D-II: Finding Its Own Niche—
A Summary from College Athletics Clips

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The following is an excerpt on NCAA Division II programs assimilated by Nick Infante of College Athletics Clips (www.collegeathleticsclips.com), a publication that sifts through numerous publications and articles about intercollegiate athletics to provide distilled executive summaries of college athletics news and issues with value-added commentary.

-Editor

After losing about 50 institutions to D1 and D3 since the mid-1980s, the NCAA’s middle division is again finding its footing.

In the NCAA hierarchy, there’s D1, the lucrative, high-profile envy of schools across the country, D3, the niche for well-known liberal arts colleges attracted to its no-scholarship policies, and D2, the...uh...well, D2. Or, in ClipsSpeak: Papa Bear, Baby Bear, Mama Bear.

Since the mid-1980s, the NCAA’s middle division has lost about 50 member institutions, many seeking the glory and profit of D1, and others the best of both worlds in D3. But times are changing.

In 2007, division leaders adopted a “strategic positioning” plan that included 12 reasons to believe in D2 (listed below). Since then, D2 has attracted 13 new institutions and hasn’t lost any, and in a wide-scale advertising campaign, its leaders are boasting a new identity that will carry it through rough economic waters.

“We struggled with our identity for years. Remember those old Avis commercials that said, ‘It’s OK to be number two?’ There’s a little bit of that going on in D2,” said Mike Racy, the NCAA’s VP for D2. “We needed to tell what sets us apart. Students said, ‘I’m not here because I didn’t live up the academic standards of a D1 institution, or for me personally, I’m not here because I couldn’t get a job with D1. We all chose D2 for a reason.’

According to the 2006 NCAA expense reports, it is $7.2 million cheaper to run a D2 program than a former D1-AA program. Also, D1 institutions are required to sponsor more sports and give out more scholarships, often resulting in increased student fees. D2 officials say that the division’s partial scholarship model is more feasible in these troubling economic times than D1’s full scholarship model.

“Success at the local level through community connections that foster greater support for all campus activities, including athletics, will benefit D2 members and, in turn, help enhance the identity for the division,” reads an NCAA document spelling out the benefits of D2.

“The ultimate goal should be to establish a ‘connection’ between the community and the school in a manner that involves intercollegiate athletics.”
12 reasons to believe in D2

1. **graduation rate.** D2 student-athlete graduation rate is consistently 10-15 percentage pts higher than the total student body.

2. **class time.** D2’s regionalization philosophy rewards the scheduling of local or regional opponents in the regular season, resulting in limited missed class time for student-athletes.

3. **athletics scholarships.** Many D2 student-athletes receive athletics scholarships and other forms of financial aid to pay for school.

4. **Personal attention.** Student-athletes receive a quality education at D2 that often feature an exceptional teacher-to-student ratio.

5. **additional assistance.** The Degree-Completion Scholarship Program provides deserving D2 student-athletes who have exhausted their collegiate eligibility with financial assistance.

6. **national championships opportunities.** D2 features unparalleled opportunity for student-athletes to advance to national championship competition as a result of the division’s generous championship access ratios.

7. **community partnerships.** D2 has initiated national community partnerships with the Make-A-Wish Foundation and Habitat for Humanity.

8. **unique fiscal model.** D2 offers a unique fiscal model for intercollegiate athletics that redefines the institutional value for sponsoring sports and offering athletics scholarships.

9. **innovative solutions.** D2 encourages innovative policy and program decisions unique to the NCAA, such as the development of D2 National Championships Festivals and a national community-engagement program.

10. **teacher/coaches.** Many D2 coaches continue to provide other services for their institution and in the community, including teaching and mentoring.

11. **Proud alumni.** Former D2 student-athletes include governors, senators, entertainers, corporate leaders and professional athletes.

12. **national recognition.** D2 student-athletes have received the NCAA’s highest individual honors, including winning the Walter Byers Scholarship Award (the Association’s top student-athlete) and the NCAA Woman of the Year Award.

More later…

This 640 word summary – with attendant commentary – was diligently distilled by newly appointed Clips’ Associate Editor Dan DeIuliis from a 1942 word article entitled, “They Chose Division II, But Why,” by David Moltz from the 1-29-09 issue of Inside Higher Ed.

The article can be accessed in its entirety at: