

# THE GREAT COLLEGE FOOTBALL REALIGNMENT

*Lance Cook*

The formation of a college football super league is no longer a far-fetched hypothetical. Conference realignment has gutted traditional structures, and the recent House settlement has intensified pressure on athletic departments to generate more revenue. A breakaway league composed of handpicked schools now appears both inevitable and financially rational, offering elite programs greater control, larger media deals, and fewer regulatory constraints.

This paper evaluates which programs super league organizers are most likely to include, using five core criteria: competitive success, media value, market size, institutional fit, and political complexity. These criteria reflect the commercial priorities shaping college football's future and provide a consistent framework for assessing inclusion. The analysis identifies seventeen schools as certain inclusions and fifteen more as likely additions, with a thirty-two team model emerging as the most practical structure.

Beyond predicting outcomes, the paper explores the institutional, legal, and cultural consequences of exclusion. Membership decisions will not only determine who competes at the highest level but will also reshape the sport's power structure, financial landscape, and broader identity.

Part I introduces the five inclusion criteria and explains how each will apply to inclusion decisions. Part II applies those criteria to identify the blue-blood programs that are likely to be foundational members of a super league. Part III examines the programs that just meet the criteria for inclusion and explains the reasons for their selection. Part IV discusses the programs that are on the outside looking in and explains why they were not included.

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“College football is headed for two big conferences... that are going to compete and break away from the NCAA and do their own thing.”<sup>2</sup>

## INTRODUCTION

In July of 2021, Texas and Oklahoma announced their intent to leave the Big 12 Conference for the Southeastern Conference (SEC).<sup>3</sup> The move signaled more than a simple realignment; it marked the beginning of a broader unraveling of college football’s traditional structure. Within two years, the Big Ten responded by adding the University of Southern California (USC), the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), Oregon, and Washington, poaching four flagship programs from the Pac-12, leading to the effective collapse of that conference.<sup>4</sup> The Big 12 scrambled to replace departing members, and the Atlantic Coast Conference (ACC) faced internal challenges to its long-term stability.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> *Saturday Down South, Nick Saban on Retirement Rumors*, YOUTUBE (Apr. 22, 2024), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UV7qOHYH7Ao>.

<sup>3</sup> Heather Dinich and Mark Schlabach, *Texas Longhorns, Oklahoma Sooners unanimously accept invitation to SEC*, ESPN.COM (July 30, 2021), [https://www.espn.com/college-football/story/\\_/id/31920686/texas-longhorns-oklahoma-sooners-unanimously-accept-invitation-sec](https://www.espn.com/college-football/story/_/id/31920686/texas-longhorns-oklahoma-sooners-unanimously-accept-invitation-sec).

<sup>4</sup> Dan Wetzel, *SEC fired the first shot. Big Ten's response: Poaching USC and UCLA, and gut-punching Pac-12*, YAHOO! SPORTS (June 30, 2022), <https://sports.yahoo.com/sec-fired-the-first-shot-the-big-ten-responded-by-poaching-usc-and-ucla-and-gut-punching-pac-12-alliance-partner-205216755.html>; *See also* Adam Rittenberg, *Big Ten adds Oregon, Washington as newest members in blow to Pac-12*, ESPN.COM (Aug. 4, 2023), [https://www.espn.com/college-football/story/\\_/id/38135852/big-ten-adds-oregon-washington-newest-members-blow-pac-12](https://www.espn.com/college-football/story/_/id/38135852/big-ten-adds-oregon-washington-newest-members-blow-pac-12). *See also* Ralph D. Russo, *AP Sports Story of the Year: Realignment, stunning demise of Pac-12 usher in super conference era*, AP NEWS (Dec. 18, 2023), <https://apnews.com/article/conference-realignment-e0356caa1c9cf5ba2630e7b23a1a06ed> (The PAC-12 added a few members in 2024 and 2025 but is no longer considered a “power” conference).

<sup>5</sup> Brandon Marcello, *Big 12 enters new era of uncertainty without Oklahoma, Texas -- but the vibes are immaculate, at least*, CBS SPORTS (May 2, 2024), <https://www.cbssports.com/college-football/news/big-12-enters-new-era-of-uncertainty-without-oklahoma-texas-but-the-vibes-are-immaculate-at-least/>; *See*

Around this same time, the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) loosened transfer restrictions and permitted players to profit off of their name, image, and likeness.<sup>6</sup> These drastic changes to college football's long standing rules accelerated the professionalization of college football.<sup>7</sup> As player compensation expanded, media revenue climbed, and power consolidated around the SEC and Big Ten, the idea of a formal college football super league gained serious traction.<sup>8</sup> A college football super league refers to a proposed new organizational structure that would consolidate a limited number of elite programs into a financially and competitively driven entity, operating independently from the traditional NCAA framework.

In February 2024, influential stakeholders, including team owners, college executives, and athletic administrators publicly proposed such a league.<sup>9</sup> Since that presentation, many experts

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also Michael McMann, *ACC Settlement, Like House Deal, Brings Order to College Sports*, SPORTICO (Mar. 4, 2025), <https://www.sportico.com/law/analysis/2025/acc-settlement-implications-1234841772/>. (explaining that Clemson and Florida State settled with the ACC on terms allowing them to exit the conference earlier and at a lower cost than the original grant of rights permitted).

<sup>6</sup> *Division I Council Approves Changes to Transfer Rules*, NCAA (Apr. 17, 2024), <https://www.ncaa.org/news/2024/4/17/media-center-division-i-council-approves-changes-to-transfer-rules.aspx>; *NCAA Adopts Interim Name, Image and Likeness Policy*, NCAA (June 30, 2021), <https://www.ncaa.org/news/2021/6/30/ncaa-adopts-interim-name-image-and-likeness-policy.aspx>.

<sup>7</sup> See Hanna Wynn, *The Path to Name, Image, and Likeness Rights for College Athletes and Its Potential Effects on Student Athletes, the NCAA, and Athletic Programs*, COLO. TECH. L.J. 309 (2022).

<sup>8</sup> Matt Hayes, *SEC, Big Ten moving closer to taking their college football ball home and making billions*, USA TODAY (Oct. 4, 2024), <https://www.usatoday.com/story/sports/ncaaf/2024/10/04/sec-big-ten-college-football-greg-sankey/75492420007/>.

<sup>9</sup> Daniel Libit, Eben Novy-Williams, *College Football 'Super League' Pitch Deck Details Breakaway Plan*, SPORTICO (Apr. 16, 2024), <https://www.sportico.com/leagues/college-sports/2024/college-football-super-league-pitch-deck-1234775652/>; see also Mike McDaniel, *ACC ADs Meet With Firm Regarding 'Project Rudy' Super League Proposal*, SPORTS ILLUSTRATED (Nov. 6, 2024), <https://www.si.com/college-football/acc-ads-meet-with-firm->

note that the SEC and Big Ten have used their position as the “power two” to secure guaranteed access to the College Football Playoff and extract a larger share of media revenue.<sup>10</sup> Some of these experts expect these conferences to eventually consolidate their power, disband, leave the NCAA, and form a new league that includes a limited number of handpicked programs.<sup>11</sup>

Unequal media rights drove the most recent wave of conference realignment, as national-brand schools sought greater financial security and visibility.<sup>12</sup> The recent *House* settlement has

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regarding-project-rudy-super-league-proposal (reporting on ACC athletic directors’ meeting with a private equity firm regarding a different proposed college football super league).

<sup>10</sup> ESPN College Football, *Greg McElroy & Paul Finebaum Talk SEC and Big Ten's Takeover of the CFP*, YOUTUBE (Feb. 19, 2025), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tJJwvYrcrBA>. (The “Power Two” generally refers to the Southeastern Conference (SEC) and the Big Ten Conference, which are currently the most dominant conferences in terms of revenue and national influence. Historically, the “Power Five” also included the Atlantic Coast Conference (ACC), Big 12 Conference, and Pac-12 Conference. The “Group of Five” consists of the American Athletic Conference, Conference USA, Mid-American Conference, Mountain West Conference, and Sun Belt Conference.)

<sup>11</sup> See Kaiden Smith, *Paul Finebaum addresses Trent Dilfer, 18-month timeline to dawn of college football super league*, ON3 (Mar. 3, 2024), <https://www.on3.com/news/paul-finebaum-addresses-trent-dilfer-18-month-timeline-college-football-super-leauge/>; Ross Dellenger, *While SEC and Big Ten Leaders Mull Major Changes, a New Super League Concept Could Radically Alter College Sports*, YAHOO! SPORTS (Oct. 8, 2024), <https://sports.yahoo.com/while-sec-and-big-ten-leaders-mull-major-changes-a-new-super-league-concept-could-radically-alter-college-sports-130031473.html> (discussing the worries of university presidents about the SEC and Big 10 breaking away to form their own league).

<sup>12</sup> *Current College Sports Television Contracts*, BUS. OF COLL. SPORTS, <https://businessofcollegesports.com/current-college-sports-television-contracts/> (last visited Apr. 30, 2025) (listing major conference media deals, including the Big Ten’s nearly \$8 billion, seven-year deal with Fox, CBS, and NBC; the SEC’s \$3 billion, 10-year agreement with ESPN; the ACC’s long-term contract with ESPN reportedly worth \$3.6 billion through 2036; and the Big 12’s \$2.3 billion, six-year extension with ESPN and Fox Sports.); Emma Spisak, *Conference Chaos: How Recent NCAA Realignments Are Shaping the Future of Media Rights*, NOVA SPORTS LAW (Dec. 10, 2024), <https://www.novasportslaw.com/post/conference-chaos-how-recent-ncaa->

only intensified the pressure on athletic departments to raise revenue as they prepare to pay players directly.<sup>13</sup>

A super league, led by SEC and Big 10 powerhouse programs, would command a massive media deal while simultaneously allowing these schools to maintain the control that they desire. The central question, however, is who gets in. Membership decisions would rely on subjective criteria and will inevitably trigger legal, institutional, and political controversy.

Inclusion decisions will shape more than competition. They will determine which programs stay at the center of the sport and which ones will be relegated to the margins. Schools left out will face the institutional consequences of that exclusion and may pursue legal or political avenues to resist it.

Revenue disparities, media rights consolidation, and shifting institutional priorities are driving the inevitable formation of a college football super league. Its early success hinges on the legally fraught process of determining membership. Decision makers must apply subjective inclusion criteria to limit the effectiveness of political, institutional, and legal challenges that are undoubtedly coming to the future of college football.

While collegiate athletic departments encompass many sports, this paper focuses exclusively on college football. Football's unparalleled economic significance, media value, and its role as the primary catalyst and financial driver behind the recent wave of conference realignments and the proposed super league concept drive this deliberate scope.<sup>14</sup> The financial and structural

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realignments-are-shaping-the-future-of-media-rights.

<sup>13</sup> House v. NCAA, No. 4:20-cv-03919-CW (N.D. Cal. filed June 15, 2020) (involving a class action lawsuit that led to a proposed settlement allowing schools to share broadcast revenue with athletes); *see also* Sean Pierce and Lance Cook, *The End of Amateurism: The NCAA's \$2.75 Billion Settlement*, SPORTS B. J. (July 17, 2024), <https://www.sportsbusinessjournal.com/Articles/2024/07/17/Unpacks/oped-17-pierce-cook/> (discussing the House settlement and its implications for college athletics going forward).

<sup>14</sup> Susan M. Shaw, *The Human Cost of Conference Realignment*, FORBES (Oct. 3, 2023), <https://www.forbes.com/sites/susanmshaw/2023/10/03/the-human-cost-of-conference-realignment/> (highlighting how financial motivations in collegiate athletic conference realignments, primarily driven by football,

considerations central to this analysis are, in the current landscape, uniquely concentrated within the sport of football.<sup>15</sup>

Part I identifies the core criteria likely to shape membership decisions and explains how those standards function in practice. Part II highlights the schools that clearly meet those criteria and that super league organizers are almost certain to include. Part III discusses the programs that are likely, but not certain, to be included and explains the reasons why they fit the criteria. Part IV discusses the programs that do not clearly meet the criteria for inclusion and the potential consequences for their exclusion.

## I. CRITERIA FOR INCLUSION

A future super league will not be open to all. Membership selection will reflect strategic priorities with decision-makers weighing a combination of factors, some rooted in football performance and others based on commercial or institutional considerations. These decisions will likely not follow any formal application process or ranking system. Decision-makers will negotiate these terms, and politics will shape the outcomes.

Although some predict a super league that includes nearly all power conference programs, most projections anticipate a league of thirty to forty-eight teams, likely divided into conferences and divisions.<sup>16</sup> The structure could resemble a professional model, with fixed membership, centralized media contracts, and standardized revenue sharing.<sup>17</sup> Some versions incorporate promotion and relegation, while others assume a closed format.<sup>18</sup>

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disproportionately burden athletes and coaches in non-revenue sports through increased travel demands, disrupted academic schedules, and emotional and physical strain).

