

Implementing Intercollegiate Sports at BYU-Idaho: A Deep Dive

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Background – Brigham Young University–Idaho (BYU-Idaho) has not hosted intercollegiate athletics since 2001, when the school (formerly Ricks College) transitioned from a two-year junior college to a four-year university. At that time, leaders phased out the successful “Ricks Vikings” athletics program – which had earned 17 NJCAA national championships – largely due to the high costs of running an athletics department and a desire to involve more students in campus activities. In place of varsity teams, BYU-Idaho developed an extensive **intramural/“intracollegiate” sports program**, enabling thousands of students to participate directly in competitive leagues each year (over 2,400 students in 2010, vs. just 264 athletes in Ricks’s final year of varsity sports) ((PDF) A New Collegiate Model: Intra-Collegiate Athletics at BYU Idaho). This intramural model has fostered broad student involvement, but it sacrifices the school spirit and unity that collegiate varsity teams can generate. This report examines what it would take to **establish intercollegiate football and men’s and women’s basketball teams** at BYU-Idaho today, focusing on seven key areas: financial considerations, facilities, regulatory compliance, student interest, comparisons to other institutions, Title IX compliance, and potential challenges with solutions.

The link between engagement and persistence is also evident in first-year retention statistics. Georgia Southern University recently reported that freshmen who attended at least one campus event in their first year returned for their second year at a 79.4% rate—over seven percentage points higher than the overall freshman retention rate of 72% (Grice Connect News, 2023). According to Georgia Southern’s student affairs vice president, national data have “consistently shown that the more engaged a student is with the university, the greater their chance of succeeding in college” (Grice Connect News, 2023). These outcomes align with student development theory (e.g., Astin’s Involvement Theory), which posits that time and energy devoted to collegiate activities directly enhance learning and persistence. In sum, engaging students outside the classroom is not just a nicety—it measurably improves their academic performance and likelihood of continuing their education, thereby bolstering institutional retention and completion goals.

1. Financial Considerations

Launching and sustaining intercollegiate football and basketball programs at BYU-Idaho would require significant investment. The initial decision to discontinue Ricks College athletics explicitly cited **financial burden** – the Church Board of Education directed BYU-Idaho to phase out varsity sports in 2000 “because of its expense” (Consistent Spirit: Ricks College Becomes BYU-Idaho - Y Magazine). Reintroducing these programs means addressing startup costs, ongoing operating expenses, and revenue sources:

- **Startup Costs:** Major upfront costs would likely include **facility upgrades** (detailed in Section 2), equipment purchases (e.g. helmets, pads, uniforms, training gear), and hiring of coaching staff and athletic department personnel. For example, the College of Idaho, when it reinstated football after a 37-year hiatus, needed to build a new locker room facility and partner with the city to upgrade the local stadium (College of Idaho board votes to reinstate football – Deseret News). Similar infrastructure investments would be needed in Rexburg for locker rooms, training rooms, and possibly stadium enhancements.

- **Operating Expenses:** Annual costs encompass coaching and staff salaries, athlete recruiting, team travel, game operations, insurance, and, if applicable, athletic scholarships. **Football** is typically the most expensive sport – it requires a large coaching staff and supports a roster of 80–100 players with extensive travel (5–6 away games) and equipment needs. **Basketball** (men’s and women’s) has smaller rosters (~15 each) and fewer games, but still entails coaching salaries, travel for ~15–20 away games per team (including flights or long bus trips for conference play), and facility overhead for home games. To gauge scale, small-college athletics budgets can range in the low millions per year. The National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA) reports a median operating budget of about **\$1.8 million** among its member schools (Does your athletic department drive net revenue? - NAIA) (many of which run football and basketball), while NCAA Division II programs average closer to \$3 million annually. BYU-Idaho’s program could be on the lower end by leveraging existing facilities and not offering full-ride athletic scholarships (if it opts for NCAA Division III or a similar model with no athletic aid). However, adding football will undeniably raise costs – one analysis notes that **football, unlike most sports, has no equivalent women’s sport to offset its large roster**, so it tends to significantly increase overall athletics expenditures (Title IX - More than a Title | Tracksmith).

