

Super Regional Cross Country Proposal

1. Conference championships remain the same weekend.
2. Regional championships remain the same weekend.
3. National championships remain the same weekend.

Change #1: Teams qualify for the regional championships in one of two ways.

- a) By winning (or placing in a pre-determined place) in their respective conference championships – possibly up to the top five places in some of the power conferences. (Why? Cross country may well be the ONLY ‘team’ sport where the conference championship does not mean anything in terms of qualifying for the next level of competition. This can add some much needed excitement to our sport – athletes, coaches, administrators, and media.)
- b) Through an at-large selection based on a regional ranking system. Yes, this would mean we are still doing an at-large process, but it is merely to get into the *regional* championships and not the *national* championships. Teams who don’t receive an at-large bid to regionals won’t be nearly as disappointed as those teams who currently don’t receive an at-large bid to nationals. It brings the “at-large” selection process to the regional level. Under this new plan, teams who are overlooked for regionals would have no chance of qualifying for nationals anyway. At-large teams would be selected until a full field of 25 teams has been selected per region. This would mean that the regional rankings would take on added importance and might need to be restructured.

Change #2: The regional format would be quite different, yet easy to employ.

- a) The current 9 regions would be done away with...or consolidated into 4 regions. The top 8 finishing teams in each of the 4 regions would qualify for the national championship. There would be no at-large bid for nationals. A total of 32 teams would qualify for nationals – an increase of one team from the current system. (*I think the NCAA committee likes the even numbers – 4 regions, 8 qualifying teams, 32 total teams – as opposed to the initial proposal of 3 regions, 11 qualifiers, 33 teams.) I think the committee as the basketball mentality of 64, 32, 16, 8, 4, etc. and these numbers would work well for our sport.
- b) The 4 regions could be set up in the following manner:
East Region: Mideast and North Atlantic
South Region: South, Southeast, ½ of the South Central
Midwest Region: Great Lakes, Midwest, ½ of the South Central
West Region: Mountain, West
- c) Using part of the original super regional proposal from a few years ago, the 4 regions would be evenly seeded based on NCAA national rankings. It would be **essential** to have as much parity as is possible, so some teams would move from one region to another. (*When you look at the NCAA basketball brackets, several teams are playing outside of their region. The most important part of the concept is “parity within each region,” at least based on the national rankings.

- d) The reason for the breakdown of the regions in this fashion is that *most* teams can stay within close proximity of their school. However, it is essential that some of the teams that are ranked nationally will be moved outside of their region to create equally seeded regions. While the schools that are required to travel outside of their region will have additional expenses, I believe that each school's athletic administration will gladly pick up the additional cost (if not picked up by the NCAA.)

Why does this system work?

- a) All other sports end at the conference championships. For those who do not qualify for the regionals, the season is over. It is sometimes difficult for teams to decide whether or not to run in the regional championship. Some programs are criticized for not taking the entire team, deciding to take only 1-2 individuals. This way the decision is made for them.
- b) It adds drama and more meaning to the conference championships. Some schools who ordinarily aren't strong programs get rewarded by qualifying for a regional championship even if they have no chance of qualifying for nationals. We can all agree on the excitement that is generated by college basketball's conference championship games. You can argue that these schools are taking someone else's spot at regionals, but if a team is ranked 23rd in their region, and they do not get an at-large bid...then tough luck. We are talking about a team that is 23rd in the region, not 23rd in the nation!
- c) It takes out the at-large drama (and controversy) at the national level. If regionals are fairly evenly seeded, then the teams that have it on that day deserve to qualify for nationals. I think that is the great thing about our sport, and it gives everyone a fair shot at qualifying. We do not then leave it to lady luck about who beat who 5-6 weeks ago.
- d) The interest in our sport will increase – newspaper media, running websites, and high school and college runners will embrace this concept. Cinderella teams (but deserving teams) qualifying for nationals will add drama to our sport, just like Gonzaga did a few years back in basketball.
- e) Teams can now run a cross country schedule without having to go to Pre-Nationals to get points. Many former top invitational cross country meets will be revitalized.
- f) The bottom line is that it is not right to have to run well in September at the expense of running well in November. We can get back to coaching our teams to run well at the right time of the year.

How many teams from each conference would qualify for their respective regional championship?

My thoughts:

- a) Some of the power conferences – Big Ten, ACC, SEC, Pac 10, etc. COULD have up to 5 qualifying spots. If a team finishes 6th in their conference, they can still qualify through the at-large process.

- b) Some of the mid-major conferences could get 2-3 qualifying spots depending on the historical strength of their conference.
- c) Some of the weaker conferences would only get one qualifying spot.

How can an individual qualify for the regional championships?

My thoughts:

- a) Individual must finish in the top 15 in a power conference, top 10 in a mid-major, and top 5 in a weaker conference.

Issues related to how many teams and individuals from the conference meet would certainly be up for discussion, but I believe that a committee can make some well-advised recommendations. I am merely proposing a concept that will foundationally be a great improvement for our sport.