

Written Testimony of Douglas M. DePeppe

Before the House Committee on Education and Workforce, Subcommittee on Higher Education and Workforce Development

Hearing: "Who Gets the Scholarship? How the Global Shift in College Sports Affects Americans"

September 16, 2026

I. Introduction and Purpose of Testimony

Chairman Owens, Ranking Member Adams, and Members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify regarding athlete pathways into college sports and the growing internationalization of collegiate soccer.

My name is Douglas M. DePeppe. I am an attorney, a retired U.S. Army Judge Advocate, a former Division I college soccer player, and a volunteer youth boys' soccer coach of more than twenty years. I am also the father of three sons, and I assisted across a seven-year period to help them pursue their respective pathways from youth soccer through college soccer. I have also advised youth players, families, and soccer clubs concerning player pathways, including U.S. college soccer and international gap-year programs.

I am the author of a recent Sportico article and a linked self-published Medium.com study that examined international participation in college soccer. As a researcher, I conducted an analysis of every team competing in the 2025 men's soccer national championship tournaments across NCAA Divisions I, II, and III, the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA), and the National Junior College Athletic Association (NJCAA). My interest in this subject grew directly from watching, over those seven years, the pathway change under my own sons' feet — and under the feet of the boys I coached alongside them. Each of my sons ultimately found his way to college soccer, and I am grateful for that. But the path became noticeably more difficult to navigate with each passing year, and I began to notice the same growing concern among the coaches, parents, and players around me: that the pathway connecting American youth soccer to college soccer was changing in ways that were poorly understood and rarely measured. My research and this testimony focus on boys' and men's soccer specifically, because that is the pathway I have lived and coached for two decades, and the one in which I am best positioned to identify what has changed and why.

Before describing what I found, I want to be clear about what my testimony is, and is not, offered to show. My purpose is not to criticize international student-athletes, who come to our colleges seeking educational and athletic opportunities much as American students do. Nor do I suggest that international recruiting is the sole driver of the changes occurring in college sports. My purpose is to provide data demonstrating the scale of a transformation that many athletes, families, coaches, and administrators have observed, and to explain why understanding that transformation matters if Congress wishes to preserve meaningful pathways for future generations of American student-athletes.

Until recently, no one appeared to have comprehensively examined who was filling the rosters of championship-participating men's college soccer programs across the principal collegiate associations and divisions. To better understand what was occurring, I assembled and analyzed roster data from all 216 men's soccer teams that qualified for the 2025 national championship tournaments across NCAA, NAIA, and junior college soccer, encompassing 7,183 players. The purpose was straightforward: to determine whether the increasing presence of international players was anecdotal, isolated to a handful of elite programs, or part of a broader systemic pattern.

The results show that this pattern is neither isolated nor confined to any single division, association, or level of competition. International recruitment has become a significant and widespread presence throughout championship-level college soccer, cutting across every level of the collegiate system I examined. The findings raise important questions about athlete pathways, opportunity allocation, and the future relationship between American youth soccer and American college soccer.

It is also important to recognize that the internationalization of college soccer is occurring within a broader realignment of non-revenue college athletics. Related pressures include a shrinking number of roster positions relative to the athletes competing for them, tuition and enrollment economics that may influence roster construction, and a widening gap between what American families invest in athletic development and what the collegiate pathway may deliver in return.

These pressures can reinforce one another. Some institutions may construct rosters for purposes extending beyond immediate competitive need. American families may pay more and wait longer to reach collegiate sports. Recruited athletes may also lack reliable information about whether the offered opportunity will materialize as expected. Taken together, these conditions can produce a pathway that appears open on paper but functions differently in practice. My testimony addresses the roster data first because those data are the headline. I then describe the related factors only to the extent necessary to assess a durable response.

II. The Data: Internationalization of Championship-Level College Soccer

A. Research Methodology

This analysis covers all 216 teams that competed in the 2025 men's soccer national championship tournaments across NCAA Divisions I, II, and III, the NAIA, and NJCAA Divisions I and II, encompassing 7,183 players. Roster data were drawn from official team rosters published for the 2025 championship tournaments. Players were classified as international or domestic based on their listed hometown and prior playing background.

I want to be transparent about how this analysis was conducted. To manage a dataset of this size accurately, I used multiple AI platforms — Claude, Gemini, and ChatGPT — to compile and cross-check the roster data, supplemented by manual review. This approach allowed me to catch and correct errors that would be difficult to identify using a single method alone. I have a reasonably high level of confidence in the accuracy of this data, though I do not claim it is free of every error, and I welcome independent verification.

Three limitations bear directly on how this data should be read. First, this study covers men's collegiate soccer only; I have not conducted a parallel study of the women's game, and I would caution against extrapolating these findings to women's college soccer without independent data. Second, this is a single-season snapshot of the 2025 championship tournaments; it does not itself establish a multi-year trend, though I am familiar with prior years' championship data and can speak to that history if the Committee has questions. Third, NJCAA Division III was not included in this study.

B. Principal Findings

Across the 216 teams and 7,183 players studied, the aggregate composition varies depending on how NCAA Division III — the only division studied that does not offer athletic scholarships — is treated. Including Division III, the overall roster composition is 56.8 percent American players to 43.2 percent international players. Viewed separately from Division III, because it operates under a fundamentally different scholarship model from the other divisions and associations studied, the composition reverses: 55.0 percent international players to 45.0 percent American players. I present both figures because each is accurate and each tells the Committee something different — the first describes the full landscape of championship-level college soccer as currently structured, and the second describes what that landscape looks like among the programs competing for scholarship-based rosters.

Only two of the five divisions and associations studied — NCAA Division I and NCAA Division III — had majority-American rosters at the national championship level. Every other tier studied was majority international:

Division / Association	Teams	Players	U.S. Players	International Players
NCAA Division I	48	1,433	847 (59.1%)	586 (40.9%)
NCAA Division II	40	1,420	702 (49.5%)	718 (50.5%)
NCAA Division III	64	2,203	1,840 (83.5%)	363 (16.5%)
NAIA	40	1,369	401 (29.3%)	968 (70.7%)
NJCAA Divisions I & II (combined)	24	758	292 (38.5%)	466 (61.5%)
Total	216	7,183	4,082 (56.8%)	3,101 (43.2%)

C. Internationalization Is Systemic

The pattern is not confined to NCAA Division I. International players constituted 50.5 percent of NCAA Division II championship rosters, 70.7 percent of NAIA championship rosters, and 61.5 percent of the combined NJCAA Division I and II championship rosters. NCAA Division III differed sharply, with championship rosters that were 83.5 percent American.

The study also found wide variation among individual programs and successful teams. Predominantly domestic and heavily international teams both won championships or advanced deep into their tournaments. It is worth noting that a single year's championship outcome should not be read as evidence for or against the broader trend documented here. Championship results vary from year to

year for reasons specific to each program and season, independent of the overall composition of the tournament field. My study is limited to the 2025 championship data presented in this testimony and its appendix, and I do not offer year-over-year comparisons in this written testimony. But those data — the composition of the full 216-team field, not the identity of any single champion — are the relevant evidence for the question before this Committee.

Appendix A reproduces the detailed findings from my study published on Medium.com, "Crunching 2025 College Soccer Championships Player Demographic Data," including its detailed divisional and program-level findings, and including the highest - and lowest-international - percentage programs at each level. I incorporate that appendix as the fuller presentation of the underlying study.

D. Why This Matters

Each of the 7,183 roster positions examined in this study represents an individual athlete's pathway: an educational opportunity, in many cases a scholarship, and a competitive and developmental opportunity that shapes that athlete's options after college. Viewed in aggregate, these numbers describe not a series of isolated recruiting decisions but a system-wide allocation pattern across every level of American men's collegiate soccer — from the most prominent Division I programs to community colleges that receive virtually no public attention. Any policy response that considers only the most visible tier of this system will miss most of where the pattern actually occurs.

III. Responding to the Pending Legislation

In preparing for this testimony, committee staff advised me that, in addition to other pending legislation, Representative Walberg has introduced a bill, the Training and Education for American Members in University Sports and Athletics Act, or TEAM USA Act, which would generally limit international student-athletes to 20 percent of each varsity team's official roster. I offer the following in response.

