

A History Of The NCAA Men's Outdoor Track & Field Championships 1921 – 2021

by **E. Garry Hill**

To begin, the author would like to thank all those who have helped with this project through the decades, especially statistical whizzes Richard Hymans, Dave Johnson & Howard Willman, whose sharp eyeballs and keen research have helped both fill in many holes and also catch those frustrating typos which creep into a project with so many numbers. And a special shout-out to Syd DeRoner, who put together the first top-6 composites for *Track & Field News* back in the '60s.

This lengthy compilation, despite closing in on 1000 easy-to-read pages, does not attempt to reproduce the complete results of the NCAA Men's Championships. Complete results of the meet from 1999 on are available online at www.flashresults.com.

While the team-scoring section does include all teams which accumulated points, for the actual events the results are usually only given 8-deep (the depth of modern point-scoring).

From the '20s through most of the '40s you'll find that official times are generally missing for everyone but the winner. This is for the simple reason that—unbelievable as it might seem today—place times more often than not simply weren't taken. Where possible, approximations are given based on photographic evidence. Field-event measures were obviously taken for all places, but these too were generally not published in official results, leading to all kinds of gaps.

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For all years, schools are given with their current names (a few of the schools no longer exist under any name).

Marks made in preliminaries are included only if they had some sort of record significance.

If a non-senior was an event winner but doesn't appear in the next year's top-end listings, an attempt has been made to ID what he did in that subsequent year.

Where possible, the athlete's class has been specified: Fr = frosh; So = soph; Jr = junior; Sr = senior. For those athletes for whom specific class remains unknown, in most instances it has been possible to make an informed guess at narrowing down year in school, based on years in which competition was found. Those are listed with multiple possibilities. (See p. x for the handling of frosh eligibility through the years.)

A tick (') after an athlete's last name means he was not eligible for Team USA at that point (even if he might have had U.S. citizenship).

Symbols: (A) = altitude over 1000m; w = illegally wind-aided; fs = false start; dnc = did not compete; dq = disqualified; WR = World Record; AR = American Record; CR = Collegiate Record; MR = Meet Record; c = estimated time or distance; + = converted time using standard formulae.

Field event results are given in Imperial measure, with the metric measure appended at the end of each year. All field measure is in modern notation, which means that all fractions have been removed from the long throws, and in the jumps and shot any use of eighth-inch measure is rounded down to the nearest quarter-inch.

Where possible the number of contestants is given for each event, plus number of finalists and also what the last qualifier achieved to make the final in multi-round events.

See p. 03 for an explanation of who has been allowed into the meet through the years.

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It should be noted that for the first decade or so of its existence, the NCAA Championships was not always the most important collegiate competition of the year, depending on which powerhouse schools competed in which meet. That distinction frequently fell to the IC4A.

Who Got Into The Meet

The methodology for qualifying for the NCAA Championships has evolved markedly through the years.

In The Beginning

The NCAA Guides make no mention of who was allowed in the meet for the first three editions (1921–23). But the '25 edition (with '24 having been an off-year) says, in part, “This year as in the past the profits of the meet will be prorated among the visiting institutions. With this in mind the competitions are limited only to the men who have placed in section or Conference meets or who have shown exceptional ability in dual meet competitions.”

(Note: the term “NCAA Guide” evolves through the years. The '21 through '41 versions were published by Spalding; the '42 through '49 versions by A.S. Barnes; thereafter by the NCAA itself.)

That wording appeared on and off for the next few years, but the '34 Guide says this: “The University of Southern California [the meet host] is guaranteeing the sum of \$20,000 to aid in paying the expenses to the meet of participants as selected by the NCAA Track & Field Committee and the NCAA Rules Committee. It is expected that this sum will guarantee the participation of the 8 or 10 outstanding men in each event, and it is anticipated that the competing colleges and universities will spend their usual amount on the meet to assure the participation of all athletes who have a chance of placing.”

The '41 Guide says that one must have “won a place in some Conference, State Sectional or general intercollegiate meet. *Mediocre performers should not be entered.*” (Emphasis ours.)

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Qualifying Standards Appear

The first mention of actual level-of-performance requirements comes with the '61 Guide, which prefaces a list of marks as “suggested Qualifying Standards.” (Historical note: among the standards that first year were 4:08.0 in the mile, 6-5 in the high jump and 54-11 with the shot.) There is no mention of any timeframe for achieving Q-standards. There is also no mention one way or another about the use of indoor marks. (The author *suspects* that except for years when it was specifically prohibited that indoor marks were acceptable throughout the Q-standard era.)

