

AD Advisors

 Timark

PORTAL PUSHDOWN

*The trend no
one talks about*

April 2025



About AD Advisors

AD Advisors is a circle of support for athletic directors, led by former Auburn University AD and 2017 NACDA Athletics Director of the Year Jay Jacobs, former White House Press Secretary Ari Fleischer, international high-performance well-being expert Carlette Patterson, and C-level major league sports executive Jeff Holbrook. We have a combined 100 years of experience working in the sports industry.

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About Timark

Timark Partners is an intercollegiate sports data and analytics consulting firm informed by the management needs of athletic directors. We specialize in providing competitiveness and financial benchmarking and trend analysis, primarily in men's and women's basketball, for conferences and individual schools. Our analysis is built on multi-source third-party data and is structured to provide insights on return on investment levels. Timark is led by managing partner Mark LaBarbera, former Athletics Director at Valparaiso University, with over 30 years of experience in intercollegiate athletics.

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Executive Summary

In December 2024, AD Advisors released the most comprehensive study ever conducted on the use of the NCAA transfer portal at the Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS) level. The white paper, titled *The Portal Puzzle: Is It the Right Fit For College?*, analyzed more than 800 FBS football transfer portal entrants and tracked their football careers.

The study showed that for 60% of students, the transfer portal didn't lead to higher levels of competition; it led to lower levels of competition. It also revealed that approximately one-third of portal entrants transfer multiple times and play for three or more teams in their college careers.

Now, as the NCAA basketball tournament has concluded while the transfer portal is still open, we turn our attention to what's happening there.

To further examine the transfer portal landscape and to provide deeper insights for college athletics stakeholders and decision-makers, AD Advisors, in partnership with Timark Partners, a collegiate athletics consulting and analytics firm, expanded its research and produced this study, which specifically focuses on NCAA Division I men's college basketball.

This white paper presents the most comprehensive and robust study into the men's Division I basketball transfer portal to date. AD Advisors and Timark analyzed every portal entrant dating back to 2019, a number surpassing **14,000 student-athletes** across all Division I basketball programs.

The data was collected from reputable online sources, including Verbal Commits, official school rosters, and sports information sites.

For over 14,000 portal entrants, AD Advisors and Timark tracked each transfer outcome, how many times the student-athlete entered the portal, and how many teams the student-athlete played for.

Our findings revealed stark realities and patterns and trends similar to the FBS transfer portal.

Approximately 65% of all the Division I basketball-playing student-athletes who entered the transfer portal, regardless of the competition level their career began at, either transferred down a level or did not find a new home.

At the highest competition level in this study (Tier 1), the Power 4 conferences and the Big East, **70% of student-athletes who entered the portal transferred down or did not find a new home.** At the lowest competition level in this study (Tier 3), which was the majority of DI programs, **61% of student-athletes who entered the portal transferred down or did not find a new home.** For those student-athletes, the only down transfer destinations are programs outside of Division I.

Additionally, the most common outcome for Tier 1 student-athletes who entered the portal and remained in Tier 1 was intra-conference destinations. Further, the majority of these portal entrants still transferred to a lower-ranked team.

No matter where a student-athlete starts

his college career, this data reveals a firm reality: Those who enter the transfer portal face a high likelihood of either competing at a lower level or failing to secure a new team altogether.

And for the minority of those student-athletes who transfer from one Tier 1 school to another Tier 1 school, the most common destination is still a lower-ranked program and the majority transfer to schools within their own conference.

Introduction

In recent years, the NCAA transfer portal has become one of the most debated topics in college athletics. As the portal's influence has grown, so have discussions around its implications, with Name Image and Likeness (NIL) deals adding financial incentives for student-athletes to transfer to another school and the NCAA removing transfer restrictions that previously required student-athletes to sit out for a year if they transferred more than one time.

At the core of this new and evolving landscape lies the question of how best to manage the portal for the benefit of student-athletes and the broader college athletic community.

The goal of this white paper is to use immense data from the transfer portal to offer precise, comprehensive insights and trends to help all college athletics stakeholders make decisions.

Our methodology was rooted in robust data collection from such reputable online sources as Verbal Commits, school

rosters, and sports information sites. We went through every team from 2019 through 2024 and tracked the actions and outcomes of every student-athlete who entered the portal.