- **Funding Sources:** Potential funding avenues include:
 - **University and Church Support** – BYU-Idaho is subsidized by the LDS Church; however, church leaders have historically been cautious about allocating tithing funds to sports. In 2014, BYU–Hawaii’s president noted he had to weigh athletics expenses against admitting more students, ultimately deciding to **redirect sports funding to enroll 500 additional students** instead (BYU-Hawaii Ends Intercollegiate Athletics Era | Athletic Business). Unless church leadership changes stance, BYU-Idaho would likely need to minimize reliance on general church subsidies for sports.
 - **Student Fees** – Many universities charge a dedicated athletic fee. BYU-Idaho could implement a modest **student athletic fee** each semester to generate revenue. For instance, a \$50 per student fee with ~20,000 on-campus students would raise about \$1 million per semester (though this would require approval and buy-in from students/administration). Student fees are a common funding

stream at public universities; their use at BYU-Idaho would be a new expense for students but could directly fund team operations.

- **Donations and Alumni Contributions** – Fundraising could tap the enthusiasm of alumni and community members who fondly remember Ricks College athletics. A targeted campaign might secure startup funds. The College of Idaho pursued a fundraising campaign immediately after its board approved football, to help cover startup costs (College of Idaho board votes to reinstate football – Deseret News). Alumni of BYU-Idaho (and Ricks) who value athletics might contribute if presented with a vision of renewed school spirit. **Corporate sponsorships** could also provide revenue (e.g. local businesses sponsoring scoreboards or advertising at games), though any partnerships would need to align with BYU-Idaho’s standards (for example, no alcohol or gambling sponsors).
- **Ticket Sales and Game-Day Revenue** – While ticket sales alone won’t sustain the program, they can offset some costs. With a football stadium capacity of ~4,000 (see Section 2) and potential community interest, a sold-out home game at say \$5–10 per ticket could gross \$20,000–\$40,000 per game. Over a season of 5 home games, that’s roughly \$100–200k in ticket revenue. Men’s and women’s basketball could draw crowds in the 1,000–3,000 range in the campus gym (tickets perhaps \$5 for students, \$10 general public), yielding maybe \$5,000–\$15,000 per game. Additional game-day income from concessions, merchandise (team apparel), and parking could supplement this. These figures are relatively small next to expenses, but they contribute and, more importantly, promote **school spirit** by drawing paying crowds.
- **Increased Enrollment Tuition** – An often-cited benefit of adding sports at small colleges is attracting new students (athletes and non-athletes) who might not otherwise enroll. More students paying tuition can bolster the university’s finances. Indeed, some schools treat athletics as an investment to boost enrollment-driven revenue. *Inside Higher Ed* reports that **Calvin University** (a small Christian college in Michigan) fielded its first-ever football team in 2023 and saw a *15% increase in freshman enrollment* as a result (Small colleges bet on new sports to boost enrollment). Similarly, **Adrian College** (MI) aggressively expanded its sports programs and more than doubled enrollment over 15 years; roughly 70% of Adrian’s 1,800 students are athletes, whose tuition helps fund the programs (Small colleges bet on new sports to boost enrollment). If BYU-Idaho’s teams draw LDS athletes who would otherwise have gone elsewhere, their tuition (even at BYU-Idaho’s relatively low rate) and housing payments become an indirect revenue source. However, unlike struggling small liberal-arts colleges that add sports to survive, BYU-Idaho already has high demand for admission. The benefit here would be qualitative (enhanced student experience) rather than needing to fill empty seats in classrooms.

In summary, **expected costs** for football plus men’s and women’s basketball likely run in the low millions annually, while **revenues** specific to athletics will only cover a portion of that. A feasible

financial plan might combine a new student fee, targeted donations (perhaps a booster club or campaign), and incremental tuition from recruited student-athletes. The institution would need to subsidize the rest, ideally without siphoning funds from academics. It's worth noting that BYU-Idaho's initial decision to cut sports freed up budget to expand academic capacity (BYU-Hawaii Ends Intercollegiate Athletics Era | Athletic Business); reinstating sports is essentially choosing to allocate resources back toward extracurricular endeavors in hopes of intangible returns like unity, morale, and tradition. Careful budgeting and phased implementation (starting small, then scaling up) could ensure **financial sustainability** of the new programs.

