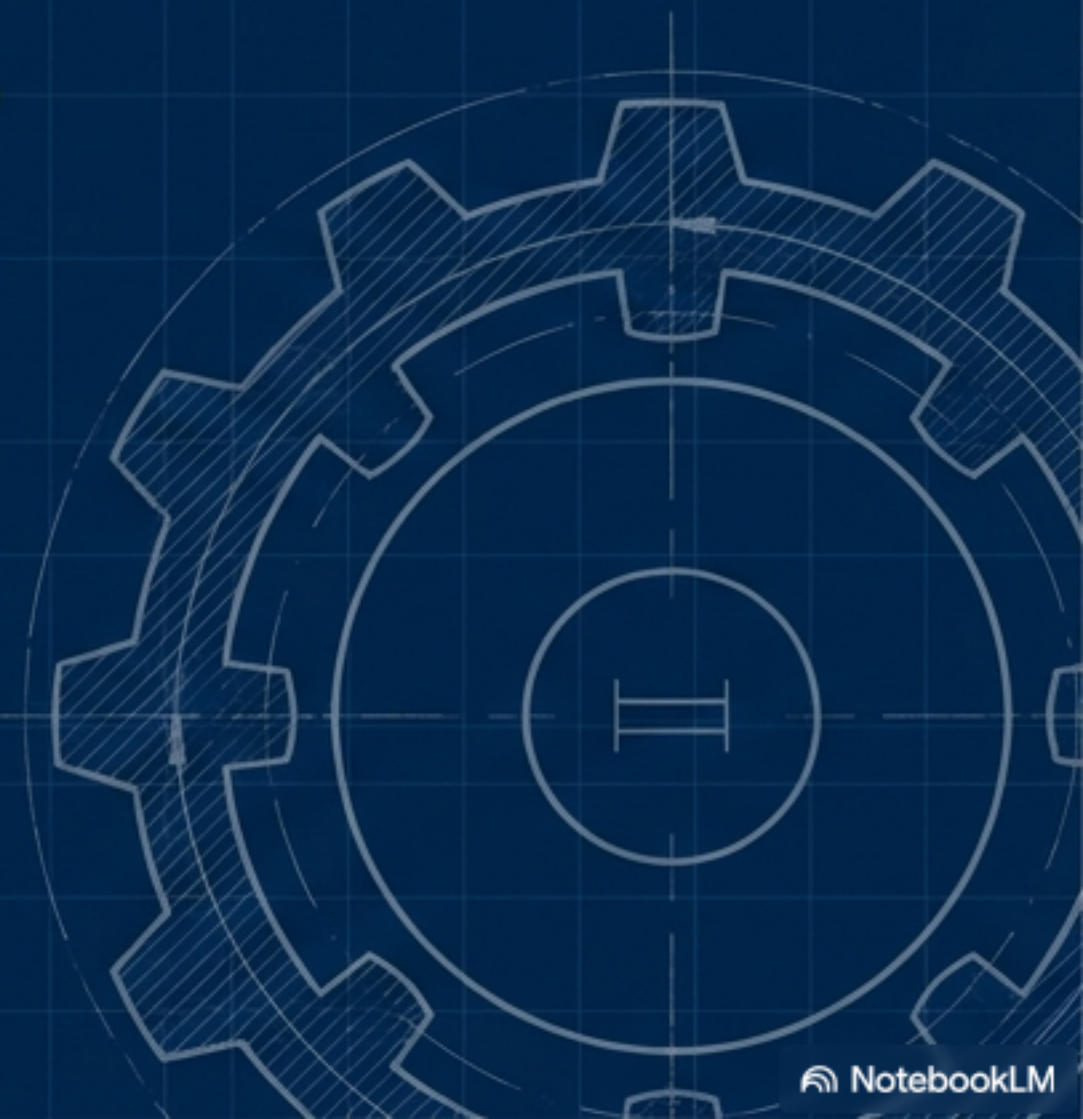