<sup>15</sup> *Id.*

<sup>16</sup> Andy Staples, *How would a college football Super League look? Let's imagine a 48-team version*, ON3 (Mar. 4, 2024), <https://www.on3.com/news/how-would-a-college-football-super-league-look/>; see also Dellenger, *supra* note 11.

<sup>17</sup> See Duane Rockerbie, *Revenue Sharing in Professional Sports Leagues*, ENCYCLOPEDIA (July 29, 2024), <https://encyclopedia.pub/entry/56796>.

<sup>18</sup> Libit & Novy-Williams, *supra* note 9. (discussing the potential relegation

Regardless of the model, the number of qualified programs will exceed the available spots. That imbalance will make the selection process both politically sensitive and legally vulnerable. The sections that follow outline the criteria most likely to shape membership decisions.

### *Competitive Success and Projected Relevance*

On-field performance will remain a central factor in any super league selection process. Programs that consistently compete for national championships, finish in the top ten, and win against strong opponents will carry clear value.<sup>19</sup> Recent success will outweigh historical reputation, but a program's broader football identity and reputation will still influence its standing.

Decision-makers will prioritize projected relevance. Programs that invest in coaching, facilities, and perhaps most importantly, compensating players signal a long-term commitment to competitiveness. These upward-trending programs may outrank declining legacy brands.

This forward-looking approach reflects the commercial nature of league formation. Networks and sponsors want programs that can sustain success and draw large audiences in the coming decade, not teams that last made headlines sixty years ago.

Prioritizing recent history reinforces the importance of on-field performance. The SEC and Big Ten have dominated the College Football Playoff era, producing nearly all of the championship contenders and most of the semifinal appearances.<sup>20</sup> That competitive success led to more favorable media rights deals, greater control over postseason access, and increased influence over

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that would occur under the CST proposal).

<sup>19</sup> Wayne Staats, *College Football Rankings: Every Poll Explained and How They Work*, NCAA (Jan. 22, 2025), <https://www.ncaa.com/news/football/article/2025-01-22/college-football-rankings-every-poll-explained-how-they-work> (explaining that finishing in the top rankings indicates a team is among the best in college football).

<sup>20</sup> *History*, Coll. Football Playoff, <https://collegefootballplayoff.com/sports/2019/5/22/history> (last visited Apr. 8, 2025).

the future of the sport.<sup>21</sup> Programs that win consistently not only build their brands, they also get to help shape the structure of college football itself.

### *Media Value and Brand Recognition*

Media value drives the super league model.<sup>22</sup> Its purpose is not to preserve tradition. It exists to maximize revenue through media rights, and television ratings remain the primary metric that determines which programs matter most.<sup>23</sup> Schools that consistently attract large national audiences will receive priority consideration, regardless of conference affiliation or historical alignment.

Fan engagement, cultural relevance, and brand recognition play an important role, particularly when they translate into higher viewership. Programs with large followings, recognizable brands, and strong digital reach bring more attention to broadcasts and increase the value of media rights deals.<sup>24</sup> That value grows when

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<sup>21</sup> McElroy and Finebaum, *supra* note 10. (discussing the SEC and Big Ten using their on-field success and media rights deals as leverage to guarantee College Football Playoff Spots).

<sup>22</sup> See Heather Dinich, *College Football Playoff Buzz: 5 Topics on the Table This Week*, ESPN (Apr. 21, 2025), [https://www.espn.com/college-football/insider/story/\\_/id/44733014/college-football-playoff-meeting-buzz-week-cfp](https://www.espn.com/college-football/insider/story/_/id/44733014/college-football-playoff-meeting-buzz-week-cfp) (discussing the potential consideration of television ratings in future CFP selection decisions which emphasizes the point that decision-makers are prioritizing television ratings more than ever).

<sup>23</sup> See *Id.*; see also Brent Schrottenboer, *Who's to blame for college football conference realignment chaos? Here are top candidates*, USA TODAY (Aug. 10, 2023), <https://www.usatoday.com/story/sports/ncaaf/2023/08/10/big-ten-big-12-pac-12-college-football-conference-realignment/70559721007/>.

<sup>24</sup> See Joshua Vowles, *Big 12 Expansion, Notre Dame, and ACC Grant of Rights*, ONE FOOT DOWN (July 29, 2016, 12:36 AM), <https://www.onefootdown.com/2016/7/29/12317808/big-12-expansion-notre-dame-andacc-grant-of-rights>. For an illustration of the value of grant-of-right deals, See *Current College Sports Television Contracts*, Bus. of Coll. Sports, <https://businessofcollegesports.com/current-college-sports-television-contracts/> (last visited Apr. 8, 2025).

high-profile programs face each other more frequently, which a super league would guarantee.<sup>25</sup> Conference realignment showed that networks will pay higher rights fees when they know each week will deliver multiple high-stakes, high-ratings matchups.

While media value reflects on-field success and brand strength, market reach also matters. The next section turns to geographic considerations and the importance of placing programs in television markets that increase national exposure and advertising revenue.

### *Market Size and Geographic Value*

Market size is another important factor that will influence which programs receive super league invitations. Larger markets create more potential viewers, which drives advertising revenue and increases the overall value of media rights deals.<sup>26</sup> Networks want teams that offer access to densely populated regions with proven interest in college football.<sup>27</sup> Programs that deliver a strong regional following while also opening the door to major television markets will stand out in the selection process.

The Midwest and Southeast remain the most reliable college football markets.<sup>28</sup> The SEC and Big Ten built dominant brands by

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<sup>25</sup> Dellenger, *supra* note 11 (discussing how recent court decisions compelling revenue sharing with athletes have created pressure on schools to maximize revenue, thereby accelerating conference realignment. A super league would follow the same logic, offering increased media value through a concentration of top-tier programs, which would likely command significantly higher rights fees from broadcast networks.)

<sup>26</sup> Chris Vannini & Justin Williams, *College Football Super Leagues? Pitch Details, Projected Revenues — and Roadblocks*, THE ATHLETIC (Oct. 17, 2024), <https://www.nytimes.com/athletic/5848871/2024/10/17/college-football-super-league-pitch-project-rudy/> (explaining that the proposal rests on the belief that increased matchups between top-tier teams will generate significantly more television revenue than the current structure).

<sup>27</sup> *Id.*

<sup>28</sup> Sam Bradshaw, *How the Television Map Influences Realignment*, SICEM365 (Aug. 23, 2023), <https://sicem365.com/s/15599/how-the-television-map-influences-realignment.>; See also Neil Irwin and Kevin Quealy, *The Places*

maintaining a stronghold in these regions. A super league cannot afford to lose that base. Preserving major regional rivalries will help maintain interest in these core markets and protect the cultural identity that continues to drive the sport's popularity.

At the same time, the model depends on growth. Recent realignment, including the Big Ten's expansion into the West Coast, demonstrates that decision-makers use market access to strengthen their media position.<sup>29</sup> A super league will likely continue this strategy, combining traditional strongholds with targeted expansion to new markets that can deliver national visibility.

Still, market size alone is not enough. A large market with limited college football interest adds little to the overall product. The most valuable programs combine access to key media markets with a strong regional following.<sup>30</sup> When networks negotiate rights packages, they assess not just how many people live in a region, but how many of them will reliably tune in on Saturday afternoon.<sup>31</sup> Programs that can deliver both volume and passion will rise to the top of the selection process.

### *Institutional Fit and Football Investment*

Super league decision-makers will also evaluate a university's ability and willingness to sustain a football operation that closely resembles a professional model. Programs must demonstrate that their institutions can handle the commercial and organizational demands of a borderline professional football enterprise. Academic alignment, administrative stability, and national brand cohesion

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*in America Where College Football Means the Most*, N.Y. TIMES (Nov. 8, 2014), [https://www.nytimes.com/2014/11/08/upshot/the-places-in-america-where-college-football-means-the-most.html?ref=sports&\\_r=4&abt=0002&abg=0](https://www.nytimes.com/2014/11/08/upshot/the-places-in-america-where-college-football-means-the-most.html?ref=sports&_r=4&abt=0002&abg=0).

<sup>29</sup> *The Big Ten Effect: With 4 New Football Teams Next Year, the NCAA Conference Will Extend Its TV Reach in Key Markets*, NIELSEN (Sept. 2023), <https://www.nielsen.com/insights/2023/the-big-ten-effect-with-4-new-football-teams-next-year-the-ncaa-conference-will-extend-its-tv-reach-in-key-markets/>.

<sup>30</sup> Bradshaw, *supra* note 28. See also Irwin & Quealy, *supra* note 28.

<sup>31</sup> *The Big Ten Effect*, *supra* note 29.

will all factor into selection.<sup>32</sup> Decision-makers will prioritize schools that operate with a football-first mindset and possess the ability to consistently compete in a media-driven structure.

Financial commitment remains critical. Programs that heavily invest in coaching salaries, facilities, and direct player compensation demonstrate their readiness to operate at the highest level. Super league organizers will likely require major investment in football as a minimum threshold for participation.

### *Political Complexity and Risk Sensitivity*

Public universities carry heightened legal and political sensitivity in any super league selection process.<sup>33</sup> State officials, especially governors, legislators, and higher education boards often see these institutions as symbols of regional identity and economic engines.<sup>34</sup> Excluding a flagship public university may provoke strong public backlash and political interference, regardless of the school's on-field profile.<sup>35</sup> Legislators, state officials, or other

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<sup>32</sup> See Dylan Callaghan-Croley, *The six new AAU schools and why it's important*, COLLEGE SPORTS WIRE (June 2, 2023), <https://collegesportswire.usatoday.com/2023/06/02/college-sports-news-aau-schools-arizona-state-miami-notre-dame/> (noting that some believe AAU accreditation will influence which schools are included in future rounds of conference realignment).

<sup>33</sup> Bernadette Gray-Little, *Political Influence in the Governance of Public Higher Education*, MERRILL SERIES ON THE RESEARCH MISSION OF PUB. UNIVS. (2022), <https://journals.ku.edu/merrill/article/view/19573>. (describing how political oversight and funding authority allow state governments to shape key decisions at public universities).

<sup>34</sup> *Id.*

<sup>35</sup> See *West Virginia Governor Threatens Legal Action over NCAA Tournament Selection*, REUTERS (Mar. 17, 2025), <https://www.reuters.com/sports/west-virginia-governor-threatens-legal-action-over-ncaa-tournament-selection-2025-03-17/>. (reporting that West Virginia Governor Patrick Morrisey announced an investigation into the NCAA's selection process after West Virginia University was excluded from the 2025 NCAA Tournament, demonstrating that politicians are willing to use governmental power to try to influence decisions relating to athletics); see also Michael McCann, *Florida AG Investigating College Football Playoff, ESPN Over FSU Snub*,

affected stakeholders may respond with legislative action, regulatory scrutiny, or even litigation if they view exclusion as a slight to the state's pride or interest.

Additional risk arises when decision-makers treat two or more public schools in the same state university system differently. If one university earns inclusion while decision-makers exclude another, they may face accusations of unfair treatment or arbitrary standards. These disputes may lead to governance friction, even from schools that might not otherwise merit inclusion. In some cases, the threat of conflict may elevate the candidacy of a politically sensitive school despite weaker competitive or commercial credentials.

Beyond political consequences, exclusion decisions carry meaningful legal risk. Public universities excluded from a super league could pursue claims based on equal protection principles, contractual interference, or breaches of fiduciary duty, depending on how the selection process unfolds.<sup>36</sup> Allegations of arbitrary or discriminatory decision-making could prompt litigation, administrative challenges, or demands for regulatory oversight.

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SPORTICO (Dec. 13, 2024), <https://www.sportico.com/law/analysis/2023/fsu-college-football-playoff-snub-legal-investigation-1234757195/> (reporting that the Florida Attorney General launched an investigation into the College Football Playoff selection process and ESPN following Florida State University's exclusion from the playoff).