I support the concept of a reasonable formula to help restore balance for American athletes who have lost access to college sport opportunities. I do not offer a view on the specific percentage; setting that number is a legislative judgment, and doing so myself would exceed what my data can responsibly support. I will note, however, that a 20 percent threshold is not without precedent: it can be placed in comparative context alongside restrictions and locally trained-player mechanisms used in several major European football markets.

For brief comparative context, several European countries and top leagues limit non-EU player registrations or use locally trained-player requirements. While the rules sometimes have exceptions, such as for players from former colonies and the like, rules affecting non-EU player registrations operate in La Liga in Spain, Serie A in Italy, and Ligue 1 in France, although their scope, exceptions, and operation differ. European football systems use several mechanisms to balance open recruitment and local development. Their legal and institutional settings differ materially from American higher education. I offer them only as evidence that leading football markets have recognized a policy interest in domestic development alongside international mobility, not as a direct regulatory template. A 20 percent cap for college soccer is not a material deviation from international player restriction caps found in many European football markets.

Beyond soccer, I believe Congress should also consider whether similar access and fairness concerns are affecting other non-revenue, Olympic-pathway sports.

IV. Beyond Soccer: Access and Fairness Across Non-Revenue Sports

My concern for athlete pathways did not begin with the international-recruiting question, and it does not end with soccer. In December 2024, before the *House v. NCAA* settlement was finalized, I co-authored an analysis for Sports Illustrated, with Attorney Brandon Leopoldus, examining the projected effect of the settlement's proposed roster caps on non-revenue college sports. That analysis estimated that as many as 25,000 Division I roster spots — spread across sports that produced roughly three-quarters of Team USA's roster and more than four-fifths of its medalists at the 2024 Paris Olympics — were at risk of elimination, predominantly in non-revenue, Olympic-pathway sports.

I raise this history for two reasons. First, it illustrates that the pressures reshaping college soccer are part of a larger pattern affecting non-revenue sports broadly, not a phenomenon unique to soccer or to international recruiting. Second, it reflects a distinction I believe is important for the Committee to keep in view throughout this hearing: there are at least three related but distinct pathway questions before Congress. Who receives the roster spots that exist is the question most directly raised by international recruiting. How many roster spots exist in the first place is the question raised by the *House v. NCAA* settlement and its roster caps. And what the quality and reliability of a roster opportunity actually is, once granted, is a third question — one I return to later in this testimony in the context of athlete information and protection.

V. What the Data Suggests About Athlete Pathways

A. The Traditional Pathway

For generations, the pathway for an American soccer player has followed a recognizable sequence: youth club soccer, often high school soccer next, and college soccer, with the possibility of continued play or coaching beyond graduation.

B. The Emerging Pathway

The data presented above suggest this pathway is changing. Increasing international competition for roster spots, growing demand from coaches for athletes who are competitively ready upon arrival, and the resulting pressure on domestic recruits to seek additional development time before college are reshaping what were once standard expectations for an American player and family. In many cases, graduating high school players are pursuing a gap year abroad, incurring substantial costs, in order to physically develop to better compete against older college players, and to improve their talent level for college soccer.

C. The Policy Question

These findings raise a question that is squarely within this Committee's jurisdiction: who is the American collegiate soccer system intended to develop, and how should the opportunities it offers be balanced between American and international athletes?

VI. Broader Policy Questions: Athlete Protection and Transparency

A. Lessons from *House v. NCAA* and the Sports Illustrated Analysis

My perspective on today's student-athlete experience is informed not only by coaching and research, but also by my representation of NCAA athletes objecting to roster limits in the *House v. NCAA* litigation. I was subsequently appointed by Chief Judge Claudia Wilken to participate in the court-ordered final settlement mediation, where I advocated on behalf of affected athletes and supported consideration of athlete-protection mechanisms, including my recommendation for an ombuds program to protect athlete rights and to address unfairness in the modern college sport landscape.

That experience, together with the roster-cap analysis I co-authored in December 2024, showed me directly how information and power imbalances affect athletes during periods of roster transition — imbalances that persist regardless of an athlete's nationality, and regardless of how Congress ultimately resolves the international-participation question.

