- Emphasize ethical conduct.
  - Maintain high level of decorum within conference/campus operations and decision making.
  - Enhance enforcement and penalties for ethical misconduct.
  - Reevaluate sportsmanship policies and initiatives.
  - Look to combine sportsmanship creed and influencers of change pledge to address ethical conduct and a conference culture of ethical decision making.
  - Review NSIC championships code of conduct and incorporate the Division II Championships code of conduct.
- Create/share best practices document for game day operations that provides minimum requirements for staffing appropriately.
  - Use game management policies that campuses have in place as a starting point.
- Implement visiting team sheets (one pagers that the host institutions provide to visiting teams in advance of contests with game day crisis information and other operational items).
  - Improve consistency in game day communication.
- Review emergency action plans to ensure they address different scenarios (e.g., weather emergency, active shooter, etc.).
  - Consider a shared platform for emergency action plans among institutions.
  - Continue game management meetings, as they allow all institutions to be on the same page regarding expectations.
  - Consider how information can be shared more effectively when an institution has last-minute fill-ins for game day staffing [e.g., use train-the-trainer programming, create connections among different game day staff (e.g., official scorers)].
- Continue training statistics personnel.
- Continue NSIC onboarding programming for new coaches and administrators hired within the conference membership.

# GAME DAY AND CHAMPIONSHIPS

We strive to provide the optimal regular-season and conference championship experiences for our student-athletes and position NSIC members for participation in NCAA Division II championships.

## GOALS/ACTION STEPS:

- Ensure consistent/equitable experiences for all NSIC championships.
  - Evaluate how host institutions are supported.
  - Review/update host requirements for on-campus championship sites.
  - Evaluate championship trophies and awards – create consistency across sports.
  - Review student-athlete gifts – evaluate changing annually and staying current with what student-athletes are interested in.
  - Evaluate consistency with community engagement at championships.
  - Evaluate consistency with media exposure, multimedia/streaming experiences and hype videos.
  - Strive to make conference championships a first-class experience that differentiate from regular-season contests, especially when a championship is held on campus.