<sup>36</sup>*See Doe v. Miami Univ.*, 882 F.3d 579, 595 (6th Cir. 2018) (explaining that an equal protection claim requires showing similarly situated individuals were treated differently without a rational basis); *Equity in Athletics, Inc. v. Dep't of Educ.*, 639 F.3d 91, 108 (4th Cir. 2011) (requiring plausible allegations of discriminatory intent for equal protection claims). But see *McCants v. NCAA*, 201 F. Supp. 3d 732, 744–45 (M.D.N.C. 2016); *Knelman v. Middlebury Coll.*, 898 F. Supp. 2d 697, 711 (D. Vt. 2012); *Squeri v. Mount Ida Coll.*, 954 F.3d 56, 69 (1st Cir. 2020) (rejecting fiduciary duty claims between universities and students or athletes, even where trust or reliance is alleged). But cf. *Dynamic Measurement Grp., Inc. v. Univ. of Or.*, 121 F. Supp. 3d 1047, 1058 (D. Or. 2015); *St. John's Univ. v. Bolton*, 757 F. Supp. 2d 144, 170 (E.D.N.Y. 2010) (recognizing that university employees may owe fiduciary duties to their institutions where relationships involve trust, control over resources, and institutional responsibility. A case could be made that university system employees owe a fiduciary duty to the university system as a whole, which could create issues if some university system schools are included while others are excluded).

In addition, the collective organization of a super league by a limited group of powerful programs raises potential antitrust concerns, particularly if excluded schools argue that the structure unlawfully restrains trade or divides the college football market.<sup>37</sup> These risks increase the pressure on decision-makers to develop a defensible, transparent, and institutionally consistent framework for membership, even if no formal application process exists.

## II. THE LOCKS

Before addressing the programs on the bubble, it is important to recognize that some schools will face no serious threat of exclusion. These schools meet every inclusion criterion. They win consistently, draw national attention, operate in large or strategically valuable markets, and align institutionally with the commercial and structural demands of a centralized league. They also present few legal or political complications. Their inclusion is unlikely to provoke controversy or resistance.

These programs are traditional blue-bloods, most of which compete in the SEC or the Big Ten. They will form the league's foundation. A side-by-side comparison of all Power Four schools would likely rank these programs near the top across every major factor. For that reason, this section refers to them as "the locks."

### *The SEC's Locks*

*Programs in this section: Alabama, Florida, Georgia, LSU, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Texas, and Texas A&M.*

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<sup>37</sup> See Sam Gillenwater, *How 'Super League' Model Makes College Football 'Anti-Trust Lawsuit Proof,' Resolves Legal Issues*, ON3 (Apr. 4, 2024), <https://www.on3.com/news/how-super-league-model-makes-college-football-anti-trust-lawsuit-proof-resolves-legal-issues/>.

## Alabama

Alabama remains one of the most dominant programs in college football. Under head coach Nick Saban, the Crimson Tide won six national championships since 2009.<sup>38</sup> Although their long-term trajectory in the post-Saban era is uncertain, Alabama has the infrastructure to remain a powerhouse. The athletic department generates more than \$200 million in annual revenue, placing the school among the most financially powerful in the country.<sup>39</sup> Combined with its national brand, loyal fan base, and history of success, Alabama has positioned itself well to serve as a leading force in a future super league.

## Florida

The University of Florida checks every major box for super league inclusion. The program won two national championships this century.<sup>40</sup> Florida is also the flagship university in a state that produces a high volume of Power Four football recruits.<sup>41</sup> This helps the Gators maintain a built-in recruiting advantage and a passionate fan base that fuels national aspirations, despite the program struggling in recent years.<sup>42</sup>

Financially, Florida ranks among the top athletic departments

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<sup>38</sup> *National Championships*, Paul W. Bryant Museum, [https://bryantmuseum.com/traditions\\_alabama/national\\_championships/](https://bryantmuseum.com/traditions_alabama/national_championships/) (last visited Apr. 10, 2025).

<sup>39</sup> *NCAA Finances*, USA TODAY SPORTS, <https://sportsdata.usatoday.com/ncaa/finances> (last visited Apr. 10, 2025).

<sup>40</sup> *FBS Football Championship History*, NCAA, <https://www.ncaa.com/history/football/fbs> (last visited Apr. 10, 2025).

<sup>41</sup> Keegan Pope, *States with the Most Recruits in the Final 2025 On300 Rankings*, ON3 (Jan. 31, 2025), <https://www.on3.com/high-school/news/states-with-the-most-recruits-in-the-final-2025-on300-recruiting-rankings/>.

<sup>42</sup> Kaiden Smith, *Urban Meyer Breaks Down Florida Struggles, Billy Napier Era: 'Momentum Is Gone'*, ON3 (Sept. 19, 2024), <https://www.on3.com/news/urban-meyer-breaks-down-florida-struggles-billy-napier-era-momentum-gone/>. (describing how after a dominant era under Urban Meyer, the Gators have lost five games or more in eight of the past fourteen seasons).

in the country. The Gators generated \$190 million in revenue in 2023 and earned a program valuation of \$865 million, placing 14th nationally.<sup>43</sup> The team also averaged 4.3 million viewers per game during the 2024 season, with marquee matchups drawing as many as seven million viewers.<sup>44</sup> Florida's combination of potential on-field success, media value, and institutional strength makes the program a clear super league lock.

### Georgia

Georgia ranks among the most dominant programs in college football over the past decade. The Bulldogs won national championships in 2021 and 2022 and reached the College Football Playoff again in 2024.<sup>45</sup> Georgia consistently attracts the nation's top recruits and is a staple at the top of college football rankings.<sup>46</sup> The program pairs elite performance with modern infrastructure, strong leadership, and deep institutional support.

Georgia also leads the country in viewership.<sup>47</sup> In 2024, the Bulldogs averaged 8.6 million viewers per game, the highest in college football. More than 13 million watched their regular season matchup against Texas.<sup>48</sup>

The athletic department generated over \$200 million in revenue for the 2023 fiscal year and holds a \$950 million valuation.<sup>49</sup> Georgia's combination of on-field dominance, financial strength,

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<sup>43</sup> See *NCAA Finances*, *supra* note 39; Michael Ozanian, *What the top 75 college sports programs are worth*, CNBC (Jan. 6, 2025), <https://www.cnbc.com/2024/12/19/college-sports-programs-valuations.html>.

<sup>44</sup> James Parks, *College Football TV Ratings: Most Watched Teams in 2024, Ranked*, SPORTS ILLUSTRATED (Jan. 2025), <https://www.si.com/fannation/college/cfb-hq/rankings/college-football-tv-rankings-most-watched-teams-2024>.

<sup>45</sup> See *FBS Football Championship History*, *supra* note 40.

<sup>46</sup> See Staats, *supra* note 19; see also Andy Staples, *Who Are College Football's Blue Bloods?*, ON3 (July 9, 2024), <https://www.on3.com/news/who-are-college-footballs-blue-bloods/>.

<sup>47</sup> See Parks, *supra* note 44.

<sup>48</sup> *Id.*

<sup>49</sup> See *NCAA Finances*, *supra* note 39; Ozanian, *supra* note 43.

and unmatched national visibility places it among the most obvious super league candidates.

### Louisiana State University (LSU)

LSU ranks among the most successful college football programs of the 21st century. The Tigers won national championships in 2003, 2007, and 2019.<sup>50</sup> LSU consistently competes at a national level, produces top-tier NFL talent, and maintains a recruiting prowess that ensures championship contention.<sup>51</sup>

The athletic department reported nearly \$200 million in revenue for the 2022–23 fiscal year, placing it near the top nationally.<sup>52</sup> The program also draws strong television viewership and enjoys one of the most passionate fan bases in the country.<sup>53</sup> With elite on-field performance, financial strength, and national visibility, LSU clearly meets every major threshold for inclusion in a future super league.

### Oklahoma

Oklahoma ranks among the most successful college football programs of the past two decades.<sup>54</sup> They maintain one of the strongest national brands in the sport.<sup>55</sup>

<sup>50</sup> See *FBS Football Championship History*, *supra* note 40; see also Pete Fiutak, *Greatest College Football Teams of All-Time: Top 150 National Champion Season Rankings*, COLLEGE FOOTBALL NEWS (Jan. 10, 2024), <https://collegefootballnews.com/rankings/greatest-college-football-teams-of-all-time-top-150-national-champion-rankings> (showing that many analysts consider the undefeated 2019 team to be one of the best in college football history).

<sup>51</sup> See Staples, *supra* note 46.

<sup>52</sup> See *NCAA Finances*, *supra* note 39.

<sup>53</sup> See Parks, *supra* note 44.

<sup>54</sup> *College Football Playoff History*, COLLEGE FOOTBALL PLAYOFF, <https://collegefootballplayoff.com/sports/2019/5/22/history> (last visited Apr. 11, 2025).

<sup>55</sup> Brad Crawford, *College Football's 25 Biggest Brands*, 247SPORTS (May 23, 2023), <https://247sports.com/longformarticle/college-footballs-25-biggest->

Although the Sooners have not yet replicated their past success in the SEC, their financial resources and commitment to football indicate that their resurgence is likely only a matter of time.<sup>56</sup> Oklahoma's athletic department reported nearly \$199 million in revenue for the 2023 fiscal year, a figure that is expected to grow as the program settles into its new conference.<sup>57</sup> The program drew 7.6 million viewers for its 2024 Red River Rivalry game against Texas, confirming its national appeal.<sup>58</sup>

Perhaps the strongest evidence supporting Oklahoma's place in a super league is the SEC's decision to pursue the program during its most recent expansion. That move signaled the school's value not only as a competitive asset, but also as a gateway into new media markets.<sup>59</sup> With strong on-field performance, financial stability, brand recognition, and a central geographic location, Oklahoma belongs in any serious conversation about super league membership.

### Tennessee

Tennessee now competes at the highest level of college football after enduring several years of inconsistency.<sup>60</sup> The program reached the College Football Playoff in 2024 and stands out as a major player in the pay-for-play era that would likely accompany a

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brands-ranked-214900353/#2223906.

<sup>56</sup> Nikki Chavanelle, *Top 25 Highest-Spending College Football Programs in the Nation*, ON3 (Feb. 21, 2024), <https://www.on3.com/news/top-25-highest-spending-college-football-programs-nation-richest-ohio-state-michigan-texas-alabama/>.

<sup>57</sup> Ozanian, *supra* note 43.

<sup>58</sup> *Red River Rivalry*, LEARFIELD, <https://www.learfield.com/partner/red-river-rivalry/> (last visited Apr. 10, 2025).

<sup>59</sup> Randall Sweet, *SEC Day: How Oklahoma's Move to the SEC 'Became Real' Over the Last Three Years*, SPORTS ILLUSTRATED (July 1, 2024), <https://www.si.com/college/oklahoma/football/sec-day-greg-sankey-joe-castiglione-and-joseph-harroz-jr-welcome-oklahoma-to-the-sec-01j1qwa2df2z>.

<sup>60</sup> See Matt Hayes, *First and 10: The Truth Hurts, but Here It Is, Tennessee — You Will Never Be Elite Again*, SATURDAY DOWN SOUTH (Jan. 18, 2021), <https://www.saturdaydownsouth.com/news/college-football/first-and-10-the-truth-hurts-but-here-it-is-tennessee-you-will-never-be-elite-again/>.

super league structure.<sup>61</sup>

As the flagship university in a state that is passionate about football, Tennessee carries both political strength and institutional backing that few other programs can match.<sup>62</sup> It is also the only public university in Tennessee likely to merit consideration in a future super league model, reducing the risk of political complications or external interference.<sup>63</sup>

Tennessee also brings significant commercial value. The program consistently ranks among the national leaders in attendance, and Neyland Stadium provides a massive stage for nationally televised games.<sup>64</sup> The athletic department generates nearly \$170 million in annual revenue and benefits from a large, engaged fan base that regularly delivers strong ratings.<sup>65</sup> With national visibility, competitive success, market strength, and political simplicity, Tennessee fits squarely within the core tier of super league candidates.

### Texas

Texas is one of the most powerful and valuable brands in college football. The Longhorns reached the College Football Playoff in 2023 and 2024, and consistently rank among the most-watched and highest-earning programs in the country.<sup>66</sup> Texas leads all schools in athletic department valuation, with recent estimates

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<sup>61</sup> See Pete Nakos, *On3's Top 15 NIL Collectives in College Sports*, ON3 (Aug. 29, 2024), <https://www.on3.com/nl/news/on3s-top-15-nil-collectives-in-college-sports/>.

<sup>62</sup> *About*, UNIV. OF TENN. KNOXVILLE, <https://www.utk.edu/about> (last visited Apr. 10, 2025).

<sup>63</sup> See Ross Dellenger, *Memphis' Big 12 Push Shows Challenges Facing Realignment Hopefuls*, YAHOO SPORTS (Sept. 20, 2024), <https://sports.yahoo.com/memphis-big-12-push-shows-challenges-facing-realignment-hopefuls-173041300.html> (describing Memphis's continued failure to join a Power Four conference despite institutional interest).

<sup>64</sup> *2024 FBS Attendance Trends*, D1.TICKER (Mar. 6, 2024), <https://www.d1ticker.com/2024-fbs-attendance-trends/>.

<sup>65</sup> See *NCAA Finances*, *supra* note 39; see also Parks, *supra* note 44.