2. Facilities Assessment

Current Sports Facilities at BYU-Idaho – BYU-Idaho possesses some athletic facilities inherited from the Ricks College era and developed for intramurals, but these would need evaluation and likely upgrades to meet intercollegiate competition standards:

- **Outdoor Stadium (Former “Viking Stadium”)**: The campus has an outdoor stadium field with a 400m track and artificial turf used presently for intramural football, soccer, Ultimate Frisbee, etc. This was the home of Ricks College football. It features bleacher seating for roughly **3,860 spectators**, with the ability to add portable bleachers to expand capacity ([PDF] Campus Building History - BYU-Idaho). A source in 2016 noted the “BYU-I Stadium...holds around 4,000” fans (BYU football: Public practice and Fan Fest should come to Rexburg). However, to host intercollegiate **football games**, the stadium would likely need:
 - **New turf**: Estimates say the cost for new turf would be around 600,000 \$
 - **Upgraded spectator amenities**: more permanent bleachers or chairback seating for comfort, a functional press box for media and game operations, a scoreboard suitable for collegiate games (with replay capability, etc.), and improved sound system. Restrooms and concession stands would need to handle larger crowds. Given the 4,000-seat size, the venue is on par with other small-college football stadiums (many NAIA/NCAA D-III schools have stadiums in the 3,000–5,000 range), so it may suffice initially. Over time, if fan interest grows, BYU-Idaho could consider expanding seating. Partnerships with the city could be explored for funding upgrades, similar to how the College of Idaho worked with Caldwell to renovate their city-owned Simplot Stadium (College of Idaho board votes to reinstate football – Deseret News).
 - **Locker Rooms & Training Facilities**: Currently, the stadium likely lacks on-site locker rooms. For a functioning program, home and away team locker rooms near the field are important, as well as officials' dressing rooms. BYU-Idaho might construct a fieldhouse building adjoining the stadium to include locker rooms, showers, training rooms, and equipment storage. This could double as support for track meets or other events. At minimum, teams could utilize locker facilities in an existing gym (e.g., the Hart building, located not far from the stadium) as a temporary solution.

- **Press and Media infrastructure:** Space for coaches (coaches' booth), media broadcasting, and filming (a video platform or high camera positions) would be needed. A modest press box structure atop the bleachers could be built or refurbished.
- **Gymnasium/Fieldhouse:** The primary indoor sports venue on campus is the **John W. Hart Physical Education Building**, which contains the main basketball court. The Hart gymnasium currently **seats about 4,000** in bleachers and is used for large gatherings, concerts, and intramural championship games. This capacity is adequate for small-college basketball; for comparison, many NAIA or NCAA Division II schools have arenas seating 1,000–3,500. The Hart Building also has ancillary facilities: an indoor pool, auxiliary gyms, weight rooms, etc. In 2010, BYU-Idaho opened the **BYU-Idaho Center**, which includes a massive 15,000-seat auditorium for devotionals and a connected space with *10 full-size courts* and an indoor track (BYU-Idaho Center | Campus Tours). However, those courts are mainly for open recreation and are not configured as a single arena – the devotional auditorium is not built for sports events. Therefore, **men's and women's basketball** would likely use the Hart gym as their home court.
 - To meet intercollegiate standards, the Hart gym would need **upgrades:** a scoreboard with player stats, shot clocks, and possibly a video board for replays/graphics. Locker rooms in the Hart building would need to be designated for home and visiting teams on game days (and possibly renovated or expanded to handle team sizes of 15 players plus staff). The venue would also require media tables, broadcast internet capability, and courtside seating for officials and press.
 - **Training Facilities:** The existing fitness center and training room in the Hart building must be elevated. There is a possibility of converting the dance classrooms or the other open gyms into student athlete weightlifting facilities. However, the space available is much smaller than most student athlete facilities meaning in order to use the facilities a closely monitored schedule would need to be implemented.
 - **Spectator Experience:** To draw crowds, the gym should create a fun atmosphere – adding a pep band (like the existing RixStix), student section bleachers, and mascot presence would be new considerations. The stage on the south side of the court could be removed to create new seating for a BYU-I fan section. (BYU-Idaho might even revive the old Ricks College mascot, the Vikings, or choose a new team name, which carries minor branding costs for signage and uniforms.)
- **Other Facilities:** If football and basketball are established, BYU-Idaho would need to expand to other sports (especially women's teams to meet Title IX, see Section 6). Sports like soccer, volleyball, or athletics (track & field) would require their own facility needs. Notably, BYU-Idaho already has **outdoor soccer fields** with top-quality turf (BYU Idaho - Fields Inc) and numerous recreational fields, which could host soccer or lacrosse matches if those sports were added. An indoor volleyball team could use the Hart gym as well (with 4,000 seats it's more than enough for volleyball). The campus also has an

indoor **I-Center courts facility** (10 courts) that could potentially be configured for multiple practice courts or tournament use, easing scheduling for practices.