The '63 Guide changes the verbiage to simply “Qualifying Standards,” but also notes that exceptions might be made (upon written request) if the athlete “is a SECTIONAL champion or scorer in the event concerned in the previous NCAA Championships.”

The '71 Guide lists Qualifying Standards, but removes the previous exemption possibilities.

The '73 Guide introduces a timeframe restriction for achieving Standard: from January 01 through the last Saturday before the Championships. Indoor marks are not addressed one way or another.

The '80 Guide expands the qualifying window: from December 01 through the last Sunday before the Championships.

The '88 Guide provides the next innovation: the adoption of altitude-adjustment factors. Only outdoor marks were eligible for qualifying, but the '89 Guide reversed that, indoor marks for the first time being specifically cited as OK. (Note: '87 wLJ champ Sheila Echols had no outdoor marks prior to the Championships.)

The '90 Guide gives us the introduction of Provisional Qualifiers. This was a secondary standard from which Nationals fields could be filled, should the “automatic” standard prove too tough. The end of the qualifying window moves to the Thursday before the meet starts.

The '92 Guide removes the use of indoor marks as qualifiers.

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The '93 Guide tightens the Q window, marks ending 2 weekends before the Championships. This is the last change before Regionals arise.

The Advent Of Regionals

The Regionals concept debuted with the '03 season, with a set of preliminary meets held 2 weeks before Nationals. The nation was split into 4 Regions—West, Midwest, Mideast, East—along state-border lines, meaning some Conferences were split. The top 5 finishers in each event (save 10K and multis, which were chosen from yearly lists) automatically advanced to the Nationals. Fields were then filled with a half-dozen “wild card” entries from the yearly lists.

A major change came in '10 with the replacing of a 4-site preliminary set of meets with a simple 2-parter, East & West. Also gone, officially, was the titling of the first meets as Regionals. Instead, the NCAA took the stance that it simply had a 2-part Nationals, with the preliminary rounds held 2 weeks earlier at different sites than the final meet. (For ease of reference, *T&FN* has continued to call the first-round meets Regionals.) The first 24 from each Region (12 for relays) advance to the Nationals. The multis still advance from yearly list.

The Regionals are held 2 weeks before the Nationals, and 2 weeks after most Conferences (a few Conferences are held earlier).

The Lower Divisions

The NCAA's College Division (CD) came into play with the '63 track season. From '63 through '72, CD athletes were allowed into the NCAA Championships if they met standard.

Starting with the '74 season, the CD was replaced by Divisions II (which offer scholarships) and III (no scholarships).

For '74, in addition to meeting Div. I standard, lower-division athletes had to finish in the first 6 at their Nationals.

For '75 through '82, in addition to making Div. I standard, Div. II athletes had to finish in the first 4 and Div. III athletes in the first 2 to compete at the NCAA Championships.

For '83 through '90 the requirement was making standard plus being top 2 in Div. II or winner-only from Div. III.

Since '91 the divisions have been separate, with no Div. II or III athletes at the Div. I meet.

Frosh Eligibility

The first Guide to spell out the meet's eligibility rules didn't come until the '41 edition, but it can be noted that newspaper accounts leading into the first edition of the meet in '21 had noted that frosh were not eligible. This was already the standard in most collegiate competition.

Note for 1932: several frosh were allowed into the meet because of their status as Olympic hopefuls, but they were not part of any team scoring.

The '41 spelling-out of the rules, while not specifically using the word "freshman," stated that the student must have spent "a calendar year in residence." Another stipulation was that to be eligible one could not have represented the school for more than 3 years. The effect of this rule is that if an athlete competed on the varsity as a frosh (even if ineligible for the Nationals), when he became a senior he was no longer eligible for the Nationals.

Things got confusing in the wake of WWII. The '46 Guide notes that the no-frosh rule is waived for '46 & '47, but also had other exceptions based on military service. As a result, the author has found several examples of athletes in '43, '44 & '45 who it seems pretty certain to have been frosh at the time.

The '52 Guide doesn't include any mention of it, but at some point after publication of the book an exception to the rule must have been made, as several frosh were allowed into the meet because it was an Olympic year.

The elimination of the frosh rule altogether began with the '68 season, although not all conferences went along with that in the first year. Notably, the sport's most powerful conference, the Pac-8, didn't adopt the rule until the following year.

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