<sup>66</sup> *Id.*

placing the program near \$1.1 billion.<sup>67</sup>

The Longhorns remain a fixture in national television windows and command one of the largest fan bases in the sport.<sup>68</sup> Their logo and brand recognition rival any in college athletics.<sup>69</sup>

The school's geographic location only strengthens its case. Texas serves as the flagship university in a state filled with several large media markets, including Dallas, Houston, San Antonio, and Austin.<sup>70</sup> No other program in the state carries the same combination of reach, revenue, and national relevance.

The SEC specifically pursued Texas during its most recent expansion, reflecting the program's unmatched commercial appeal.<sup>71</sup> With brand power, financial might, recruiting access, and geographic advantage, Texas is an automatic inclusion in any serious super league model.

### Texas A&M

Texas A&M combines massive financial strength, institutional backing, and one of the largest NIL investments in college football.

<sup>72</sup> The athletic department generated \$270 million in 2023 and

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<sup>67</sup> See Ozanian, *supra* note 43.

<sup>68</sup> See Parks, *supra* note 44.

<sup>69</sup> See Crawford, *supra* note 55.

<sup>70</sup> *Major pro and college sports teams ranked by market size*, SPORTS MEDIA WATCH (July 12, 2023), <https://www.sportsmediawatch.com/nba-market-size-nfl-mlb-nhl-nielsen-ratings/>.

<sup>71</sup> ESPN Staff, *Texas, Oklahoma and the SEC: The History, the Drama and Why It's Happening Now*, ESPN (July 30, 2021), [https://www.espn.com/college-football/story/\\_/id/31906566/texas-oklahoma-sec-history-drama-why-happening-now](https://www.espn.com/college-football/story/_/id/31906566/texas-oklahoma-sec-history-drama-why-happening-now).

<sup>72</sup> See NCAA Finances, *supra* note 39; see also Pete Thamel, *Jimbo Fisher Expected to Be Fired at Texas A&M, Sources Confirm*, ESPN (Nov. 12, 2023), [https://www.espn.com/college-football/story/\\_/id/38880082/jimbo-fisher-expected-fired-texas-sources-confirm](https://www.espn.com/college-football/story/_/id/38880082/jimbo-fisher-expected-fired-texas-sources-confirm) (Texas A&M paid a record \$77.5 million buyout to fire former coach Jimbo Fisher); Adam Rossow, *Texas A&M's Recruiting Class Highlights Growing Impact of NIL*, SPECTRUM NEWS (Jan. 14, 2022), <https://spectrumlocalnews.com/tx/south-texas-el-paso/news/2022/01/14/texas-a-m--recruiting--nil> (Reporting that boosters gave over \$25 million to collectives to ensure that Texas A&M finished with the top

channels significant resources into facilities, coaching, and supporting the NIL infrastructure that allows players to earn direct compensation.<sup>73</sup> Even without consistent on-field success, the program operates with the infrastructure and ambition of a top-tier contender.<sup>74</sup>

The school also holds strategic value. Texas A&M became the first Texas-based SEC member and ranks as the second-largest public university in the country by enrollment.<sup>75</sup> The program draws strong viewership, connects with several major Texas media markets, and benefits from deep donor support. With elite funding, geographic advantage, and long-term potential, Texas A&M presents a strong case for super league inclusion.

### *The B1G Locks*

*Programs in this section: Michigan, Ohio State, Oregon, Penn State, and USC.*

#### Michigan

Michigan enters the super league conversation with one of the nation's strongest brands and a track record of recent on-field success. The Wolverines won the national championship in 2023 and appeared in three consecutive College Football Playoffs from 2021 to 2023.<sup>76</sup> Fans widely recognize the program's winged helmets and the Big House as iconic symbols in college athletics.<sup>77</sup>

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ranked recruiting class).

<sup>73</sup> *Id.*; see also Steve Berkowitz, *Texas A&M Rakes in More Than \$239 Million in Athletics Revenue in 2023*, USA TODAY (Jan. 19, 2024), <https://www.usatoday.com/story/sports/college/2024/01/19/texas-am-over-279-million-athletics-revenue-2023/72287203007/>.

<sup>74</sup> *Id.*

<sup>75</sup> Lyss Welding, *The 50 Largest Colleges and Universities in the United States*, BESTCOLLEGES (May 21, 2024), <https://www.bestcolleges.com/research/largest-colleges-universities-in-united-states/> (noting that Texas A&M enrolls nearly 75,000 students).

<sup>76</sup> See *FBS Football Championship History*, *supra* note 40.

Michigan consistently draws top-tier television ratings and benefits from its presence in the Detroit market and a broad national following.<sup>78</sup>

The university brings institutional strength few can match. Michigan ranks among the top academic public universities in the country while maintaining a clear and sustained commitment to football at the highest level.<sup>79</sup> Its alumni base is large, wealthy, and deeply supportive of athletics.<sup>80</sup>

As the flagship public university in a state with multiple major institutions, Michigan still wields dominant political and donor influence.<sup>81</sup> The athletic department generates over \$200 million in annual revenue and operates with long-term financial and administrative stability.<sup>82</sup> With recent success, a strong brand, financial strength and institutional leverage, Michigan is among the most secure and valuable candidates for any future super league.

### Ohio State

Ohio State presents one of the clearest cases for super league inclusion. The Buckeyes check every box: sustained on-field

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<sup>77</sup> *Football Helmet History*, BENTLEY HIST. LIBR., UNIV. OF MICH., <https://bentley.umich.edu/athdept/football/helmet/mhelmet.htm> (last visited Apr. 10, 2025) (describing the origin and cultural significance of Michigan's winged football helmet design).

<sup>78</sup> See Parks, *supra* note 44.

<sup>79</sup> *2024 Best National Public Universities Rankings*, U.S. NEWS & WORLD REP., [https://www.usnews.com/best-colleges/rankings/national-universities/top-public?\\_sort=rank&\\_sortDirection=asc](https://www.usnews.com/best-colleges/rankings/national-universities/top-public?_sort=rank&_sortDirection=asc) (last visited Apr. 10, 2025).

<sup>80</sup> Lisa Scherzer, Alex Schiffer & Dennis Young, *How Michigan's NIL Ambitions and Larry Ellison's Billions Could Shape College Football's Future*, FRONT OFFICE SPORTS (Nov. 23, 2024), <https://frontofficesports.com/larry-ellison-michigan-nil-bryce-underwood/>.

<sup>81</sup> Ben Rosenfeld, *How the University of Michigan Exerts Varying Levels of Influence on Local, State, and National Politics*, MICH. DAILY (Apr. 14, 2021), <https://www.michigandaily.com/news/government/how-the-university-of-michigan-exerts-varying-levels-of-influence-on-local-state-and-national-politics/>.

<sup>82</sup> See NCAA Finances, *supra* note 39.

success, elite media value, national brand strength, political pull, and strong financial resources. They won national championships in 2014 and 2024, reached the College Football Playoff five times, and consistently finish among the top programs in the country.<sup>83</sup> Their games attract enormous national audiences, and the brand remains one of the most recognizable in American sports.<sup>84</sup>

The program also benefits from structural advantages. Ohio State generates more than \$250 million in annual athletic revenue and dominates major media markets across Ohio, including Columbus, Cleveland, and Cincinnati.<sup>85</sup> The Buckeye brand holds a commanding position not just within the state, but throughout the Midwest and beyond. The university operates with consistent administrative alignment and a dedicated commitment to football.<sup>86</sup> As both a financial powerhouse and competitive anchor, Ohio State is not just a super league candidate; it is a foundational member.

### Oregon

Oregon offers one of the most distinctive and commercially valuable brands in college football.<sup>87</sup> The program benefits from a decades-long partnership with Nike and co-founder Phil Knight, who directed substantial investment into facilities, branding, and national exposure.<sup>88</sup> Oregon's constant innovation in uniform design helped build its national identity, turning the program into a marketing asset that appeals to both fans and recruits.<sup>89</sup> The

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<sup>83</sup> See *FBS Football Championship History*, *supra* note 40.

<sup>84</sup> See Parks, *supra* note 44.

<sup>85</sup> *Id.*; see also NCAA Finances, *supra* note 39.

<sup>86</sup> See Austen Bundy, *Ohio State Paid a Bigger Price Than We Thought to Win a National Championship*, FANSIDED (Jan. 29, 2025), <https://fansided.com/ohio-state-paid-bigger-price-than-we-thought-win-national-championship>.

<sup>87</sup> See Crawford, *supra* note 55.

<sup>88</sup> Kristian Dyer, *Oregon Football Now Has 'Unlimited' NIL Backing*, YAHOO SPORTS (July 10, 2024), <https://sports.yahoo.com/oregon-football-unlimited-nil-backing-203209065.html>.

<sup>89</sup> Tyson Alger, *How Oregon and Nike Teamed Up to Change College Football*

Ducks have reached the College Football Playoffs twice, competed for a national title in 2014, and consistently finishes near the top of the rankings.<sup>90</sup>

Oregon also brings strategic market value. Oregon delivers access to the Pacific Northwest, including Portland and Seattle, and carries minimal political baggage as the flagship public university in its state.<sup>91</sup>

The Big Ten's decision to invite Oregon while excluding Oregon State signals Oregon's institutional strength and political viability in a super league model.<sup>92</sup> With strong performance, a nationally recognized brand, a deep investment in football, and little political risk, Oregon presents an exceptional case for super league inclusion.

### Penn State

Penn State brings tradition, geographic value, and institutional stability to any super league model. As the flagship public university in Pennsylvania, it commands overwhelming in-state support and operates without the political complications that often arise in states with multiple major programs.<sup>93</sup> The school also offers a rare foothold in the Northeast, a region with limited high-level college football representation but significant population density and television reach.<sup>94</sup>

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*Uniforms Forever*, THE ATHLETIC (Apr. 30, 2020), <https://www.nytimes.com/athletic/1782676/2020/04/30/oregon-football-uniforms-nike-design-1999/>.

<sup>90</sup> See *FBS Football Championship History*, *supra* note 40.

<sup>91</sup> See Rittenberg, *supra* note 4 (explaining that the Big 10's decision to add Oregon and Washington was partially motivated by the potential expansion into Pacific Northwest television markets).

<sup>92</sup> Kyle Bonagura, *Oregon State, Washington State Settle with Departing Pac-12 Schools*, ESPN (Dec. 21, 2023), [https://www.espn.com/college-football/story/\\_/id/39164107/oregon-state-washington-state-settle-departing-pac-12-schools](https://www.espn.com/college-football/story/_/id/39164107/oregon-state-washington-state-settle-departing-pac-12-schools) (Oregon State officials publicly criticized Oregon's departure and ultimately filed a lawsuit against the departing Pac-12 members, which was quickly settled. The episode underscores Oregon's elevated institutional standing and influence within the state hierarchy).

<sup>93</sup> See 2024 FBS Attendance Trends, *supra* note 64.

Penn State continues to compete at a high level and ranks among the most respected programs in the sport. The Nittany Lions consistently draw strong viewership, fill one of the nation's largest stadiums, and maintain a national brand built on decades of relevance.<sup>95</sup> Its combination of fan support, market reach, and institutional clarity makes it one of the Big Ten's most obvious choices for a super league.

#### University of Southern California (USC)

USC brings brand strength, market access, and historical significance to the super league model. The Trojans are one of the most tradition-rich programs in college football, with multiple national championships and decades of national relevance.<sup>96</sup> Located in Los Angeles, USC provides access to the largest media market in the country and serves as a flagship brand for the West Coast.<sup>97</sup>

The university also offers institutional advantages. As a private university, USC faces fewer political constraints and operates with greater agility than many of its public counterparts. The program continues to draw national interest, produces elite talent, and commands a loyal fan base that extends well beyond Southern California.<sup>98</sup> With legacy value, market dominance, and governance simplicity, USC is a clear inclusion in any serious super league model.

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<sup>94</sup> See Bill Connelly, *What Happened to College Football in the Northeast?*, ESPN (Aug. 25, 2022), [https://www.espn.com/college-football/story/\\_/id/34301978/what-happened-college-football-northeast](https://www.espn.com/college-football/story/_/id/34301978/what-happened-college-football-northeast); see also *NBA Market Size Rankings (2023): What Are the Biggest TV Markets in the U.S.?*, SPORTS MEDIA WATCH (July 12, 2023), <https://www.sportsmediawatch.com/nba-market-size-nfl-mlb-nhl-nielsen-ratings/>.

<sup>95</sup> See 2024 FBS Attendance Trends, *supra* note 64; See also Crawford, *supra* note 55.

<sup>96</sup> See *FBS Football Championship History*, *supra* note 40.

<sup>97</sup> See Sports Media Watch, *supra* note 70.

<sup>98</sup> See Crawford, *supra* note 55.