Overall, **BYU-Idaho is relatively well-positioned in facilities** since it maintained many sports venues for its robust intramural program. The **football stadium and basketball gym exist**, but **would need moderate upgrades** to transition from casual student use to collegiate competition-ready. Those upgrades – lighting, seating, locker rooms, scoreboards, turf replacement – represent a significant one-time investment. A rough estimate could be in the several millions of dollars range (e.g., building locker rooms and installing stadium lights alone could easily exceed \$1 million). BYU-Idaho could prioritize refurbishing existing structures over new construction: for example, the 4,000-seat Hart gym might be sufficient without building a new arena, and the former Viking Stadium can be modernized rather than constructing a brand-new football facility. In planning, the university should also consider **long-term maintenance costs** of these facilities and ensure that they remain multi-use (so that if varsity sports were ever discontinued, the investments still benefit intramurals, community events, etc.).

3. Regulatory Compliance (NCAA/NAIA Membership and Eligibility)

Establishing intercollegiate teams means joining a competitive athletics association and adhering to a host of regulations. BYU-Idaho would need to decide whether to seek membership in the **NCAA** (likely Division II or III for a school of its size/mission) or the **NAIA** (which often includes faith-based and small colleges). Key compliance considerations include membership requirements, athlete eligibility rules, and ensuring federal Title IX compliance:

- **NCAA vs. NAIA:** Each governing body has minimum sports sponsorship requirements and compliance infrastructures:
 - The **NCAA Division II**, for example, requires an institution to sponsor at least 10 varsity sports (with at least 5 for each gender, or 4 men's/6 women's) and meet scheduling and scholarship minimums. **Division III** (no athletic scholarships allowed) also requires around 10 sports (5 per gender) and emphasizes academic integration. The NCAA also has a multi-year provisional membership process for new entrants.
 - The **NAIA** is often more accessible for smaller programs. NAIA rules require at least **6 varsity sports** (with at least 3 teams per gender) (What are the Differences Between the NAIA and NCAA?). To comply, BYU-Idaho would need to introduce additional teams beyond football and two basketball squads – likely two or three more women's teams and perhaps another men's team. For instance, it could add women's volleyball and women's soccer (two popular sports that align with BYU-Idaho's student interest and available facilities) as well as one more men's sport (perhaps men's soccer or track) to reach 6 total. The NAIA application process involves documenting institutional commitment, paying

membership dues (approximately \$9,000 annually, plus sport-specific dues for football etc. (Membership Costs - NAIA)), and adhering to eligibility and compliance standards.

- **Competitive Level & No-Sunday Play:** An important regulatory factor for any LDS Church school is accommodating the policy of not competing on Sundays. BYU (Provo) and other religious colleges negotiate conference schedules that avoid Sunday play. NAIA conferences (such as the Frontier Conference or Cascade Collegiate Conference in the Northwest) and NCAA D-II/D-III conferences with religious schools often respect this. BYU-Idaho would follow BYU's model, making clear in membership discussions that its teams cannot play on Sundays. Both NAIA and NCAA have precedents for this, so it should be manageable.
- Considering mission alignment and flexibility, BYU-Idaho might lean toward **joining the NAIA initially**. NAIA conferences in the region include the Frontier Conference (which sponsors NAIA football and includes College of Idaho and Montana schools) and the Cascade Conference (NAIA, for sports other than football, including many religiously affiliated colleges in the Northwest). In fact, the College of Idaho's plan was to pursue associate membership in the Frontier Conference for football only (College of Idaho board votes to reinstate football – Deseret News); BYU-Idaho could do similarly if it staggered sports addition (e.g., football in an NAIA football conference, basketball in another league).
- **Athlete Academic Eligibility:** Intercollegiate athletes must meet academic standards to practice and compete. BYU-Idaho would establish an **athletic compliance office** to verify that student-athletes satisfy initial eligibility (e.g., GPA and test scores out of high school) and maintain progress toward a degree. The NCAA has a clearinghouse for academic eligibility and specific benchmarks (for instance, NCAA freshmen need a minimum GPA in core courses and test score based on a sliding scale). The NAIA similarly requires incoming athletes to meet at least two of three criteria (a minimum test score, GPA, or class rank) to be eligible. In-season, athletes typically must be full-time students and maintain a certain GPA (often 2.0 minimum) and course load. BYU-Idaho would need to **monitor grades and credits** and possibly provide academic support services (tutoring, study halls) for athletes to ensure they succeed academically while balancing sports. Fortunately, BYU-Idaho's student body is high-achieving and accustomed to an honor code that includes academic honesty and diligence, which could translate to strong academic performance among athletes as well.
- **NCAA Compliance Rules:** If joining the NCAA, BYU-Idaho would be subject to the NCAA rulebook governing recruiting (when and how coaches can contact recruits, no improper benefits, etc.), amateurism (students cannot be paid for play), and practice limits (e.g., hours per week). NAIA rules are somewhat less elaborate but still enforce amateurism and fair play. The university would need to educate new coaches and student-athletes on these rules to avoid violations. For example, simple things like providing meals to recruits or hosting summer workouts have regulations – a new

compliance office and faculty athletic representative would have to oversee these areas.