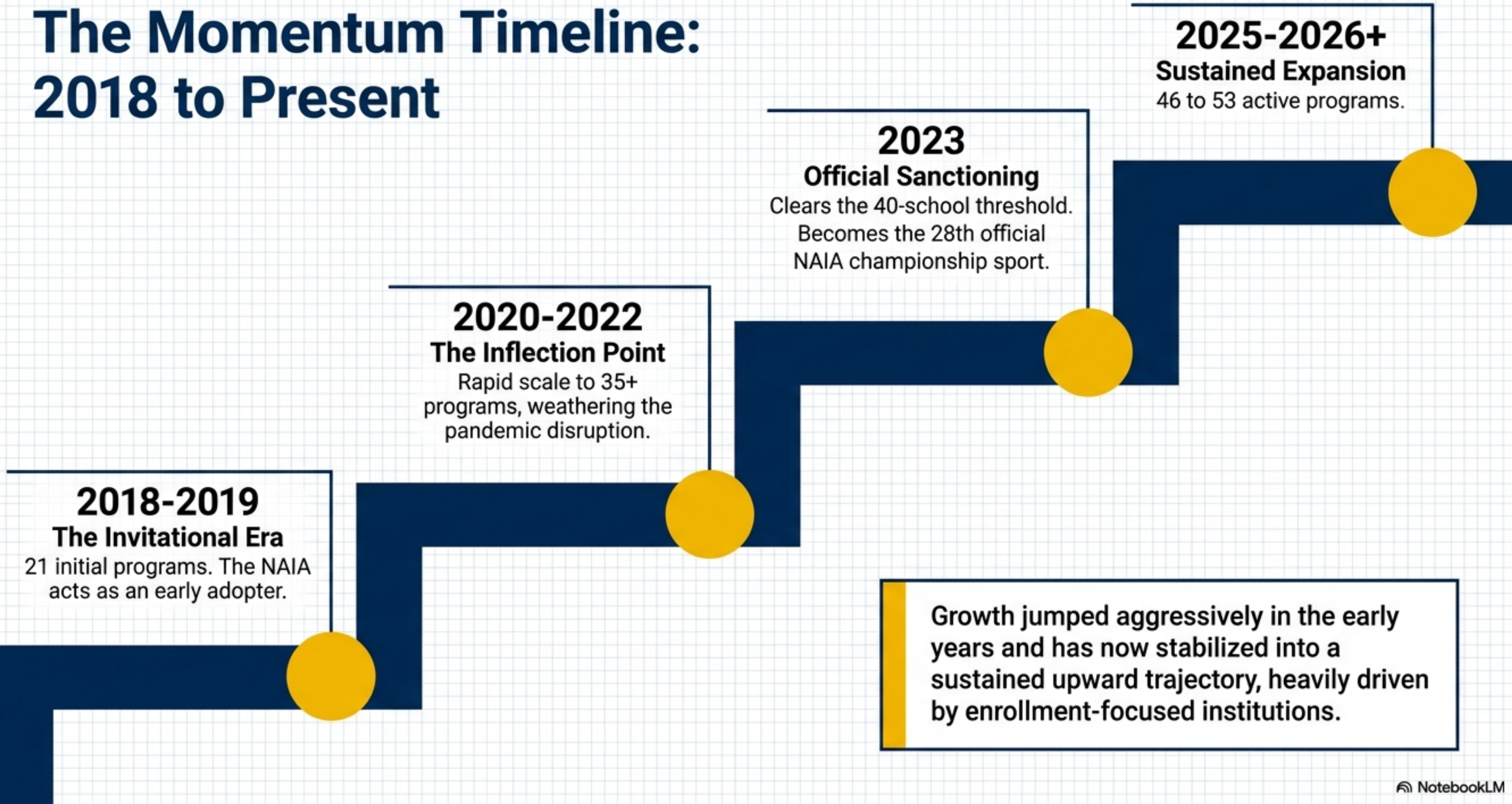


The State of NAIA Women's Wrestling

A Strategic Diagnostic of Growth,
Governance, and Program Mechanics



The Momentum Timeline: 2018 to Present



Current Footprint & Strategic Additions (2026-27)

46-53

Current Sponsoring Institutions

New Additions (2026-2027)



Defiance College (OH) & Andrew College (GA)

Geographic expansion into new regional footprints.



Bellevue University (NE)

Joining the highly competitive Heart of America Athletic Conference.



Wilberforce University (OH)

Pioneering status: Set to become the only NAIA HBCU to sponsor women's wrestling.

While the exact live count fluctuates as affiliate members finalize their rosters, the NAIA comfortably maintains well over the 40-program threshold required for championship status.

The Collegiate Ecosystem Matrix

Governing Body	Total Programs	Scholarship Model	Roster Caps	Recruiting Rules
NAIA	46-53 Programs (1 Division)	Equivalency Model (Max 10)	No Roster Cap	Open communication, no dead periods.
NCAA	115+ Programs (transitioning)	D1/D2 Athletic Aid; D3 Academic Only	D1 features a strict 30-athlete limit	Rigid recruiting calendars.
NJCAA	~14-30 Programs	Varies by state (Up to 16-20 scholarships)	Varies	Two-year developmental pathway.
Club (NCWA)	~69-100+ Clubs	No athletic funding	No official cap	Informal / Non- governed.

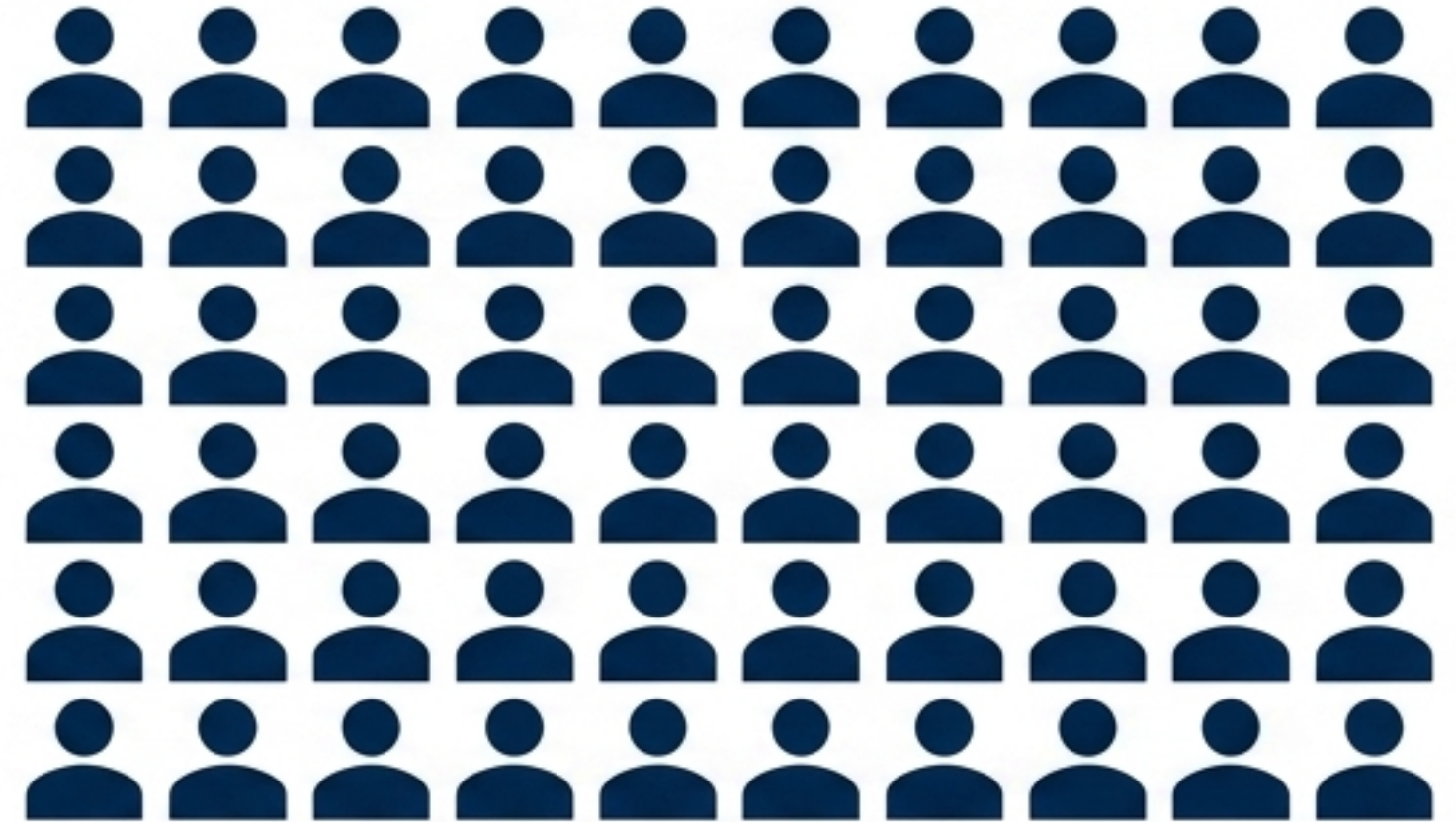
Roster Mechanics: The Myth vs. The Reality