*Other Locks*

*Programs in this section: Clemson, Florida State, Miami, and Notre Dame.*

While most of the clear-cut super league candidates come from the SEC or Big Ten, a super league will include a few schools from outside of the “power two.” These schools continue to influence their current leagues, secure favorable treatment, and attract interest as potential targets in future SEC or Big Ten expansions.<sup>99</sup> Their brand strength, competitive success, and strategic value make them a “lock” to land a spot in any super league model.

*Clemson*

Clemson’s recent dominance secures its place in any super league model. The Tigers won national championships in 2016 and 2018, appeared in six College Football Playoffs, and remain a consistent national contender.<sup>100</sup> Sustained investment in coaching, recruiting, and facilities have propelled the program into the sport’s upper tier. Clemson operates with the scale and intensity of an SEC program, despite playing outside the conference.<sup>101</sup>

While southern programs already occupy a strong presence in the super league landscape, Clemson helps preserve traditional rivalries and reinforces the regional identity that defines much of college football. The program offers strong brand value, national visibility, and continued relevance in a consolidated landscape.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Brad Crawford, *College Football Realignment: Projecting Where FSU, Clemson, UNC and Others Land if ACC Collapses*, 247SPORTS (Mar. 23, 2024), <https://247sports.com/longformarticle/college-football-realignment-projecting-where-fsu-clemson-unc-and-others-land-if-acc-collapses-228982260/#2389866>.

<sup>100</sup> See *FBS Football Championship History*, *supra* note 40.

<sup>101</sup> See Blake Toppmeyer, *Why SEC Expansion to Add Clemson Might Not Sit Well with South Carolina (or Steve Spurrier)*, USA TODAY (July 13, 2022), <https://www.usatoday.com/story/sports/ncaaf/sec/2022/07/13/clemson-football-sec-expansion-steve-spurrier-south-carolina-florida-duke/10045825002/>.

<sup>102</sup> Zach Miller, *Which College Football Programs Were Most-Watched in*

Excluding South Carolina could trigger political tension, but Clemson's decade-long dominance on the field will secure its spot in a super league.<sup>103</sup>

### Florida State

Florida State brings national brand power, consistent football relevance, and geographic value to the super league model. The Seminoles won a national championship in 2013 and completed an undefeated regular season in 2023.<sup>104</sup> The program remains one of the sport's most recognizable brands and consistently attracts strong viewership.<sup>105</sup>

Florida State also offers significant strategic value. As a major public university in a state where college football holds significant importance, the school provides access to the Florida market and helps preserve traditional rivalries in the Southeast.<sup>106</sup> Because Florida is also a lock for inclusion, Florida State's addition would not raise the same political concerns that could arise in other states.

Recent moves to exit the ACC's grant of rights arrangement reflect the school's ambition and legal preparedness for a broader shift in college football's structure.<sup>107</sup> With high-level performance,

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2024?, MEDIUM (Dec. 5, 2024), <https://medium.com/run-it-back-with-zach/which-college-football-programs-were-most-watched-in-2024-6596e696ebaf>.

<sup>103</sup> This paper assumes South Carolina will also merit inclusion based on its institutional backing, political importance, and consistent media value.

<sup>104</sup> See *FBS Football Championship History*, *supra* note 40.

<sup>105</sup> See Crawford, *supra* note 55.

<sup>106</sup> Jim Henry, *Florida State Featured in Two Most-Watched ACC Football Games in 2024*, TALLAHASSEE DEMOCRAT (Dec. 18, 2024), <https://www.tallahassee.com/story/sports/college/fsu/2024/12/18/florida-state-featured-in-two-most-watched-acc-football-games-in-2024-fsu-ratings/77061650007/> (showing that Florida State still ranked near the top of the ACC in viewership per game in 2024 despite a historically bad season).

<sup>107</sup> *ACC, Clemson and Florida State Settle Litigation*, REUTERS (Mar. 4, 2025), <https://www.reuters.com/sports/acc-clemson-florida-state-settle-litigation-2025-03-04/#:~:text=The%20settlement%20keeps%20the%20ACC's,litigation%20from%20the%20two%20universities>.

brand recognition, and institutional momentum, Florida State stands as one of the strongest non-power two candidates for inclusion.

### Miami

Miami offers a powerful combination of brand strength, tradition, and media reach. “The U” remains one of the most iconic brands in college football, built on a legacy of dominance in the 1980s and early 2000s.<sup>108</sup> While on-field results have fluctuated in recent years, the program draws national attention and holds strong cultural relevance across generations of fans.<sup>109</sup>

Miami’s location in one of the largest media markets in the country adds significant strategic value.<sup>110</sup> Miami is also a private institution with fewer political constraints than some of its peers that rely on government funding.<sup>111</sup>

The Hurricanes consistently show a strong willingness to invest heavily in acquiring talent, reflecting a clear, top-level commitment to on-field success.<sup>112</sup> With institutional flexibility, brand power, and major market appeal, Miami is a natural fit for any super league model.

### Notre Dame

Notre Dame stands as one of the strongest locks for super league inclusion. The program combines unmatched brand power with deep tradition, on-field success, and national influence. Its long-standing television deal with NBC highlights the school’s unique media value, and its independent status has never

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<sup>108</sup> See Crawford, *supra* note 55.

<sup>109</sup> See Miller, *supra* note 102.

<sup>110</sup> See TV Market Size Rankings (2023), *supra* note 94.

<sup>111</sup> *Welcome to the University of Miami*, Univ. of Miami (last visited Apr. 10, 2025), <https://welcome.miami.edu/>.

<sup>112</sup> See Kenneth Teape, *Miami Hurricanes Landed Star Quarterback Transfer with Massive NIL Package*, SPORTS ILLUSTRATED (Jan. 10, 2025), <https://www.si.com/fannation/name-image-likeness/nl-news/miami-hurricanes-landed-star-quarterback-transfer-with-massive-nil-package>.

diminished its relevance.<sup>113</sup>

The school also wields significant political influence within college athletics.<sup>114</sup> Its status as an independent did not prevent it from securing an automatic bid structure under the College Football Playoff, a concession that reflects Notre Dame's institutional power.<sup>115</sup> With national reach, financial strength, and competitive credibility, Notre Dame belongs at the center of any future super league model.

*Table 1: The Locks*

Alabama	SEC
Florida	SEC
Georgia	SEC
LSU	SEC
Oklahoma	SEC
Tennessee	SEC
Texas	SEC
Texas A&M	SEC

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<sup>113</sup> See Observer Sports Staff, *Notre Dame Extends TV Contract with NBC Through 2029*, THE OBSERVER (Nov. 19, 2023), <https://www.ndsmcobserver.com/article/2023/11/notre-dame-extends-tv-contract-with-nbc-through-2029>.

<sup>114</sup> See Trent Moore, *How Notre Dame Became a National Football Brand*, NBC (Sept. 3, 2024), <https://www.nbc.com/nbc-insider/how-notre-dame-became-a-national-football-brand>.

<sup>115</sup> Tim Prister, *Jack Swarbrick and His Role in Constructing the 12-Team Playoff Format*, 247SPORTS (Dec. 10, 2024), <https://247sports.com/college/notre-dame/article/ex-notre-dame-vice-president-director-of-athletics-jack-swarbrick-looks-back-on-process-of-expanding-college-post-season-241780185/>.

Michigan	Big 10
Ohio State	Big 10
Oregon	Big 10
Penn State	Big 10
USC	Big 10
Clemson	ACC
Florida State	ACC
Miami	ACC
Notre Dame	Independent

### III. LIKELY INCLUSIONS

Not every program presents a clear-cut case for inclusion. A substantial number of schools fall into the “bubble zone,” programs that satisfy some of the inclusion criteria but not all.

These schools vary widely in profile and value. Some deliver competitive success but operate in smaller markets. Others offer strong brands but lack recent on-field performance. Their strengths and weaknesses cut across multiple categories, which makes their evaluation uniquely subjective.

While these programs may not satisfy every inclusion criterion, they meet enough to justify their place. They offer greater overall value and significance to college football than other fringe candidates, making their inclusion appropriate.

*SEC “Likely Included” Schools*

*Programs in this section: Arkansas, Auburn, Kentucky, Ole Miss, Missouri, and South Carolina.*

While the SEC dominates the list of super league locks, several additional members from the conference make compelling cases for inclusion. These programs fall just short of the elite tier but bring significant institutional value. Each delivers some combination of football tradition, market reach, fan support, or financial commitment. These schools benefit from their SEC affiliation, a brand that will likely anchor any future super league model. Their inclusion helps preserve regional rivalries, protect valuable media markets, and reinforce the cultural foundations of college football’s strongest conference.

### Arkansas

Arkansas is a defensible inclusion in any super league model. As the flagship public university and the only Power Four program in the state, Arkansas avoids the political entanglements that could arise from leaving behind an in-state rival. The program enjoys strong support from its fan base, a deep connection to state identity, and an athletic department willing to spend.<sup>116</sup> If excluded, Arkansas would likely mount serious political and institutional pushback.<sup>117</sup>

The program’s football success has been sporadic, but its leadership continues to invest heavily in facilities, coaching, and player support.<sup>118</sup> Arkansas remains committed to competing at the highest level.<sup>119</sup> Its historical ties to the SEC, financial resources,

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<sup>116</sup> See 2024 FBS Attendance Trends, *supra* note 64.

<sup>117</sup> See Katherine A. Deck, *The Economic Impact of the University of Arkansas*, Ctr. for Bus. & Econ. Research, SAMM. WALTON COLL. OF BUS. J. (Oct. 2012),

<https://scholarworks.uark.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1013&context=cberp> (estimating that the University of Arkansas contributes over \$3 billion annually to the state economy, some of which is directly tied to the football program).

<sup>118</sup> See NCAA Finances, *supra* note 39.

and stable governance structure give it a strong case for inclusion despite limited recent on-field performance.

### Auburn

Auburn is too politically and culturally entrenched in college football to be excluded quietly. The program commands enormous statewide support, possesses deep financial resources, and maintains one of the SEC's most loyal and engaged fan bases.<sup>120</sup> Its political connections are also notable. Senator Tommy Tuberville, a former Auburn head coach, exemplifies the type of influence that would respond to exclusion.<sup>121</sup> Any attempt to leave Auburn out would trigger a swift and highly public response from stakeholders at every level.

Despite these advantages, Auburn does not qualify as a lock. The program owns multiple national championships but its recent performance has fallen well below elite standards. Auburn cycles through head coaches at a staggering rate.<sup>122</sup> Despite its resources, Auburn has struggled to compete in the SEC in the modern NIL and transfer portal era.<sup>123</sup> Still, Auburn's brand strength, financial investment, and political leverage make it one of the strongest candidates among the bubble schools.

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<sup>119</sup> See Brad Crawford, *College Sports' Top Donors: Ranking the Most Generous Athletics Boosters*, 247SPORTS (Aug. 29, 2023), <https://247sports.com/college/arkansas/longformarticle/college-sports-top-donors-ranking-the-most-generous-athletics-boosters-214986422/>.

<sup>120</sup> See Miller, *supra* note 102; see 2024 FBS Attendance Trends, *supra* note 64.

<sup>121</sup> Thomas Tuberville, U.S. Senate, <https://www.senate.gov/senators/117thCongress/tuberville-thomas.htm> (last visited Apr. 11, 2025).

<sup>122</sup> *Football Coaching History*, Auburn Tigers, <https://auburntigers.com/football-coaching-history> (last visited Apr. 11, 2025) (listing nine head coaching changes since 1998, including multiple short-term tenures in recent years).

<sup>123</sup> *College Football Win Trends – All Games Since 2020*, TEAMRANKINGS, [https://www.teamrankings.com/ncf/trends/win\\_trends/?range=yearly\\_since\\_2020](https://www.teamrankings.com/ncf/trends/win_trends/?range=yearly_since_2020) (last visited Apr. 11, 2025)) (showing that Auburn is 28-33 since 2020).

## Kentucky

Kentucky presents a deceptively strong case for inclusion in a future super league. The university serves as the flagship public institution in a state with a strong cultural emphasis on football and maintains deep cultural and political influence.<sup>124</sup> The Wildcats ranked among the ten most-watched programs in college football during the 2024 season, an indication of its national visibility and strong SEC brand association.<sup>125</sup> Kentucky also ranks in the top twenty for program valuation and regularly generates athletic department revenue exceeding \$150 million.<sup>126</sup>

On the field, Kentucky remains inconsistent. The program continues to fall short of sustaining high-level success.<sup>127</sup> Even so, excluding Kentucky would likely trigger political and institutional pushback, especially given its status as the state's primary public university.<sup>128</sup> Its financial profile, fan support, and national media visibility make it one of the more defensible bubble school inclusions.