To categorize competition levels, AD Advisors and Timark separated conferences into three tiers based on competitiveness and program spending for their individual schools.

Competitiveness was measured through the school's KenPom rating, and spending information was measured through the program's operating expenses, salaries, and scholarship costs. This information was sourced from the KenPom ratings website and the U.S. Department of Education's Equity in Athletics website.

Tier 1

Composed of schools that spend on average two times the seven-year average spending of all DI basketball teams, which is \$4.2 million, and have a relatively high seven-year KenPom rating average generally ranging from +5 to +30. These are schools from the ACC, Big Ten, Big 12, SEC, and the Big East.

Tier 2

Composed of schools that spend on average 1 to 1.5 times the average spending of all DI basketball teams and have a relatively medium seven-year KenPom rating average generally ranging from -6 to +15. In Tier 2 are schools from the Atlantic Ten, American Athletic Conference, Mountain West Conference, West Coast Conference, and the remaining schools of the Pac12.

Tier 3

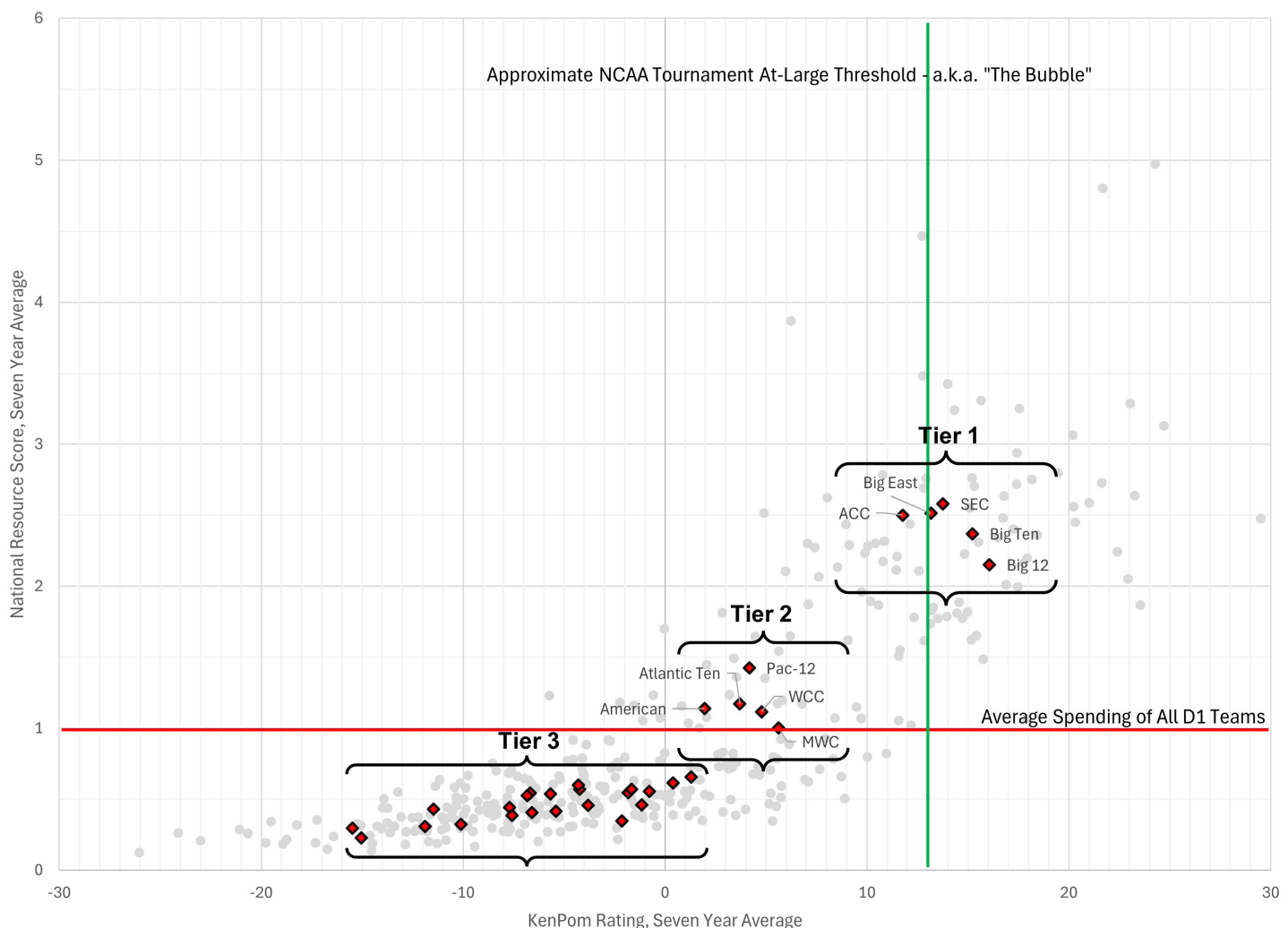
Composed of schools that spend below the average of all D1 basketball teams and have a relatively low seven-year KenPom rating average generally ranging from -26 to +11. The majority of D1 basketball programs fall into this category.