B. Voices from Continued Representation

Since the final settlement in *House v. NCAA*, I have continued to represent college athletes navigating its aftermath. These athletes have competed in soccer, golf, swimming, tennis, and track and field. Nearly all are Division I athletes; several hold the equivalent of four-star national recruiting rankings and hold other impressive accolades and championship accomplishments in their respective sports, and several presently compete for Power Four Conference sport programs. Across sports and programs, I have heard a common refrain from them, centered on a single word: fairness. The examples below are drawn from separate athlete experiences, presented without identifying details. These experiences raise questions that extend beyond playing time or disappointment with a coach's competitive decisions.

While maintaining client confidences and privacy, I present now the voices of elite college athletes with their common questions, compiled and paraphrased:

Is it fair for a college to market a varsity opportunity to an American athlete without disclosing that the recruited class is already highly concentrated with older, professionally-groomed international players, or that the full roster is so oversized that the entire team cannot even be accommodated in its own locker room?

Is it fair to accept that athlete's commitment and tuition payment without disclosing that the program has recruited more players than it can realistically train, develop, take to competitions, or play at the varsity level?

Is it fair for the athlete to discover those material facts only after enrolling, when transferring or withdrawing may mean interrupted education, lost development, additional expense, and the loss of a year within the athlete's eligibility period?

And if the athlete's enrollment helps subsidize the athletic program or institution, is it fair for the financial benefit to flow to the college while the athlete and family bear the consequences, including a diminished athletic opportunity and substantial student-loan debt?

These are not hypothetical concerns. They come from highly recruited athletes who did what was asked of them — earned recognition, received offers, and signed agreements — and still found that the opportunity they were recruited for differed materially from the opportunity they received. Additionally, these questions are not objections to international student-athletes, nor do they ask Congress to guarantee playing time or second-guess legitimate coaching decisions. They concern the institutional practices surrounding recruitment. This is the human reality behind the economics and pressures that prevail in college sports today. When international concentration and oversized rosters materially narrow the opportunities realistically available to American athletes, colleges should disclose those conditions before accepting an athlete's commitment, tuition payment, and use of collegiate eligibility.

These concerns raise more than questions of abstract fairness. As an attorney who addressed unfair and deceptive practices during the House v. NCAA fairness hearing, I question whether a college should be permitted to market and financially benefit from a varsity opportunity while withholding material information about roster size, international concentration, overflow roster practices, and the realistic structure of the marketed (i.e., recruited) opportunity. Congress should examine whether existing laws adequately reach such conduct or whether recruited college athletes require more specific disclosure and protection.

C. Collegiate Athletics: A Holistic View

This hearing is not solely focused on NCAA Division I sports. Intercollegiate athletics includes all levels of collegiate sport. As my data illustrates, the international athlete participation question affects all levels. But additionally, as my clients' concerns illustrate, there are also other issues with intercollegiate athletics that warrant attention from Congress.

VII. Problems a Participation Cap Alone May Not Solve

A nationality-based participation cap regulates the allocation of existing roster positions. It does not, by itself:

- Prevent institutions from eliminating non-revenue sports programs
- Limit the practice of recruiting athletes for reasons unrelated to sport and which go undisclosed
- Require disclosure of recruited class size
- Afford student-athletes with governance mechanisms to redress violations of specified athlete rights

A. Over-Recruiting and Roster Inflation

Several incentives may contribute to recruiting more athletes than a roster can realistically place on the field. A larger roster provides competitive depth and insurance against injury and transfer-portal attrition. At tuition-dependent institutions, each additional recruited athlete — especially for non-scholarship athletes — also represents additional net tuition revenue. And in the post-NIL, post-House settlement environment, many non-revenue programs face new budget pressure as institutional resources shift toward revenue-sharing obligations in football and basketball, which can push coaches toward recruiting larger classes to sustain program visibility and results on a constrained budget.

The consequence is a widening gap between the number of athletes recruited and the number who receive meaningful playing time or developmental attention. This dynamic affects domestic and international athletes alike, and it operates independently of any nationality-based roster rule Congress might adopt.

B. Athlete Debt and Financial Exposure

For nonrevenue sports, recruited athletes often pay their way to school, as well as receive student loans. My championship dataset includes college soccer rosters exceeding 40 or 50 players. Roster size alone does not prove improper over-recruiting, but it warrants inquiry into whether recruited athletes receive meaningful competitive and developmental opportunities. Materially incomplete or misleading recruiting information can expose athletes and families to educational, financial, and eligibility consequences that are difficult to reverse after enrollment. For the athlete, in addition to a lost year of athletic eligibility, significant student debt can accrue without receiving any athletic benefits from paying tuition at the school.