## Ole Miss

Ole Miss presents a compelling case for super league inclusion based on brand strength, football investment, and recent performance. As the flagship public university in Mississippi, the school benefits from political strength and a loyal statewide fan base. Its historical ties to the SEC and deep cultural relevance in the South strengthen its brand value.<sup>129</sup> In the NIL era, Ole Miss

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<sup>124</sup> See Josh Moore, *Kentucky Football's Value to the State? Even Governor Says It's Huge*, LEXINGTON HERALD LEDGER (Apr. 4, 2020), <https://www.kentucky.com/sports/college/kentucky-sports/uk-football/article241694596.html> (reporting that Kentucky state officials warned a lost football season would significantly harm the state's economy).

<sup>125</sup> See Parks, *supra* note 44.

<sup>126</sup> See NCAA Finances, *supra* note 39.

<sup>127</sup> *College Football Win Trends – All Games Since 2015*, TEAMRANKINGS, [https://www.teamrankings.com/ncf/trends/win\\_trends/?range=yearly\\_since\\_2015](https://www.teamrankings.com/ncf/trends/win_trends/?range=yearly_since_2015) (last visited Apr. 11, 2025) (showing that Kentucky won approximately 55 percent of its games since 2015).

<sup>128</sup> See Moore, *supra* note 124.

consistently fields one of the most competitive rosters in the conference.<sup>130</sup>

The program does not have a long tradition of national success but recent performance reflects a program on the rise.<sup>131</sup> A super league model will likely prioritize recent and projected success in a pay-for-play era over championships or prestige rooted in the distant past.

The greatest obstacle to including Ole Miss is the likely exclusion of Mississippi State, its in-state rival and fellow public university. That scenario could trigger political backlash and broader institutional pushback within the state.<sup>132</sup> Even so, Ole Miss presents a strong profile across the key inclusion criteria and deserves serious consideration for a place in a future super league.

### Missouri

Missouri sits in a complex but promising position. The university brings valuable geographic reach by connecting the Midwest and Southeast. It also offers access to the Saint Louis and Kansas City media markets.<sup>133</sup>

As the flagship public institution in a state with no other

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<sup>129</sup> See *College Football Gamedays at the University of Mississippi*, VISIT MISSISSIPPI, <https://visitmississippi.org/experiences/college-football-gamedays-university-of-mississippi/> (last visited Apr. 11, 2025) (describing gameday in Oxford as a quintessential Southern football experience).

<sup>130</sup> See Mark Schlabach, *Ole Miss Rebels Coach Lane Kiffin Declares Himself 'Portal King'*, ESPN (Jan. 31, 2022), [https://www.espn.com/college-football/story/\\_/id/33186932/ole-miss-rebels-coach-lane-kiffin-declares-portal-king](https://www.espn.com/college-football/story/_/id/33186932/ole-miss-rebels-coach-lane-kiffin-declares-portal-king).

<sup>131</sup> Kevin Skiver, *Lane Kiffin, Ole Miss Reach 11 Wins After Peach Bowl Victory over Penn State*, CLARION LEDGER (Dec. 30, 2023), <https://www.clarionledger.com/story/sports/college/ole-miss/2023/12/30/ole-miss-football-11-win-season-lane-kiffin-schedule-peach-bowl-win-penn-state/72067427007/> (Ole Miss won ten games or more in 2021, 2023, and 2024).

<sup>132</sup> See Noah McCord, *NIL and Its Future at Mississippi State*, THE REFLECTOR (Nov. 5, 2024), <https://reflector-online.com/31562/sports/mccord-nil-and-its-future-at-mississippi-state/> (demonstrating how Mississippi State is far behind Ole Miss in NIL and other changes in college athletics).

<sup>133</sup> See TV Market Size Rankings (2023), *supra* note 94.

Power Four programs, Missouri faces no internal political complications. Lawmakers in the state took direct action to improve Missouri's NIL position, further illustrating the university's political support and strategic alignment with the evolving college football landscape.<sup>134</sup>

Although Missouri lacks a rich history of football success, the program has recently improved its on-field results and is a legitimate contender in the SEC.<sup>135</sup> Missouri ramped up its investment in NIL operations and demonstrated a clear institutional commitment to football.<sup>136</sup> The school may not carry the same brand recognition as some SEC peers, but its political simplicity, regional value, and competitive momentum support a strong case for inclusion.

### South Carolina

South Carolina's inclusion in a future super league would promote political and institutional stability within a sensitive region. As the flagship public university in South Carolina, the school maintains strong ties to the state government and a well-organized alumni and donor network.<sup>137</sup> The university's governance structure and statewide visibility make it a legally riskier program to leave out than its recent win-loss record might suggest.<sup>138</sup> ~~Excluding South Carolina while including most other~~

<sup>134</sup> Dennis Dodd, *Missouri State Law, University's Progressive NIL Approach Gives Mizzou Advantage Amid Evolving Landscape*, CBS SPORTS (May 2, 2024), <https://www.cbssports.com/college-football/news/missouri-state-law-universitys-progressive-nil-approach-gives-mizzou-advantage-amid-evolving-landscape/>.

<sup>135</sup> *Id.*

<sup>136</sup> *Id.*

<sup>137</sup> See Griffin Goodwynn, *More Than Just a Football Game: How the South Carolina-Clemson Rivalry Began*, THE DAILY GAMECOCK (Nov. 15, 2014), <https://www.dailygamecock.com/article/2024/11/more-than-just-a-football-game-how-south-carolina-clemson-rivalry-began-sports-news-goodwyn> (describing the political roots of South Carolina's flagship football rivalry and its influence on state institutional alignment).

<sup>138</sup> See Miller, *supra* note 102; see also 2024 FBS Attendance Trends, *supra* note 64 (showing South Carolina was top 20 in most viewed teams and was top

regional schools could trigger political backlash and potential legal action from state officials.

While the football program lacks consistent elite performance, South Carolina is still often competitive on the field and certainly offers important structural value to a super league model. It competes in the SEC, generates high revenue, and helps preserve key regional rivalries.<sup>139</sup> Including South Carolina would reinforce the super league's regional integrity and reduce the likelihood of legislative or institutional challenges from a program that is likely to challenge its exclusion.

### *Big 10's "Likely Included" Schools*

*Programs in this section: Iowa, Michigan State, Nebraska, Washington, and Wisconsin.*

#### Iowa

Iowa presents a strong structural profile that supports its case for super league inclusion. As the flagship public university in the state, Iowa carries clear political authority and broad fan support.<sup>140</sup> The program ranks in the top twenty-five nationally in both athletic department revenue and overall program valuation.<sup>141</sup> It also benefits from a loyal fan base, a stable administrative structure, and a long-standing affiliation with the Big Ten.

On the field, Iowa consistently performs at a competitive level, even if it rarely contends for national championships.<sup>142</sup> Iowa clearly meets most of the necessary criteria for super league

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fifteen in attendance in 2024).

<sup>139</sup> See *NCAA Finances*, *supra* note 39.

<sup>140</sup> *About the University of Iowa*, University of Iowa, <https://uiowa.edu/about-iowa> (last visited Apr. 11, 2025) (describing the university as the state's oldest public institution and flagship university with statewide influence).

<sup>141</sup> See *NCAA Finances*, *supra* note 39; Ozanian, *supra* note 43.

<sup>142</sup> See *TeamRankings*, *supra* note 127 (showing that only ten Power Four teams have a better winning percentage than Iowa since 2015).

inclusion but a complication could arise from the fact that the Iowa Board of Regents governs both Iowa and Iowa State.<sup>143</sup> Including one program while excluding the other may invite political scrutiny or resistance from within the state.

Despite that risk, Iowa's position remains strong. The program's brand strength, marketability, and competitiveness on the field make it a likely inclusion.<sup>144</sup> These advantages, along with institutional clarity and statewide support, make Iowa's super league inclusion likely.

### Michigan State

Michigan State presents a compelling case based on financial strength and institutional scale. The program ranks twelfth nationally in athletic department revenue and holds a top twenty-five overall valuation.<sup>145</sup> As a large public university with a substantial alumni base, Michigan State brings broad market appeal and strong brand recognition.<sup>146</sup> Its affiliation with the Big Ten adds further credibility to the school's competitive value. Michigan's position as a consensus super league lock may also help Michigan State by reinforcing the importance of maintaining marquee rivalries and in-state balance.

The main challenge for Michigan State stems from inconsistent on-field success. Although the program has delivered strong seasons in the past, it does win at a consistently high level.<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> See Randy Peterson, *Iowa Board of Regents Monitors Iowa State's Situation Amid Conference Realignment*, DES MOINES REG. (July 27, 2021), <https://www.desmoinesregister.com/story/sports/2021/07/27/iowa-board-regents-iowa-state-big-12-conference-realignment-jamie-pollard-ad-texas-oklahoma-sec-ou/5386974001/>.

<sup>144</sup> See Ozanian, *supra* note 43.

<sup>145</sup> See *NCAA Finances*, *supra* note 39; Ozanian, *supra* note 43.

<sup>146</sup> Lyss Welding, *The 50 Largest Colleges and Universities in the United States*, BESTCOLLEGES (May 21, 2024), <https://www.bestcolleges.com/research/largest-colleges-universities-in-united-states/> (noting that Michigan State enrolls more than 50,000 students).

<sup>147</sup> *College Football Win Trends – All Games Since 2019*, TEAMRANKINGS, [https://www.teamrankings.com/ncf/trends/win\\_trends/?range=yearly\\_since\\_2019](https://www.teamrankings.com/ncf/trends/win_trends/?range=yearly_since_2019) (last visited May 1, 2025). (showing that Michigan State's winning percentage

Other Big Ten bubble schools offer similar structural value but stronger football records.<sup>148</sup> Even so, Michigan State's marketability, financial profile, and institutional stature give it a favorable position in a limited-seat super league model.

### Nebraska

Nebraska continues to struggle to compete for championships in the 21st century, but the program still ranks among the most recognizable brands in college football.<sup>149</sup> The Cornhuskers dominated the 1990s, winning three national championships and building a legacy that still resonates with fans and media partners.<sup>150</sup> That historical success continues to drive national relevance despite recent performance.

The program brings unique structural advantages. Nebraska faces no in-state or professional competition and commands near universal fan support across the state.<sup>151</sup> Nebraska consistently ranks among national leaders in attendance despite on-field struggles and benefits from a deeply loyal, multi-generational fan base.<sup>152</sup> The Cornhuskers' stability, branding, and political simplicity give them a legitimate claim to inclusion, even if competitive results must eventually catch up.

### Washington

Washington enters the super league discussion with recent

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is 49% since 2019).

<sup>148</sup> *Id.*

<sup>149</sup> See Ozanian, *supra* note 43.

<sup>150</sup> SI Staff, *1997 Nebraska Cornhuskers: A Team of Destiny*, SPORTS ILLUSTRATED (Aug. 23, 2012), <https://www.si.com/college/2012/08/23/nebraska-1997>.

<sup>151</sup> See Dan Murphy, *Nebraska Fans Hope This Really Is Rock Bottom*, ESPN (Sept. 24, 2018), [https://www.espn.com/college-football/story/\\_/id/24784575/nebraska-cornhuskers-fans-hope-really-bottom](https://www.espn.com/college-football/story/_/id/24784575/nebraska-cornhuskers-fans-hope-really-bottom) (highlighting Nebraska's reputation for having one of the most loyal fan bases in college football).

<sup>152</sup> *Id.*

success, a strategic geographic location, and institutional stability. The Huskies have appeared in the College Football Playoff twice, including a national title game appearance in 2023, and continue to compete at a nationally relevant level.<sup>153</sup> The program draws strong viewership and maintains competitive credibility on the national stage.<sup>154</sup>

Washington brings important strategic advantages beyond the field. As the flagship public university in Washington, it holds dominant in-state influence and provides access to the Seattle/Pacific-Northwest media markets.<sup>155</sup>

When the Big Ten added Washington and left Washington State behind, some state officials initially objected and Washington State pursued legal action.<sup>156</sup> Washington resolved the dispute through a settlement and still moved forward with the transition, demonstrating its political leverage and institutional strength within the state.<sup>157</sup> While Washington falls just short of the top tier due to less consistent historical dominance, its market value, administrative clarity, and competitive relevance place it firmly among the strongest candidates just outside the initial super league core.

### Wisconsin

Wisconsin presents a structurally clean and financially strong case for super league inclusion. As the only major college football program in the state, the Badgers control the entire Wisconsin

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<sup>153</sup> See *FBS Football Championship History*, *supra* note 34.

<sup>154</sup> Zach Miller, *Which College Football Programs Were Most Watched in 2024?*, MEDIUM (Dec. 5, 2024), <https://medium.com/run-it-back-with-zach/which-college-football-programs-were-most-watched-in-2024-6596e696ebaf>.