The KenPom rating system we employed is a widely used metric to measure the strength of a basketball team. It is a statistically driven ranking system that considers metrics including but not limited

to offensive efficiency, defensive efficiency, strength of schedule, nonconference strength of schedule, and the number of possessions a team has per game.

Similarly, we calculated the average spend per D1 basketball program using the U.S. Department of Education's Equity in Athletics website and recorded each program's spending information. Measuring competitiveness and program spending against one another supplied our tiered competition system. The chart below shows this model.

Measuring Competitiveness Against Program Spending



Talent Migration

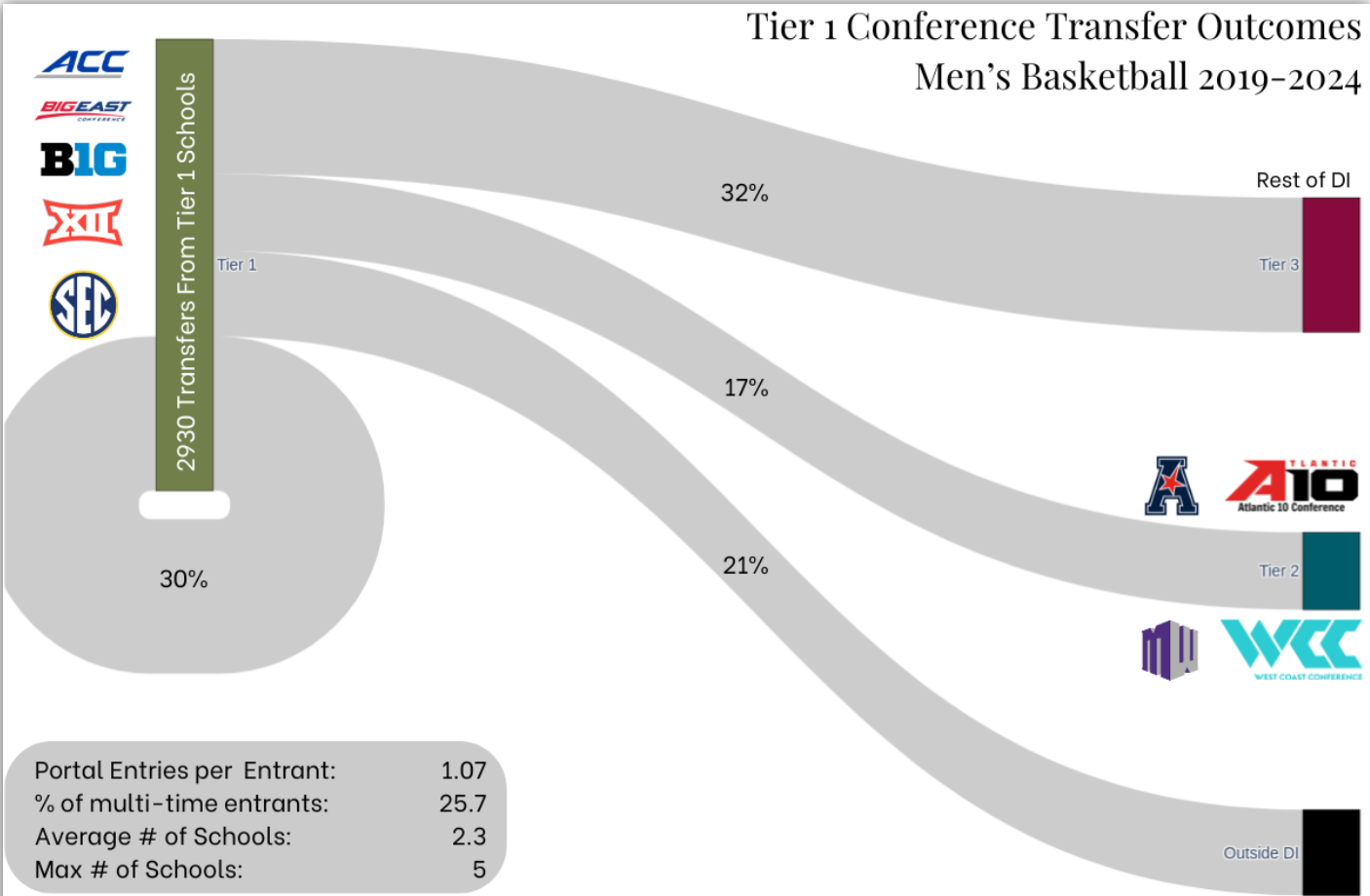
Our research revealed a clear trend that a significant majority of DI men’s basketball student-athletes who enter the portal will either transfer to a lower level of competition or fail to find a new place to play.