The Myth



Assumption: Because the NAIA limits teams to 10 full scholarships, or because teams only send 10-12 athletes to Nationals, regular-season rosters are capped at a dozen athletes.

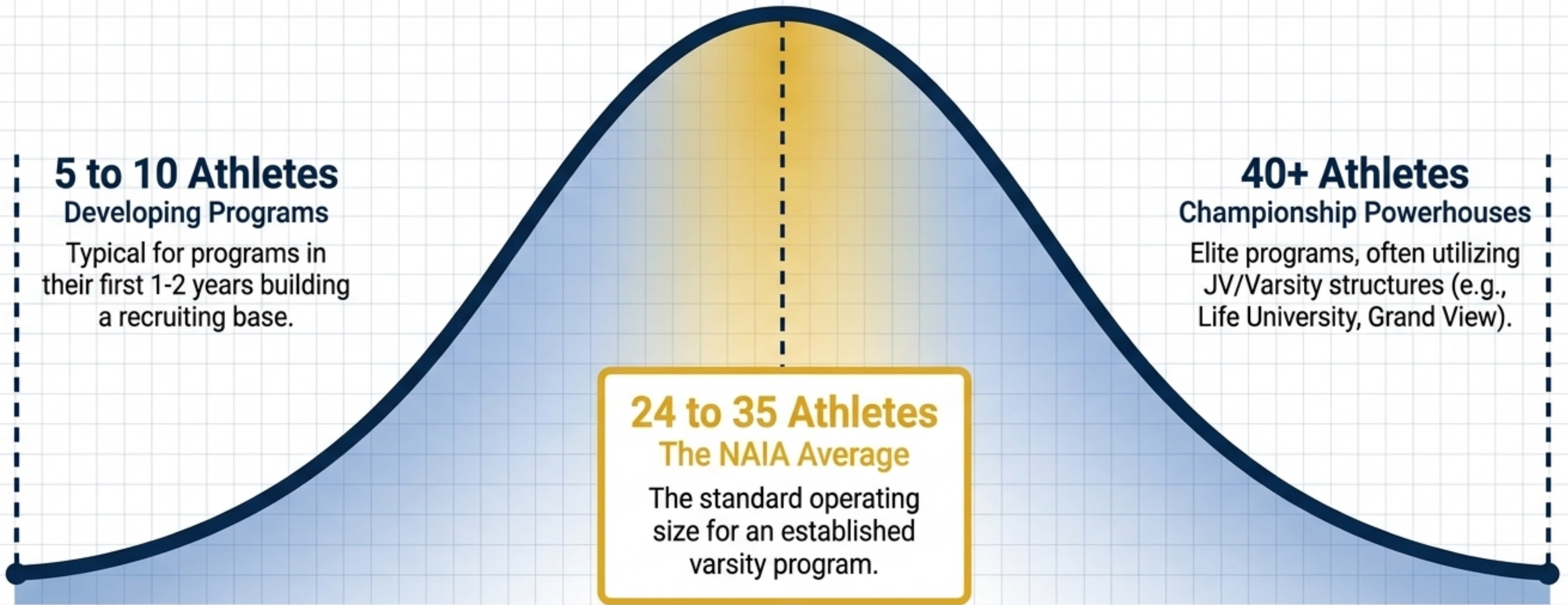
The Reality



Fact: There is **NO regular-season roster cap** in the NAIA.

Established, fully funded programs regularly carry 35–45+ athletes (including Varsity and JV tiers) to ensure depth, quality practice partners, and injury