<sup>155</sup> Ben Portnoy, *A Week Across Washington: Inside the Huskies' Push to the Big Ten and a Bigger Football Future*, SPORTS BUS. J. (Sept. 27, 2024), <https://www.sportsbusinessjournal.com/Articles/2024/09/30/a-week-across-washington/> (describing Washington's status as the state's flagship university and its institutional positioning for national football prominence).

<sup>156</sup> See Bonagura, *supra* note 92.

<sup>157</sup> *Id.*

market and benefit from overwhelming in-state support.<sup>158</sup> That exclusive hold on the state's fan base boosts the program's brand, streamlines governance, and avoids the political complications that often emerge in states with competing public universities.<sup>159</sup>

While the program has not reached the same national heights as some of its peers, Wisconsin maintains a strong tradition of success, routinely finishes in the top twenty-five of college football rankings and fields a consistently competitive team.<sup>160</sup> Its athletic department is among the most valuable in the country, ranking in the top fifteen most recent program valuations.<sup>161</sup> With a unified market presence, on-field competitiveness, and institutional strength, Wisconsin makes a compelling case for inclusion.

#### *Other "Likely Included" Schools*

*Programs in this section: BYU, Colorado, North Carolina, and Utah.*

#### Brigham Young University (BYU)

BYU offers a unique institutional profile that strengthens its case for super league inclusion. The school operates independently of state governance, which limits political complications.

As a private university with national brand recognition and deep ties to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, BYU commands one of the most loyal and widespread fan bases in college

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<sup>158</sup> Ian Boyd, *Power Ranking College Football's Recruiting Monopolies*, FOOTBALL STUDY HALL (June 27, 2019), <https://www.footballstudyhall.com/2019/6/27/18761101/power-ranking-college-footballs-recruiting-monopolies-ohio-state-lsu-wisconsin-penn-state-oklahoma> (highlighting Wisconsin's advantage as the only FBS program in the state).

<sup>159</sup> *Id.*

<sup>160</sup> *College Football Win Trends – All Games Since 2010*, TEAMRANKINGS, [https://www.teamrankings.com/ncf/trends/win\\_trends/?range=yearly\\_since\\_2010](https://www.teamrankings.com/ncf/trends/win_trends/?range=yearly_since_2010) (last visited Apr. 10, 2025) (showing that Wisconsin has the tenth-best record among Power Four teams since 2010).

<sup>161</sup> See Ozanian, *supra* note 43.

football.<sup>162</sup> The university brings access to the Mountain West market and a sizable alumni network, giving it solid media value for a program outside the power two conferences.<sup>163</sup>

BYU continues to maintain national relevance by winning consistently and building a strong football identity, even without regular appearances in the national title picture. The team regularly posts winning seasons, generates strong attendance, and performs well in viewership metrics.<sup>164</sup> BYU's institutional clarity, geographic reach, and brand stability make it one of the strongest non-Power Two candidates for super league inclusion.

### Colorado

Colorado brings structural advantages that strengthen its candidacy for super league inclusion. As the flagship public university in the state, it carries political authority and faces no power conference in-state competition.<sup>165</sup> University leadership recently committed major resources to football and signaled a willingness to embrace innovation.<sup>166</sup> That forward-facing posture aligns with the commercial demands of a super league model.

Coach Deion Sanders catapulted the program into the national spotlight, driving viewership numbers that placed Colorado among the ten most-watched teams in 2024.<sup>167</sup> The school leveraged that

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<sup>162</sup> See Jeff Fuller, *BYU's Widespread Fan Base, Religious Ties Help Bolster Media Value*, ESPN THE FAN (Sept. 6, 2023), <https://espnthefan.com/news/byus-widespread-fan-base-religious-ties-help-bolster-media-value/>.

<sup>163</sup> *Id.*

<sup>164</sup> See TeamRankings, *supra* note 147 (showing that BYU won 68% of games since 2019); see also *2024 FBS Attendance Trends*, *supra* note 64 (showing BYU is in the top 25 in attendance for 2024).

<sup>165</sup> *About CU Boulder*, UNIV. OF COLO. BOULDER, <https://www.colorado.edu/about> (last visited Apr. 11, 2025).

<sup>166</sup> See Claire Boyer, *Colorado Makes Major Change to NIL Collective Amid Shifting NCAA Rules*, SPORTS ILLUSTRATED (Jan. 14, 2025), <https://www.si.com/fannation/name-image-likeness/nil-news/colorado-makes-major-change-to-nil-collective-amid-shifting-ncaa-rules>.

<sup>167</sup> See Miller, *supra* note 102 (showing that Colorado was the ninth most watched team in the country in 2024).

attention into increased brand recognition and recruiting momentum.<sup>168</sup> The university can solidify a long-term place in the super league conversation by retaining Sanders or, better yet, by sustaining fan interest and competitive relevance after his tenure ends.

### North Carolina

North Carolina enters the super league conversation as one of the strongest academic and athletic brands in the country.<sup>169</sup> The school commands national recognition, deep alumni support, and a large fan base.<sup>170</sup> Both the SEC and Big Ten have reportedly pursued North Carolina as a realignment target, which signals its value to any future media deal.<sup>171</sup> The addition of legendary Coach Bill Belichick to the football program further elevated the program's profile.<sup>172</sup> Early projections suggest the Tar Heels will rank among the most-watched teams during the upcoming season.<sup>173</sup>

Despite its brand strength, North Carolina remains on the bubble because of inconsistent on-field performance in recent years.

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<sup>168</sup> Adam Gorney, *Deion Sanders' Recruiting Strategy Still Under the Microscope*, RIVALS (Feb. 20, 2025), <https://n.rivals.com/news/deion-sanders-unique-recruiting-approach-is-still-getting-results> (highlighting Colorado's successful recruitment of top-tier talent under Deion Sanders, including flipping five-star quarterback Julian Lewis from USC and securing commitments from other high-profile recruits, thereby enhancing the program's national profile and recruiting momentum).

<sup>169</sup> See Crawford, *supra* note 55 (ranking North Carolina as the fourteenth biggest brand in college football).

<sup>170</sup> *Id.*

<sup>171</sup> James Parks, *North Carolina a Major Target for SEC, Big Ten as College Football Realignment Heats Up*, SPORTS ILLUSTRATED (Mar. 1, 2024), <https://www.si.com/fannation/college/cfb-hq/ncaa-football/college-football-realignment-expansion-north-carolina-sec-big-ten-target>.

<sup>172</sup> Bill Connelly, *College Football 2025: The Most Interesting Teams This Spring*, ESPN (Apr. 3, 2025), [https://www.espn.com/college-football/insider/story/\\_/id/44506529/college-football-2025-most-interesting-teams-spring](https://www.espn.com/college-football/insider/story/_/id/44506529/college-football-2025-most-interesting-teams-spring).

<sup>173</sup> *Id.*

<sup>174</sup> The university also faces potential complications if excluded in-state rivals challenge its participation. North Carolina State, Wake Forest, and Duke hold meaningful political and athletic standing within the state, and their exclusion could trigger backlash. Still, North Carolina's marketability, institutional strength, and appeal to media partners give it a significant edge.

### Utah

Utah earns a super league spot through its consistent on-field success and strategic market value. Utah has won nearly 60% of its games since 2022 and ranks fifteenth in winning percentage among Power Four teams since 2015.<sup>175</sup> The program consistently performs at a high level, appearing in major bowl games and regularly competing for conference championships.<sup>176</sup> Utah also attracts a substantial national audience, ranking thirty-first in average viewership over the past three seasons, ahead of many other bubble programs.<sup>177</sup>

Utah strengthens the super league's competitive depth and adds value in a region that remains relatively underrepresented, complementing rather than duplicating existing market footprints.<sup>178</sup> Utah provides access to many large media markets in the western part of the country, particularly Salt Lake City. As the state's flagship public university, Utah offers political clarity, institutional stability, strong football investment, and market value, making it the strongest candidate for a super league slot.

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<sup>174</sup> See *TeamRankings*, *supra* note 125 (showing that North Carolina won 56% of since 2019).

<sup>175</sup> *College Football Win Trends – All Games Since 2022*, TEAMRANKINGS, [https://www.teamrankings.com/ncf/trends/win\\_trends/?range=yearly\\_since\\_2022](https://www.teamrankings.com/ncf/trends/win_trends/?range=yearly_since_2022) (last visited May 1, 2025).

<sup>176</sup> *Utah Bowl History*, SPORTS REFERENCE, <https://www.sports-reference.com/cfb/schools/utah/bowls.html> (last visited Apr. 14, 2025).

<sup>177</sup> See Miller, *supra* note 102.

<sup>178</sup> See Nielsen Media Research, *Nielsen Media 2023–2024 Local Market Estimates*, TVJOBS.COM, <https://www.tvjobs.com/cgi-bin/markets/market2.cgi> (listing Salt Lake City, Albuquerque, and Las Vegas among the top 50 U.S. media markets in the Mountain West region).

*Table 2: “Likely In” Bubble Schools*

Arkansas	SEC
Auburn	SEC
BYU	Big 12
Colorado	Big 12
Iowa	Big 10
Kentucky	SEC
Michigan State	Big 10
Missouri	SEC
Nebraska	Big 10
North Carolina	ACC
Ole Miss	SEC
South Carolina	SEC
Utah	Big 12
Washington	Big 10
Wisconsin	Big 10

#### IV. ON THE OUTSIDE LOOKING IN

The thirty-two programs identified as “locks” or “likely in” reflect the structure of the National Football League, which

operates with thirty-two franchises.<sup>179</sup> That number offers a natural benchmark for how a super league could balance scheduling, media value, and institutional influence. While some have predicted a model that includes most of the Power Four, a smaller breakaway by the true revenue generators appears far more realistic.<sup>180</sup> A narrower league more effectively aligns with the financial and competitive incentives driving realignment in the first place.<sup>181</sup>

Still, the line between inclusion and exclusion is far from clear. Many bubble programs, that are on the outside looking in, have strong arguments rooted in competitive success, institutional alignment, or political backing. Their omission would not be without consequence. Leaving them out could trigger political interference, legal challenges, and public scrutiny, especially in states where football carries deep cultural and financial importance.

To assess these schools, this section divides them into four categories based on their competitive profiles and the legal, institutional, and commercial issues they present: (A) Just Missed the Cut, (B) Next Tier Out, (C) Excluded Based on Institutional Alignment, and (D) Group of Five Longshots.

### *Just Missed the Cut*

*Programs in this section: Georgia Tech, Illinois, Iowa State, Kansas, Kansas State, Louisville, Maryland, Minnesota, NC State, Oklahoma State, Texas Tech, UCLA, and West Virginia.*

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<sup>179</sup> *NFL Teams*, NFL.COM, <https://www.nfl.com/teams/> (last visited Apr. 13, 2025).

<sup>180</sup> See Dennis Dodd, *As College Athletics Prepares for Revenue-Sharing Fallout, Leaders Wonder: Is a Breakaway from the NCAA Next?*, CBS SPORTS (Sept. 4, 2024), <https://www.cbssports.com/college-football/news/as-college-athletics-prepares-for-revenue-sharing-fallout-leaders-wonder-is-a-breakaway-from-the-ncaa-next/> (hypothesizing that the SEC and Big Ten could lead a breakaway from the NCAA, potentially incorporating select programs from other conferences).

<sup>181</sup> *Id.*

Each of these programs brings a compelling case for inclusion. They rank among the top fifty in television viewership per game and have won more than fifty percent of their games since 2022.<sup>182</sup> These metrics reflect sustained relevance, strong fan engagement, and a product that appeals to media partners.

Many of these schools offer access to major media markets or serve as flagship public institutions with broad support.<sup>183</sup> Their competitive consistency and institutional backing make them viable super league candidates. They will each receive serious consideration and could earn a spot in the league's initial formation.

Still, each program in this group falls short in at least one key category. For example, Texas Tech brings political power, institutional alignment, and financial backing, but lacks the on-field performance and viewership metrics necessary for immediate inclusion.<sup>184</sup> Maryland and Illinois are flagship public universities, yet they have not paired that status with consistent football success.<sup>185</sup> Georgia Tech, Minnesota, and UCLA benefit from large media markets, but fail to generate high-level national viewership.<sup>186</sup> Kansas State, Iowa State, and Oklahoma State, proven winning programs, draw smaller audiences than other consistent programs.<sup>187</sup>

Excluding these programs would carry institutional and cultural consequences. Many of these programs have strong regional ties and historical rivalries with included programs. Their absence would shrink the sport's national footprint and erode its claim to represent a broad swath of American higher education.