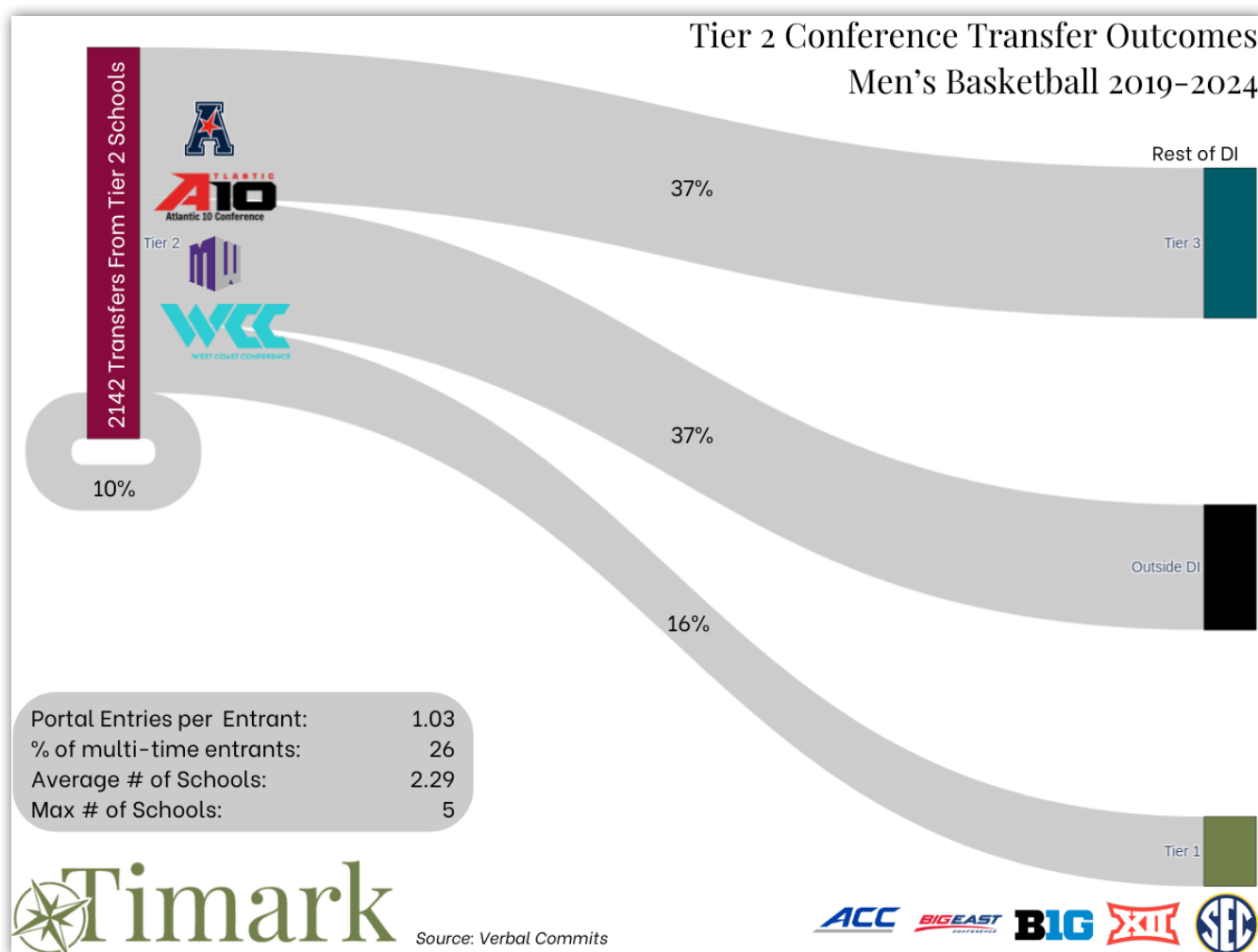
The following charts break down transfer outcomes for student-athletes in Tier 1, Tier 2, and Tier 3. Each chart presents aggregate data, combining individual transfer journeys to highlight overall trends and insights.

The chart below is specifically focused on Tier 1, which includes student-athletes from schools in the SEC, Big 12, Big

Ten, ACC, and the Big East. The chart highlights that the most common outcome for the nearly 3,000 student-athletes who transferred from Tier 1 was transferring to a Tier 3 program. This included players like Dennis Evans, who transferred from Louisville to Grand Canyon University, and Isaiah West, who transferred from Vanderbilt to Samford.

Only 30% of Tier 1 student-athletes remained in Tier 1, meaning 70% transferred down or did not find a new home. The “Outside DI” category is a combination of basketball programs outside of DI (D2, D3) and/or a failed transfer. A failed transfer means that the student-athlete did not find a new team.





Additionally, 25% of Tier 1 student-athletes transferred multiple times, and the average number of teams a student-athlete played for was more than two.

Above is the same data broken down for Tier 2 schools.

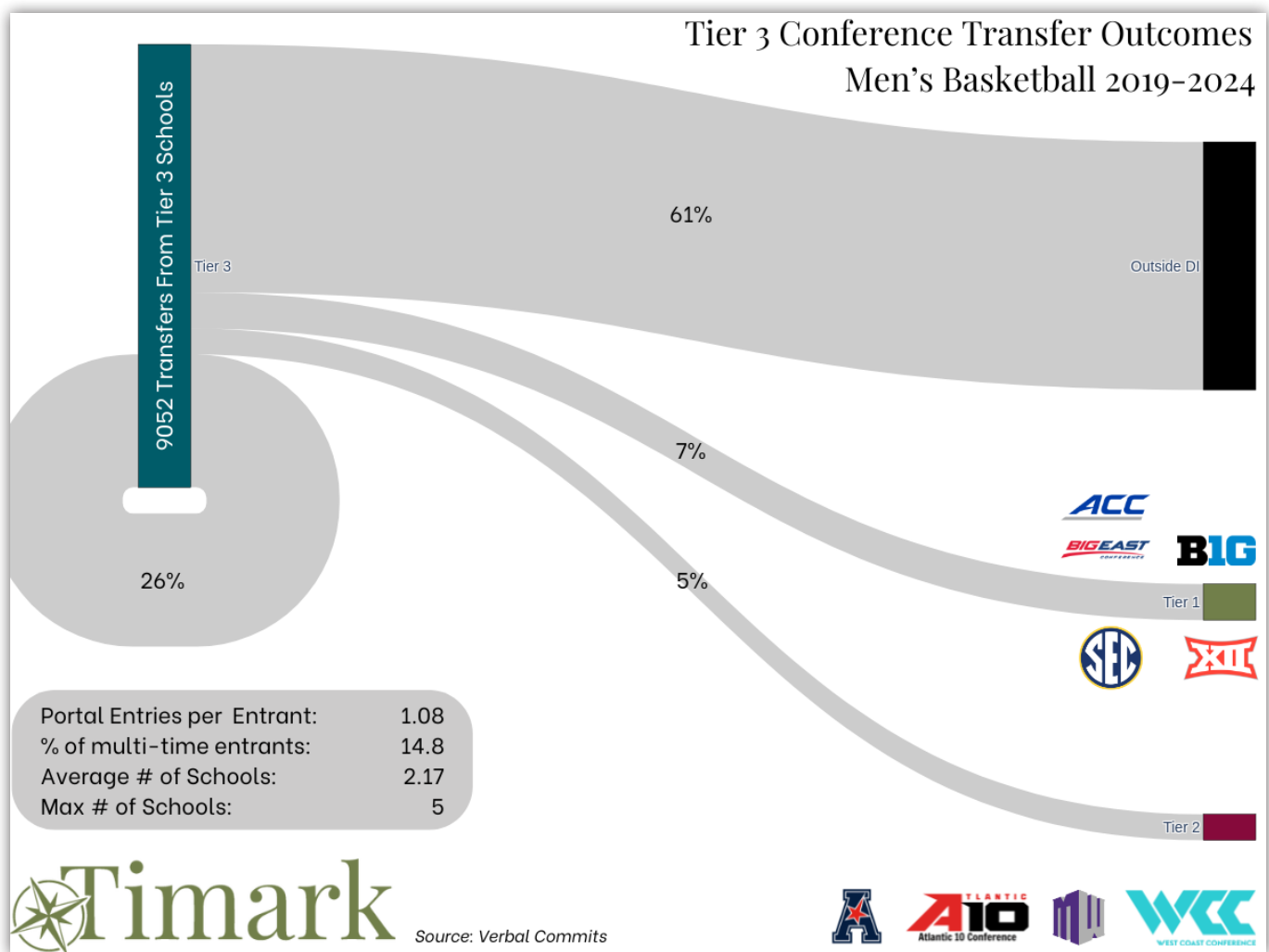
The most common transfer outcomes for student-athletes who transferred from a Tier 2 program was to transfer outside of DI or to Tier 3. This included players like Lamont Evans IV, who transferred from Saint Louis to McNeese, and Cam Manyawu, who transferred from Wyoming to Drake. A small percentage, 16%, went up, and an even smaller percentage, 10%, remained in Tier 2. Similar to the student-athletes in Tier 1, 74% of these student-athletes either transferred to a