coverage. Powerhouses like Campbellsville and Indiana Tech actively maintain rosters of 40 or more.

The Roster Distribution Curve



Because roster limits are non-existent, a program's size is dictated entirely by institutional funding, recruiting success, and developmental strategy rather than NAIA governance.

The “Nationals Funnel” Architecture

The Program Footprint (30–45+ Athletes)

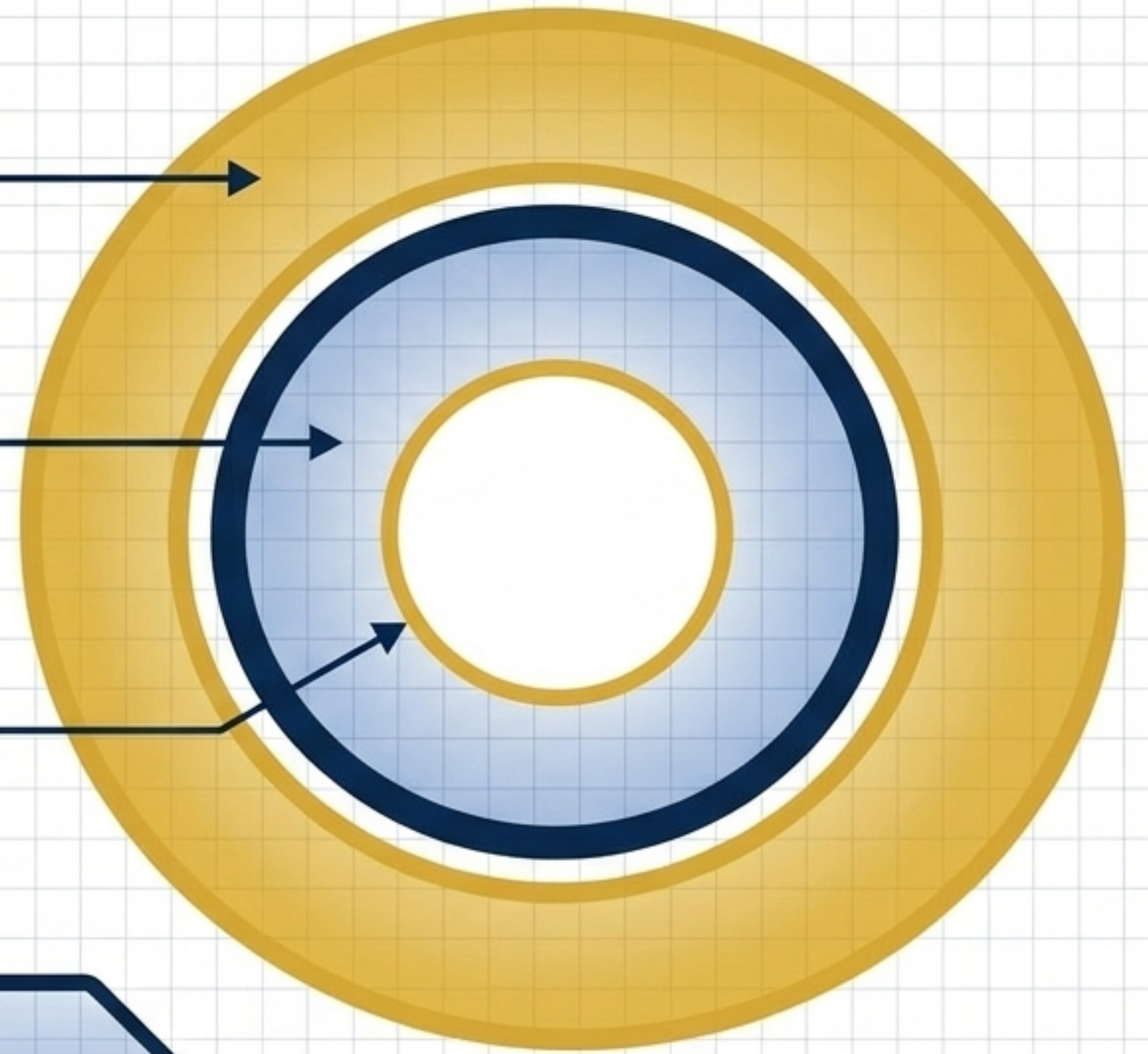
Represents the uncapped regular-season roster.

Weight Class Competition

The internal battle for the 10 standardized weight classes.

The Championship Limit (Max 12 Qualifiers)

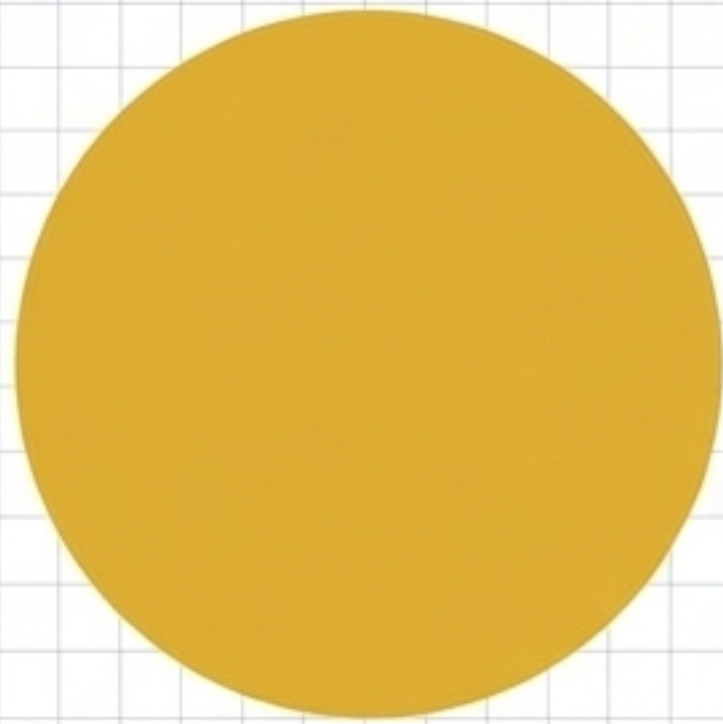
A program can certify a maximum of 12 wrestlers for the postseason, with a cap of exactly 2 athletes per weight class.



