



Katie Boldvich

**Landmark Conference
Commissioner**

The Case for the Paywall

In July 2023 the Landmark Conference became the first NCAA Division III conference to sign a multimedia agreement with sports streaming service FloSports. FloSports is no stranger to the NCAA streaming space with clients including the BIG EAST, CAA, Gulf South and more.

The news was met mostly with support, with a handful of individuals condemning the conference for 'taking the money.' This criticism irked me. Why is it acceptable for our counterparts at Division I and II, NAIA, NJCAA and even high schools to monetize their webstreams, but Division III is expected to operate under a different set of rules? Are our athletes as valuable and entertaining as those other entities? We say yes.

Our athletics departments are consistently challenged to think outside the box when it comes to fundraising. Our student-athletes in Division III have the same expectations of being collegiate athletes as their compatriots participating in Division I and Division II. Our teams fundraise for foreign tours and spring trips, team stores are opened each summer for players and families to stock up on branded gear, and many of our schools and conferences charge admission to watch contests in person. So I wonder, why is paying a subscription fee for webstreams the line we have drawn in the sand?

The broadcasts in Division III are constantly improving. Our content looks much different than 15 years ago, and those improvements have come at a cost. The problem is those costs have been inherited by our schools and our overworked communications departments. Division III has always found a way to do more with less – but I cannot think of anyone that does this more than our athletics communicators.

The deal with FloSports gave an opportunity for the Landmark to provide these departments with direct funding to support a variety of enhancements. Ask any athletics director in

Division III which department is the most overlooked when it comes to budget increases. The vast majority will say it's their athletics communications office. It's difficult for our institutions to consistently fundraise and sell advertisements for webstreams. With this partnership, our schools are now guaranteed funding for the next five years to enhance their storytelling ability with each institution deciding how best to utilize these funds. This financing on its own is exciting, but this partnership will also offer additional opportunities for national branding and conference-wide initiatives.

As an outsider, it is easy to criticize an organization for increasing fees or charging for something in the past that has been free. However, I would argue our product was never free, those working to make that product happen were not previously supported financially, and now they will be.

Every school, every conference in Division III is looking at opportunities for outside revenues. I'd encourage everyone not to hold back just because something hasn't been done before. There is value in all we do, and oftentimes in places where others will tell you it does not exist.



Ryan Ivey

**Stephen F. Austin
State University
Director of Athletics
FCS ADA President**

It's the most wonderful time of the year (at least in my opinion)! I always enjoy this time as we wind down summer and begin focusing on a new and exciting academic year; a year that is full of optimism, hope, plans of success and implementation of summer planning. The activities, contests, and comradery of our student-athletes and staff bring about great energy and excitement to all of our campuses. I wish all of you the best of luck, except, of course, if and when you play the Lumberjacks!

I am also looking forward to serving as President of FCS ADA this upcoming year. I am humbled and honored to have the opportunity to serve the membership and play a small part in continuing to position the subdivision as an integral spoke in the wheel of the intercollegiate athletics enterprise. I continue to be bullish on the fact that our institutions, departments and student-athletes matter a great deal to the current Division I model and are relevant to the identity of Division I. History provides a guide that will continue to light our future pathway of talented, successful student-athletes, coaches and staff within our Association.

Our institutions have been and will continue to be a strong and successful training ground of the very best leaders in college athletics. This is evident by the resiliency and courage displayed by our administrators, coaches and staff that continue to strive to do the right thing for and by our student-athletes. We have some phenomenal, servant-oriented individuals within our institutions that utilize the vehicle of college athletics to make a difference in the lives of young people. To all of those individuals, I say, THANK YOU! Your work is so appreciated and truly makes a difference.

As I close this note, I would be remiss if I didn't acknowledge the work of Tom Michael for his leadership as the 2022-23 FCS ADA President. Tom continued the good work that came from our collaboration through the Transformation Committee recommendations, and continued to position our subdivision in a positive light. I am thankful for the opportunity to follow in his footsteps, and look forward to growing our collaboration with DI-AAA ADA. Our two Associations are very similar in scope, and we certainly are stronger together, as we represent 220 institutions in 22 multi-sport conferences, sponsoring at least 14 varsity sports, and thousands of student-athletes across hundreds of sport programs.

While we continue to experience unprecedented change in intercollegiate athletics, I take comfort in knowing that we have a bright future ahead with the work and support of our colleagues. I look forward to serving with you as we continue to make a difference!