lower tier or failed to transfer.

Additionally, 26% of these portal entrants transferred multiple times, with the average number of teams a student-athlete played for being more than two.

On the next page (8) is the same data broken down for Tier 3.

As shown here, out of the 9,052 student-athletes who entered the portal from Tier 3, 61% still transferred down or failed to find a new team. This is especially profound as these DI student-athletes represent the majority of DI teams, and the competition levels below Tier 3 in this study fall outside of DI, to include D2 and D3 programs. For example, Mason Grant transferred from Campbell (Tier 3) to USC



Aiken (Division II), and Cameron Marlay entered the portal from Cal Poly (Tier 3) but has failed to find a new team.

Only 12% transferred up in competition level, including student-athletes like David Coit, who transferred from Northern Illinois to Kansas, and Chaz Lanier, who transferred from North Florida to Tennessee. This means 88% remained at Tier 3, transferred out of DI, or failed to find a new team.

The percentage of multi-time transfers for this tier was notably smaller than it was for Tier 1 or Tier 2.

This reflects the impact of the majority of

Tier 3 transfers leaving the DI level, limiting their ability to re-enter the portal and transfer back into DI.

As shown in these charts, the transfer portal distributes talent from Tier 1 down at a far higher rate than from Tier 2 or Tier 3 and up. The majority of student-athletes that have entered their name in the portal have ended up playing at a lower level regardless of where their career began.

For a minority, however, the portal is a route up or a route to remain in the same tier. For those student-athletes, we took an even deeper dive into the transfer data.

Same-Tier Transfers

Approximately 30% of Tier 1 portal entrants remain in Tier 1 after entering the portal. Across the entire Division I basketball landscape, that translated to approximately 6% of student-athletes. One of the most revealing trends discovered in this data was their most common outcomes and destinations.

AD Advisors and Timark drilled into the Tier 1 data to analyze where the student-athletes who remained in this tier after transferring landed. This included identifying the specific conferences these portal entrants transferred to and from, and the specific teams to assess whether the student-athlete moved to a higher- or lower-ranked program.

The individual team data helped paint a more comprehensive picture of transfer outcome trends, considering that in our study, Tier 1 student-athletes can't transfer "up" since they are already in the highest tier.