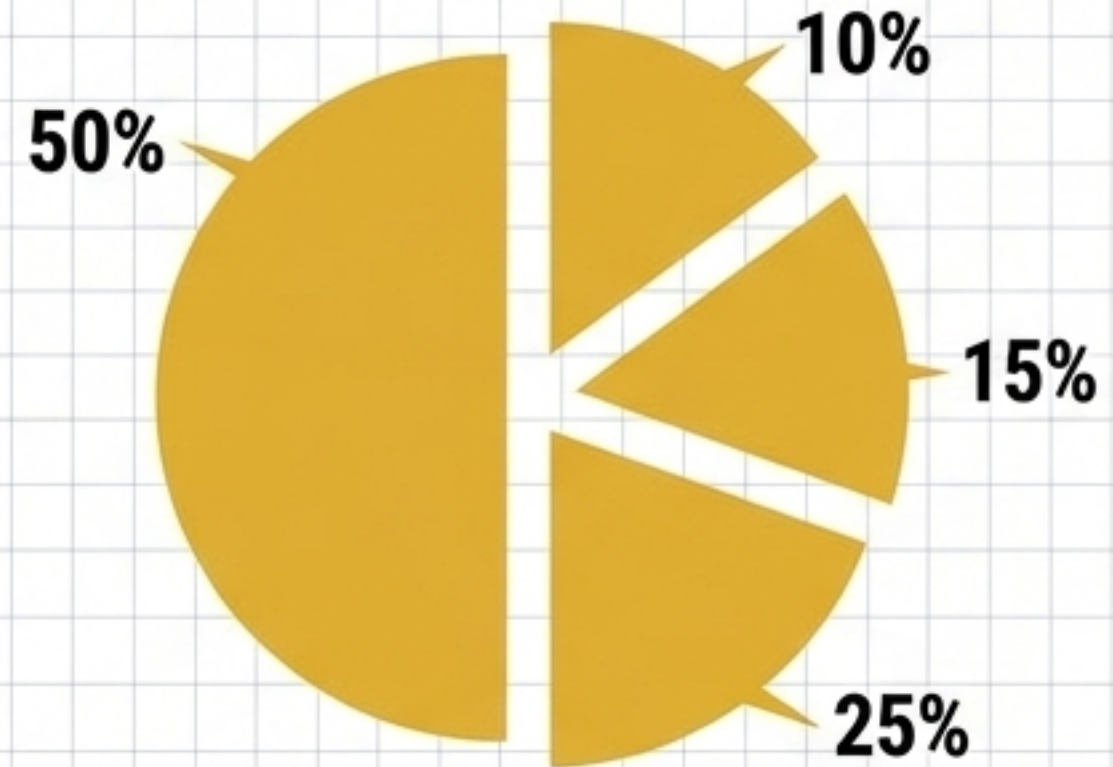
While regular-season rosters are unlimited, the NAIA enforces a **strict limit for the National Championship**, filtering a massive program footprint into a hyper-elite 12-woman postseason squad.

Financial Mechanics: The Scholarship Slicer

The NAIA does not use a headcount model. Instead, it operates on an Equivalency Model.