Politically, lawmakers and alumni in states where college

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<sup>182</sup> See Miller, *supra* note 102; See *TeamRankings*, *supra* note 175.

<sup>183</sup> See *TV Market Size Rankings* (2023), *supra* note 94.

<sup>184</sup> See Justin Williams, *Why Texas Tech Thinks It Can Be the 'Next Big Thing' in College Football*, THE ATHLETIC (Sept. 7, 2023), <https://theathletic.com/4822592/2023/09/07/texas-tech-football-realignment-nil/> (highlighting Texas Tech's institutional ambition, NIL investment, and strategic positioning for future realignment).

<sup>185</sup> See *Teamrankings*, *supra* note 127 (showing that Maryland and Illinois have won barely over 40% of their games since 2015).

<sup>186</sup> See Miller, *supra* note 102 (showing that these three programs are outside the top thirty in viewers per game from 2022-2024).

<sup>187</sup> *Id.*

football holds significant cultural and economic importance may view exclusion as an attack on public investment and tradition, prompting legislative inquiries or attempts to exert pressure on university leadership and media partners.<sup>188</sup> Disrupting top-tier football seasons could destabilize local economic ecosystems that rely on the revenue they generate.<sup>189</sup> While these programs may lack the immediate leverage to block a super league, their exclusion risks generating long-term political and reputational friction.

Ultimately, the decision on these programs underscores the complexity and tension at the heart of forming a super league. Each offers undeniable strengths, but the stringent criteria for inclusion will force decision-makers to make tough choices.

Their exclusion highlights the inherent trade-offs between tradition, competitive success, and market viability. As the landscape of college football shifts, stakeholders must weigh these competing factors carefully, recognizing that each decision shapes not only the structure of the league but the very identity of the sport itself.

At its core, the super league model prioritizes competitive quality and media value above all else. Its success depends on delivering high-stakes and nationally relevant matchups each week that consistently attract viewers and maximize broadcast revenue.

Programs that fall short in either viewership or on-field performance weaken that model and dilute the product. Including teams that cannot consistently compete at the highest level or draw a national audience undermines the very purpose of the league.

While the excluded programs bring historical and institutional value, the super league's viability depends on disciplined selectivity. Every slot must be justified not by sentiment but by the ability to contribute to a premium and commercially driven product. The programs in this section fall just short of the elite standard that is necessary to ensure inclusion.

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<sup>188</sup> See *supra* note 35 (reporting on Governor Morrissey's response to West Virginia's NCAA Tournament exclusion).

<sup>189</sup> See *Historic Ole Miss Football Crowds Generate \$325M Economic Impact*, UNIV. OF MISS. NEWS (Jan. 28, 2025), <https://olemiss.edu/news/2025/1/economic-impact-of-football/index.html>. (demonstrating the impact of high-level college football on local economies).

*Table 3: Just Missed the Cut*

Georgia Tech	ACC
Illinois	Big 10
Iowa State	Big 12
Kansas	Big 12
Kansas State	Big 12
Louisville	ACC
Maryland	Big 10
Minnesota	Big 10
NC State	ACC
Oklahoma State	Big 12
Texas Tech	Big 12
UCLA	Big 10
West Virginia	Big 12

## NEXT TIER OUT

*Programs in this section: Arizona, Arizona State, Baylor, Boston College, Cincinnati, Houston, Indiana, Mississippi State, Pittsburgh, Purdue, Rutgers, SMU, Syracuse, TCU, UCF, Virginia, Virginia Tech, Wake Forest.*

This group represents the next tier of programs that decision-makers could consider for a future college football super league if

they include a majority of Power Four schools. These programs lag behind the previous section in almost all of the important criteria.

Each of these schools either ranks outside the top fifty in college football in average television viewership per game from 2022-2024 or have a losing record during that same span.<sup>190</sup> Most fall short in both categories.<sup>191</sup> While on-field success naturally drives viewership, sustained underperformance signals a deeper issue.

Still, several of these programs maintain strong traditions and deliver competitive performances in stretches. For example, TCU reached the national title game just two seasons ago.<sup>192</sup> Others, like Arizona State and Indiana, reached the College Football Playoff in 2024.<sup>193</sup> Despite these achievements, this group falls short of the consistent performance and viewership metrics likely to drive initial inclusion in a condensed super league model. A super league will prioritize sustained competitiveness and long-term value over isolated success or short-term momentum.

Many of these programs struggled to adapt to the demands of the transfer portal and NIL era.<sup>194</sup> A super league will place a premium on programs that can attract talent, build depth quickly, and consistently compete on a national stage. Programs that lag in talent acquisition and fail to align institutionally on the necessary financial commitments to compete at the highest level make it harder to justify inclusion.

Another challenge for the programs in this group is their low television ratings, even though they are located in favorable media markets.<sup>195</sup> Programs like Boston College, Houston, Rutgers, SMU and Syracuse sit in or near major population centers, but they fail to convert that advantage into reliable game-to-game viewership.<sup>196</sup>

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<sup>190</sup> See *supra* note 182.

<sup>191</sup> *Id.*

<sup>192</sup> *College Football Playoff, supra* note 54.

<sup>193</sup> *Id.*

<sup>194</sup> See Nakos, *supra* note 61 (showing that none of these schools are in the “top fifteen collectives”).

<sup>195</sup> See Miller, *supra* note 102; See TV Market Size Rankings (2023), *supra* note 94.

<sup>196</sup> See *supra* note 102 (showing that from 2022 to 2024, Boston College,

For a media-driven product, market reach matters only if a program can convert its local market into a reliable viewing audience.

If the super league expands to include most Power Four programs, several of these schools could receive renewed consideration. Yet under a more selective model focused on recent performance, national visibility, and commercial strength, these programs do not meet the current threshold for inclusion.

*Table 4: Next Tier Out*

Arizona	Big 12
Arizona State	Big 12
Baylor	Big 12
Boston College	ACC
Cincinnati	Big 12
Houston	Big 12
Indiana	Big 12
Mississippi State	SEC
Pittsburgh	ACC
Purdue	Big 10
Rutgers	Big 10
SMU	ACC

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Houston, Rutgers, SMU, and Syracuse ranked on average 62nd, 68th, 51st, 76th, and 55th, respectively, in per-game viewership among all FBS programs).

Syracuse	ACC
TCU	Big 12
UCF	Big 12
Virginia	ACC
Virginia Tech	ACC
Wake Forest	ACC

*Excluded Based on Institutional Alignment*

*Programs in this section: California, Duke, Northwestern, Stanford, and Vanderbilt.*

These universities rank among the top five academically of all institutions that compete in the highest level of college football.<sup>197</sup> They prioritize educational excellence and research output, and that institutional identity often shapes their approach to athletics.<sup>198</sup> While they field competitive football programs, their core mission does not revolve around maximizing athletic revenue or commercializing sports to the same degree as other schools under serious super league consideration. It is difficult to imagine these programs drastically shifting their priorities to emphasize on-field success and media value over the student-athlete's comprehensive

<sup>197</sup> *National Universities Rankings*, U.S. NEWS & WORLD REPORT, [https://www.usnews.com/best-colleges/rankings/national-universities?\\_sort=rank&\\_sortDirection=asc](https://www.usnews.com/best-colleges/rankings/national-universities?_sort=rank&_sortDirection=asc) (last visited Apr. 14, 2025).

<sup>198</sup> See Ben Wildavsky, *Duke Prof Weighs Tradeoffs Between Academics, Athletics at Universities*, STAN. CTR. FOR EDUC. POL'Y ANALYSIS (Sept. 27, 2012), <https://cepa.stanford.edu/news/duke-prof-weighs-tradeoffs-between-academics-athletics-universities> (discussing how elite universities like Duke and Stanford must balance athletic ambitions with a deep institutional focus on academics).

experience.

These schools have been slower to adapt to the realities of the transfer portal and NIL compensation.<sup>199</sup> That hesitation reflects more than just administrative delay. It signals a philosophical reluctance to fully embrace a semi-professional model of college football. A super league built around aggressive monetization, direct player compensation, and television-driven scheduling may not align with their long-term institutional goals.

From a market and performance standpoint, each of these programs faces additional headwinds. All rank outside the top fifty in average viewership per game over the past three seasons.<sup>200</sup> With the exception of Duke, none of them have a winning record during that same three-year span.<sup>201</sup> Those indicators make it difficult to justify inclusion in a model driven by performance, market reach, and financial return.

While these schools bring considerable prestige and cultural value, their academic alignment, performance history, and philosophical fit indicate that decision-makers are unlikely to include them in a smaller, revenue-maximizing super league. They may also self-select out if the terms of participation conflict with their broader institutional values. Their exclusion exemplifies the broader shift from the traditional amateur student-athlete model toward the near-professional environment envisioned in a super league.

*Table 5: Excluded Based on Institutional Alignment*

California	ACC
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<sup>199</sup> See Mac Engel, *TCU Has a ‘Stanford Problem’ When It Comes to the NCAA’s Busy Transfer Portal*, FORT WORTH STAR-TELEGRAM (Aug. 29, 2024), <https://www.star-telegram.com/sports/spt-columns-blogs/mac-engel/article291642410.html> (draws a comparison between Stanford and TCU in discussing how TCU’s academic standards may limit its ability to compete in the transfer portal era).

<sup>200</sup> See *supra* note 182.

<sup>201</sup> *Id.*

Duke	ACC
Northwestern	Big 10
Stanford	ACC
Vanderbilt	SEC

### *Group of Five Longshots*

No Group of Five program currently meets the full range of criteria necessary for super league inclusion. These schools typically fall short in revenue generation, national viewership, and sustained on-field performance.<sup>202</sup> A few institutions, such as Appalachian State, Boise State, Memphis, Liberty, and Tulane, have built strong regional followings, invested in football infrastructure, and occasionally posted national-level success.

Still, these programs still remain longshots for the initial super league, but they could reemerge in future expansion discussions if the league grows beyond its original structure. Their exclusion presents limited legal or political risk when compared to Power Four programs.<sup>203</sup>

Even so, schools with strong local support or ties to large metropolitan areas could raise reputational concerns if the super

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<sup>202</sup> Carter Bahns, *TCU's Sonny Dykes Predicts Split Between College Football Power Four and Group of Five Conferences*, 247SPORTS (May 11, 2024), <https://247sports.com/article/tcus-sonny-dykes-predicts-split-between-college-football-power-four-and-group-of-five-conferences-231673149/> (discussing TCU head coach Sonny Dykes' belief that a separation between Power 4 and Group of 5 is inevitable because of the vast differences between levels).

<sup>203</sup> See Spencer D. Wyld & David C. Wyld, *College Football's Bottom-Line Impact: Exploring the Relationship of Football Performance on Athletic Finances for Division I Institutions Today*, THE SPORTS JOURNAL (July 23, 2021), <https://thesportjournal.org/article/college-footballs-bottom-line-impact-exploring-the-relationship-of-football-performance-on-athletic-finances-for-division-i-institutions-today/> (discussing the widening financial gap between Power Five and Group of Five athletic programs).

league appears overly exclusive or indifferent to rising markets. A long-term media strategy that values growth and regional engagement may still keep these programs within the broader conversation, but they are unlikely to be included initially.

#### CONCLUSION

The formation of a college football super league represents the culmination of market driven forces reshaping collegiate athletics. While inclusion decisions inevitably invite controversy, the financial imperatives driving the transition make a super league increasingly likely.

Programs selected for this model will benefit from enhanced media revenue, increased national visibility, and greater institutional stability. Conversely, excluded programs face substantial institutional, political, and legal challenges as they adapt to a diminished competitive landscape.

Ultimately, the creation of a super league reflects the ongoing tension between tradition and commercial realities. Stakeholders must navigate complex criteria, including competitive performance, media value, market size, institutional investment, and political sensitivity, to define membership clearly and equitably. The choices made today will redefine college football, setting the sport on a path that balances commercial success with the cultural and historical values at its core.

#### *Appendix*

***Included in the Super League:*** Alabama, Arkansas, Auburn, BYU, Clemson, Colorado, Florida, Florida State, Georgia, Iowa, Kentucky, LSU, Miami, Michigan, Michigan State, Missouri, Nebraska, North Carolina, Notre Dame, Ohio State, Oklahoma, Ole Miss, Oregon, Penn State, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Texas A&M, USC, Utah, Washington, Wisconsin

#### ***Programs Included in the Super League***

Alabama	Arkansas
Auburn	BYU
Clemson	Colorado
Florida	Florida State
Georgia	Iowa
Kentucky	LSU
Miami	Michigan
Michigan State	Missouri
Nebraska	North Carolina
Notre Dame	Ohio State
Oklahoma	Ole Miss
Oregon	Penn State
South Carolina	Tennessee
Texas	Texas A&M
USC	Utah
Washington	Wisconsin