The data revealed that the most common outcome for these portal entrants is intra-conference transferring and that the majority still transfer to lower-ranked programs.

A slight majority of 50.5% of Tier 1 student-athletes transferred to teams with a worse KenPom rating, and 45.3% transferred to teams with a better KenPom rating. Also, 4% returned to the schools that they entered the portal from.

For example, Jonas Adoo transferred from Tennessee to Arkansas after the 2024 season. Tennessee finished 2024 with the 5th best KenPom rating, and Arkansas finished with the 108th best.



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Roddy Gayle Jr. transferred from Ohio State to Michigan. Ohio State finished with the 49th best KenPom rating in 2024, and Michigan finished with the 128th best.

Even at the highest tier, more granular data still shows that the majority of portal entrants move to a lower-ranked school.

Additionally, looking into specific conference trends, the most common outcome of these transfers is intra-conference transferring. For example, the most frequent transfer outcome for Big Ten student-athletes was to transfer to another Big Ten school. The top transfer outcome for SEC student-athletes was to move to another SEC school.

Examples are student-athletes like Connor Essegian (Wisconsin to Nebraska), Luke Goode (Illinois to Indiana), Aden Holloway (Auburn to Alabama), and Otega Oweh (Oklahoma to Kentucky).

This information highlights a key trend: These student-athletes transfer to teams they compete against most frequently in heavily weighted games as they compete for conference championships. As a result, coaches and recruiters must adapt their strategies to stay competitive within their conferences while also managing the risk of losing players to rival programs after investing resources, coaching, and development into them.

It is more important in today's basketball environment for coaches to retain players than to recruit them. Yes, recruiting is important, but if a coach can retain their players, they will need to do less recruiting.

Conclusion

The data in this study reinforces a clear reality: The vast majority of NCAA Division I men's basketball players who enter the transfer portal move down or out. The portal isn't the place to rise, but it is the place to find more playing time, albeit at a lower level of competition.

Even at the highest level, where Tier 1 athletes cannot move "up," most transfers result in a move to a lower-ranked program. Additionally, for the minority of these athletes who manage to stay in the highest tier, the most common outcome is to stay in their conference, presenting new challenges and demanding new strategies for teams, coaches, and recruiters to consistently build a competitive, steady roster.

These findings parallel the trends seen in FBS football, demonstrating that the transfer portal overwhelmingly facilitates downward mobility rather than an upward trajectory.

This raises the question of whether downward mobility will balance out competition across the Division I landscape and if program success can be tied to transfer portal activity.

For college athletics stakeholders, these insights provide critical data for shaping future policies and support structures for student-athletes navigating the transfer process.

As the NCAA landscape continues to evolve, understanding these transfer trends will be essential for institutions, coaches, and athletes seeking to make



informed decisions in an increasingly fluid and complex system.

Adding the position of general managers for football and men's basketball programs is the current trend at the FBS and Tier 1 and Tier 2 levels.

While this trend makes sense in the short term as coaches look to stay competitive in the new collegiate environment of revenue sharing, NIL, and unfettered transferring, it also has the potential of creating issues for the longer term. Issues relating to redundant services within athletics departments and fostering greater interdepartmental rivalries for services and donor support.

To better support the evolving intercollegiate athletics environment and to prevent the loss of students, the time has come for every athletic program in D1 to create a support program similar to a private-sector human resources department. Its purpose would be to help schools retain their student-athletes.

Given the reality of the portal, either schools will get used to saying goodbye every year to players, or they need to find a new coordinated way to retain them.

Important lessons can be learned from the private sector, which has deep experience retaining a workforce that can always pick up and go to another job. Athletic

programs will benefit by bringing in professionals whose focus is on recruitment, onboarding, student-athlete development, benefits administration, performance management, student-athlete relations, and maintaining a positive work environment across the entire department. This new department should report to the AD and consist of people with personnel experience, with an eye on sports.

If athletic programs don't adapt to the reality of the portal, they'll become revolving doors with little or no sense of team or continuity. It's better to welcome student-athletes, address their needs, and provide them with a positive environment. We advise universities to maintain an open-door, professional approach to retaining student-athletes, rather than a revolving door where coaches endlessly watch students come and go.



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