1 Full Athletic Scholarship



Fractured Equivalency Awards

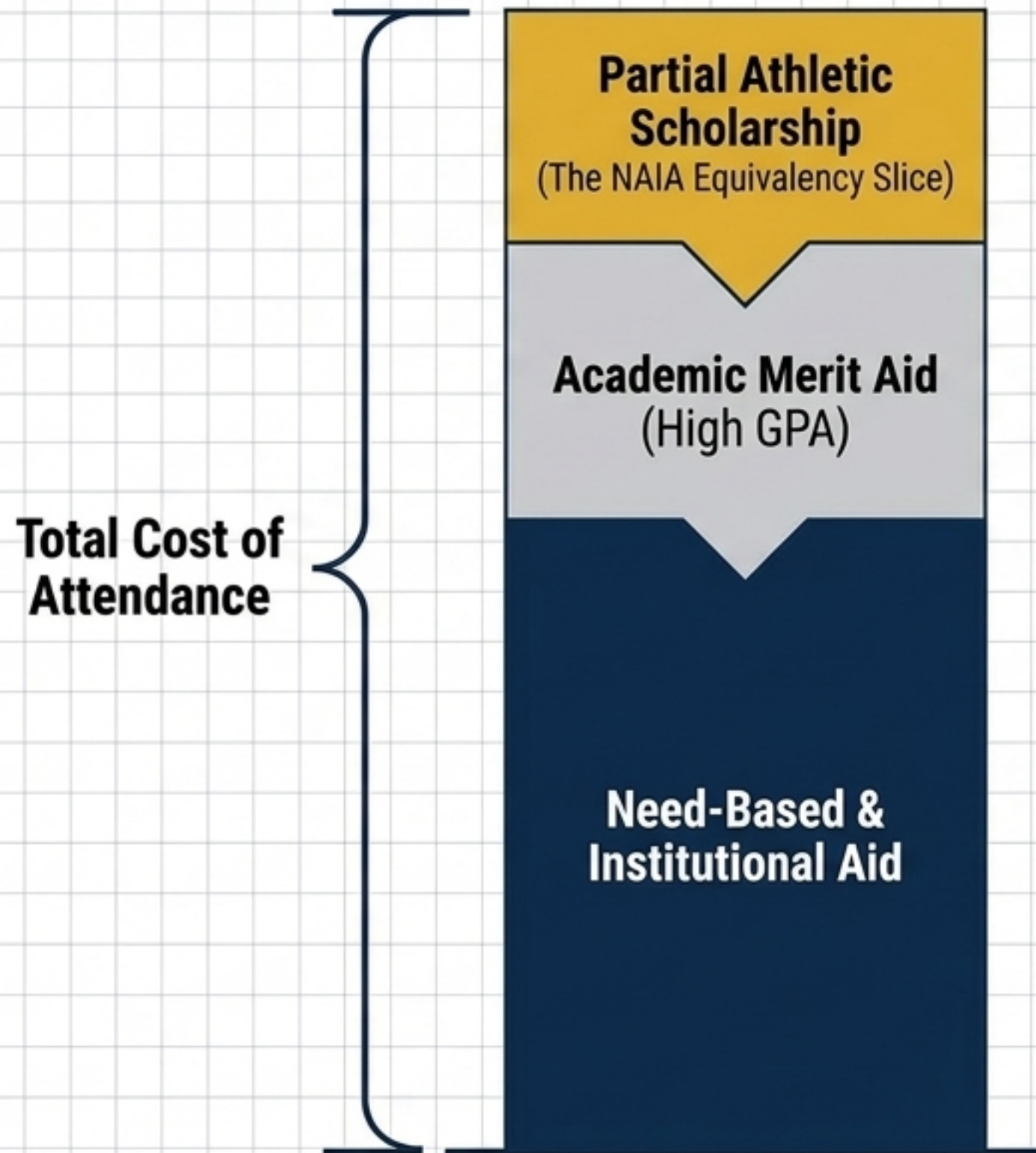
The Cap

Each team is allotted a maximum of 10 full athletic scholarships.

The Distribution

Coaches rarely award full rides. A budget of 10 equivalencies is typically fractured into 20 to 35 partial scholarships, creating competitive opportunities for a massive roster.

Funding the Athlete: The Stacking Strategy



A major structural advantage of the NAIA is the **unrestricted ability to "stack" financial aid.**

By combining a partial athletic award with academic grants and institutional need-based aid, coaches can build highly competitive financial packages for a wider group of athletes without exhausting their 10-scholarship athletic cap.

Synthesis: The NAIA Growth Engine



**Unlimited
Roster Capacity**



**Stackable, Partial
Equivalency Aid**



**Economical Scale for
Enrollment-Driven
Institutions**

The NAIA's explosive growth in women's wrestling wasn't an accident—it was a byproduct of structural design. Because the NAIA allows **unlimited rosters** and flexible, stacked partial scholarships, smaller institutions can rapidly launch and **scale 40-person rosters economically**. The governing structure perfectly aligns with the institutional business model.

The Blueprint for a Pioneer



The Early Adopter Advantage

By sanctioning the sport early and establishing the 28th official championship in 2022, the NAIA cemented its legacy as a foundational pillar of women's collegiate wrestling.



Unmatched Flexibility

The combination of open recruiting, single-tier governance, and stacked equivalency aid provides unparalleled roster-building flexibility for coaches.



Sustained Trajectory

With roughly 50 programs and highly strategic additions like Wilberforce University entering the fray, the NAIA remains an accessible, highly competitive, and economically viable destination for the modern student-athlete.