VIII. Policy Considerations

A. Ombudsman and Athlete-Advocacy Concepts

Congress need not reproduce Olympic governance to draw from an existing American framework. The Team USA Athlete Ombuds provides independent, confidential, and impartial assistance; supports fact-finding, facilitated communication, and mediation; and promotes fair, transparent, timely, and equitably administered processes. The reference points for college athletics are the underlying principles: independence, confidentiality, impartiality, retaliation protection, and the ability to identify recurring concerns and recommend systemic improvements. I offer that model as a reference for congressional consideration, not as a complete proposal or the centerpiece of this testimony.

The Aspen Institute's Children's Bill of Rights in Sports supplies a related youth-sport reference, emphasizing access, development, athlete voice, equal opportunity, dignity, and safe environments. Together, these models suggest a limited collegiate framework centered on access, transparency, independent assistance, fair process, development, and dignity. Congress could use those principles to evaluate an ombudsman pilot or a focused college-athlete bill of rights.

These principles would require adaptation to the collegiate setting. They should not be understood to guarantee selection, playing time, or a particular competitive role. Rather, they would support

accurate information, independent guidance, fair administration of established rules, and protection against retaliation for raising concerns.

B. International Participation and Domestic Pathways

Consistent with Section III, I support the concept of a reasonable formula to restore balance for American athletes, without endorsing a specific percentage. I encourage the Committee to consider any such formula alongside the additional measures below, since a nationality-based rule addresses only one of the three pathway questions this testimony has described.

C. Recruiting and Roster Transparency

I recommend that Congress consider requiring institutions to disclose the following to a recruited athlete and their family before a commitment is signed:

- The program's historical roster size and year-over-year attrition rate for the preceding three seasons
- The number of fully funded, partially funded, and unfunded roster positions on the team
- A de-identified and aggregated scholarship profile for the preceding three seasons that depicts the ratio of scholarships between international and US student-athletes
- Any additional material disclosures Congress determines necessary after consultation with athletes, institutions, associations, and recruiting experts

A standardized, plain-language disclosure form — comparable to consumer financial disclosure requirements in other contexts — would allow families to compare offers on a consistent basis and make an informed decision before committing to a program.

D. Athlete Protection Mechanisms

I recommend that Congress consider directing or funding a pilot athlete-ombudsman program, modeled on the principles of the Team USA Athlete Ombuds described above, at a defined set of institutions or conferences. Such a pilot should be structured so that the ombudsman:

- Operates independently of the athletic department's own reporting lines, perhaps operating at the conference level
- Receives inquiries and complaints on a confidential basis
- Has authority to recommend redress for any retaliation related to a complaint to the ombudsman
- Is authorized to identify systemic patterns across multiple complaints and report aggregate findings to institutional leadership and, where appropriate, to NCAA or NAIA governance bodies

I would recommend that Congress ask the NCAA, NAIA, and affected institutions to help define the pilot's scope and funding mechanism as a next step, rather than legislating a fully specified program at this stage.

IX. Conclusion

The central question before this Committee is not whether international athletes should participate in American college sports. The question is whether the pathway from American youth soccer to college soccer — and, more broadly, from American youth sports to collegiate opportunity across non-revenue programs — remains meaningful, accessible, and sustainable for future generations of American athletes.

Understanding the scale of internationalization is a necessary first step toward answering that question, but it is not the last step. My own path through this sport — as a player, as a coach, and as a father who watched three sons navigate a pathway that grew more difficult with each passing year — is what brought me to this data. I hope it can help bring the Committee to a more complete understanding of what is at stake, and of what Congress can do about it.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I am happy to answer the Committee's questions.

Appendix A

CRUNCHING 2025 COLLEGE SOCCER CHAMPIONSHIPS PLAYER DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

Douglas DePeppe | Originally published December 21, 2025 on Medium

Purpose and Background

What follows is an AI-supported analysis of the roster make-up for the men's college soccer teams that participated in their respective 2025 national championship playoffs for NCAA Divisions I, II, and III, the NAIA, and NJCAA Divisions I and II. The objective is to enumerate and compare the U.S. and international player make-up of college soccer. The original analysis was made available under a Creative Commons Attribution license.