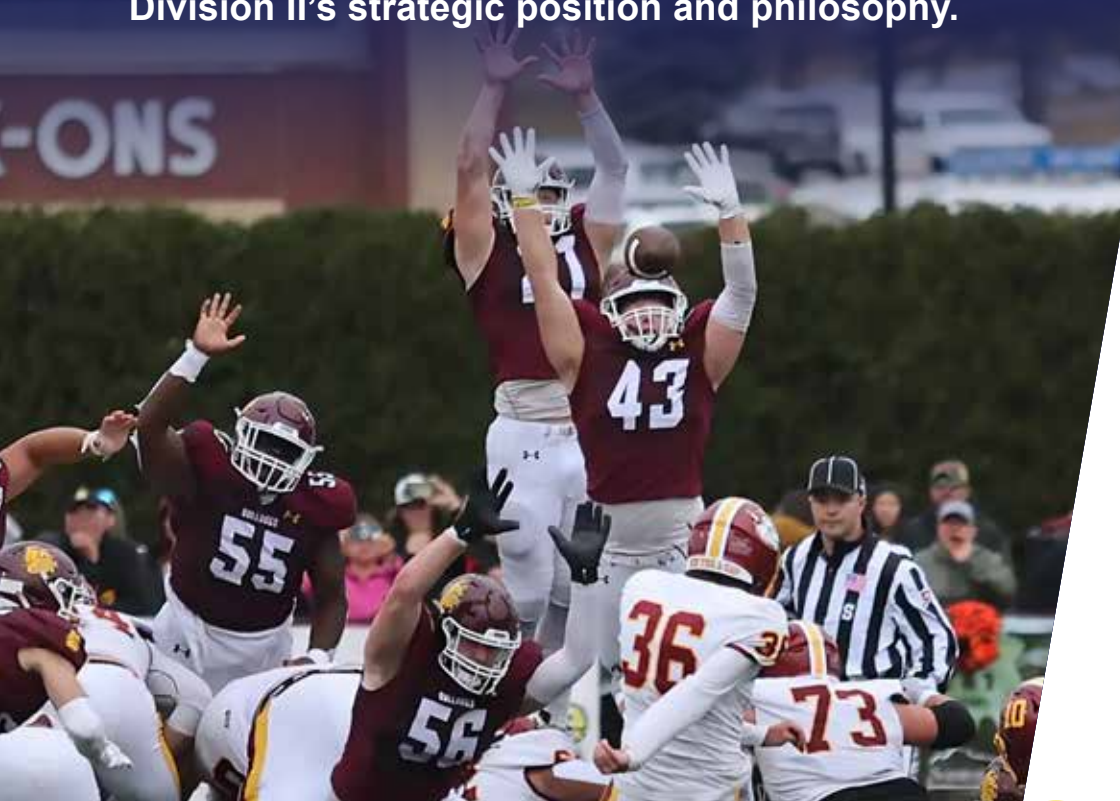
## ***GOALS/ACTION STEPS CONT:***

- NSIC Network.
  - Evaluate webcasting goals.
  - Evaluate pros/cons of pay-per-view model.
  - Evaluate how to enforce and penalize institutions that do not meet minimum standards of webcasting.
  - Maintain quality and consistent standards for game day streaming.
- Enhance officiating.
  - Continue to enhance recruiting efforts and training.
  - Emphasize appreciation for officials and create a culture to improve interest in officiating.
  - Mentor officials – use scrimmages to help train/mentor newer officials.
  - Educate student-athletes on the officiating profession (target officials who are former student-athletes to speak with current student-athletes).
- Maintain consistent and equitable schedules for all sports.
  - Create conference schedules further out (e.g., four-year rotations rather than two) to help institutions plan events on campus.
  - Be creative and flexible when creating parameters for schedules; remain mindful of travel and missed class time.
  - Evaluate partnering with other conferences for scheduling nonconference or conference crossovers tournaments.
- Evaluate the feasibility of creating an administrative group for championships to serve as a professional development opportunity for campus personnel and provide extra hands for conducting certain championships.
- Maintain stability for championship site locations; evaluate using more predetermined sites.
- Review avenues for feedback with sportsmanship survey.

# MEMBERSHIP AND POSITIONING INITIATIVES

○ —————

We commit to enhancing the public's knowledge and appreciation of the NSIC, and we support Division II's strategic position and philosophy.



## GOALS/ACTION STEPS:

- Consider the feasibility of retaining an outside vendor to evaluate the status and reach of the NSIC brand.
- Establish a standing membership committee in the conference structure.
  - Help track on the changing landscape of college athletics.
  - Continue to review attributes of members the conference finds important.
  - Conduct a SWOT analysis to help inform needs.
  - Keep in mind enrollment-driven decisions.
- Track on emerging sports within the conference footprint for potential expansion opportunities.
- Expand and elevate the NSIC brand.
  - Evaluate avenues to increase exposure and accessibility.
  - Brand the Division II experience along with the NSIC.
  - Create/use league-wide PSAs/multimedia.

## ***GOALS/ACTION STEPS CONT:***

- Continue encouraging conference members to serve on NCAA committees and evaluate adding student-athletes to serve on NSIC committees.
- Expand conference-wide contracts/partnership opportunities that could be helpful in different areas.
- Continue striving to create elevated experiences for student-athletes.
  - Consider creating a group in addition to the NSIC Board of Directors with institutional representation to annually review strategic plan priorities.
  - Collect fanbase demographics to enhance fan experience and connection.
  - Conduct membership census to measure membership satisfaction within the conference.
- Collaborate on ways NSIC members can support/help develop coaches during changing times to help retain them.





# HEALTH, WELLNESS AND LEADERSHIP

○ —————

We commit to providing safe and healthy experiences that protect and enhance all aspects of student-athlete wellness (physical, mental, social and personal well-being).

## **GOALS/ACTION STEPS:**

- Professional development for coaches and staff.
- Take care of staff/recognize athletic trainers, coaches, and administrators.
  - Evaluate how to support athletic training staff.
  - Promote personal and professional growth for coaches and administrators.
- Encourage NSIC health care administrators to convene regularly to discuss issues and share best practices.
- Establish a wellness committee.
  - Charge would include reviewing trends, topics of beneficial programming, sharing resources, etc.
  - Committee composition should include a variety of campus roles, not just athletics health care administrators.



## ***GOALS/ACTION STEPS CONT:***

- Focus on ways to encourage coaches and staff to take advantage of existing professional development opportunities (e.g., through NACDA) and evaluate the feasibility of creating development resources within the conference to help grow NSIC personnel.
- Continue USCAH partnership and programming.
  - Be cognizant of how to intrinsically motivate staff and coaches to attend wellness programming.
- Educate student-athletes, coaches and staff on accessible resources and tools that may not require financial support.
  - Educate student-athletes with self-care tools (e.g., building resilience, grit).
  - Be creative with platforms/avenues that can educate student-athletes (e.g., social media, sports psychologist).
- Create a conference-wide template/video for mental health awareness to be played at events.
- Secure speakers on health and wellness for student-athlete programming.
  - Use the NSIC SAAC and alumni to share mental shifts that took place upon transitioning to life after college.
- Review campus mental health emergency action plans.
  - Create a “stoplight card” (with green-, yellow-, and red-light scenarios) for staff members to help with different health and wellness situations and contact information for appropriate and available services/resources.
  - Review campus mental health emergency action plans.

***NATIONAL CHAMPIONS***

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***STUDENT-CENTERED***

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***INNOVATIVE AND INFLUENTIAL***

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***COMMUNITY-MINDED***







# ***YOUR TIME TO SHINE***

**Northern Sun Intercollegiate Conference**  
**Strategic Plan, 2025-30**