The project grew from my life-long soccer interest; twenty years of youth coaching and player-pathway mentoring; sports-law work involving FIFA player-status and transfer rules and European work-permit requirements; the October 2025 U.S. Soccer and Next Gen College Soccer Committee white paper; and the 2026 World Cup. It also followed Representative Tim Walberg's December 16, 2025 remarks concerning international student-athlete recruiting and lost American scholarship or participation opportunities.

Summary of Overall Findings

NCAA Division III had the highest concentration of U.S. players, at 83.5 percent. Across all levels studied, the roster population was approximately 56.8 percent U.S. and 43.2 percent international. Excluding Division III, the remaining championship-roster population was approximately 55.0 percent international and 45.0 percent U.S. players. International players constituted a majority in NCAA Division II, the NAIA, and NJCAA Divisions I and II.

Division / Association	Teams	Players	U.S.	International
NCAA Division I	48	1,433	847 (59.1%)	586 (40.9%)
NCAA Division II	40	1,420	702 (49.5%)	718 (50.5%)
NCAA Division III	64	2,203	1,840 (83.5%)	363 (16.5%)
NAIA	40	1,369	401 (29.3%)	968 (70.7%)
NJCAA I & II	24	758	292 (38.5%)	466 (61.5%)
Total	216	7,183	4,082 (56.8%)	3,101 (43.2%)

NCAA Division I

48 teams; 1,433 players; 59.1% U.S.; 40.9% international. The 2025 College Cup was 84% U.S. National Champion Washington listed one international player and nineteen players from Washington State.

Highest: Marshall 93.1%; UCF 77.8%; Syracuse 76.0%; Hofstra 65.6%; Kansas City 65.5%.

Lowest: Princeton 3.4%; Washington 3.4%; Notre Dame 7.1%; Stanford 7.4%; Denver 9.4%.

NCAA Division II

40 teams; 1,420 players; 49.5% U.S.; 50.5% international; average roster 35.5. National Champion Midwestern State listed nine international players, below the tournament average.

Highest: Palm Beach Atlantic 79.3%; Wilmington (DE) 76.7%; Bridgeport 75.0%; Mississippi College 70.0%; Fort Hays State 68.8%.

Lowest: Seattle Pacific 0%; CSUSB 5.7%; Bentley 13.5%; Rockhurst 17.9%; UCCS 21.2%.

NCAA Division III

64 teams; 2,203 players; 83.5% U.S.; 16.5% international; average roster 34.4. National Champion Tufts listed no international players.

Highest: NC Wesleyan 90.9%; Lyon College 60.8%; Luther 59.5%; Wisconsin-Superior 57.1%; Penn State Harrisburg 27.3%.

Lowest: Tufts, Christopher Newport, Scranton, Catholic, and Stevens each 0%.

NAIA

40 teams; 1,369 players; 29.3% U.S.; 70.7% international; average roster 34.2. National Champion Cumberlands listed 32 international players; WVU Tech listed 40 on a 49-player roster.

Highest: William Penn 100%; Keiser 96.9%; Dalton State 96.8%; Bethel 94.3%; Campbellsville 91.4%.

Lowest: Warner Pacific 1.8%; Indiana East 11.5%; Carroll 39.0%; Concordia 42.9%; Baker 46.0%.

NJCAA Divisions I and II

24 teams; 758 players; 38.5% U.S.; 61.5% international; average roster 31.6. Reported champions illustrated opposite models: Indian Hills fully international (100%) and Phoenix College 96.7% U.S.

Highest: Indian Hills 100%; Iowa Lakes 90.0%; Murray State College 89.3%; Northeast CC 85.7%; St. Clair County CC 84.6%.

Lowest: Phoenix College 3.3%; Mississippi Gulf Coast CC 16.0%; Pima CC 17.1%; Mohave College 18.2%; Pearl River CC 20.0%.

Study Limitations and Notes

A single season's champion should not be treated as proof for or against a broader recruiting pattern. The relevant evidence is the composition of the full 216-team championship field and the differences among levels and programs. The study covers men's soccer only, is a 2025 championship snapshot, excludes NJCAA Division III, and does not measure age, academy tenure, prior senior competition, scholarship value, playing time, retention, or causation.