- **Title IX Compliance:** As a federally funded institution (students receive federal aid), BYU-Idaho must abide by Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, which mandates gender equity in any education program including athletics. *Title IX compliance is so critical it is addressed separately in Section 6.* In short, BYU-Idaho would need to ensure that adding men's teams (especially a large roster sport like football) is accompanied by equitable opportunities for women, in terms of number of athletes, scholarships, and treatment. The **impact of Title IX** will require adding women's sports and carefully balancing resources, or else the university would risk legal and ethical issues.

In summary, **regulatory compliance** will require careful planning from day one. BYU-Idaho must choose an athletic association that fits its size and values (likely NAIA or NCAA Division II/III), ramp up its sports offerings to meet membership minimums, and build a compliance framework to uphold academic standards and gender equity. None of these hurdles are insurmountable – many peer institutions have navigated them – but they do add **administrative overhead**. Hiring an experienced Athletic Director and compliance coordinator early in the process would be essential to guide BYU-Idaho through the membership application and ensure all eligibility and reporting rules are followed. If done correctly, membership in an athletic association will open the door for postseason play, all-American awards, and legitimacy for the new teams.

4. Student Interest and Engagement

Any decision to implement intercollegiate sports at BYU-Idaho should be driven by student interest and the potential to enhance the campus experience. Evidence suggests there is **significant student (and community) enthusiasm** for bringing back sports teams, and the benefits for student unity and engagement could be substantial:

- **Student Demand:** Despite two decades without varsity teams, many BYU-Idaho students have long expressed a desire for them. A recent online petition to “Resurrect sports at BYU-Idaho” gathered signatures and laid out reasons to bring back athletics, indicating grass-roots interest (Petition · Resurrect sports at BYU-Idaho - United States · Change.org) (Petition · Resurrect sports at BYU-Idaho - United States · Change.org). The petition argues that *“having sports would increase the morale at BYU-Idaho... giving students and the community something to be excited about during the cold winter months”* (Petition · Resurrect sports at BYU-Idaho - United States · Change.org). Rexburg's winters are long and chilly, and weekend basketball games or fall football Saturdays could provide much-needed entertainment and school spirit. The petition also notes that many talented LDS athletes who aren't recruited by BYU-Provo would love to attend a church school and still play college sports (Petition · Resurrect sports at BYU-Idaho - United States · Change.org) – currently, those students must choose either

BYU-Idaho (with no varsity sports) or pursue athletics at a non-LDS college. Offering intercollegiate teams would attract these students, who in turn would enrich campus life with their talents and leadership.

- **Campus Unity and Spirit:** A college football team, in particular, can rally a campus like nothing else. *“No other sport contributes more to the vibrancy of a college campus than football,”* according to the president of the National Football Foundation, noting that university leaders nationwide see the value of football in energizing student life (Colleges and Universities Continue Adding Football Teams in 2014 - National Football Foundation). Games become community events where students, faculty, and families gather in support of a common cause – wearing school colors, singing the fight song, and forging a shared identity. BYU-Idaho currently has plenty of wholesome activities and devotionals that bring students together spiritually, but lacks the electric atmosphere of game day. Instituting men’s and women’s basketball would similarly create focal points for school spirit; midnight madness events, pep rallies, and rivalry games would add new traditions to campus.
- **Evidence from Intramurals:** BYU-Idaho’s existing intramural sports (branded as “Competitive Sports” on campus) show that students are passionate about athletics. Participation rates are very high – the intramural program provides **2,400+ students** competitive team opportunities annually, far more than the 264 who participated in Ricks College’s varsity teams in 2000 ((PDF) A New Collegiate Model: Intra-Collegiate Athletics at BYU Idaho). This indicates students *love to play*, but it also hints at an appetite for higher levels of play. Many students also *love to watch* high-level sports. Currently, the most talented athletes on campus only compete against peers, with limited spectator turnout (mostly fellow students). Elevating a select few teams to intercollegiate status would give the broader student body a chance to become **fans**. Rather than every student being an athlete (BYU-Idaho’s current philosophy (Gordon B. Hinckley | “Inaugural Remarks” | Speeches | BYU-Idaho)), those not on the team can cheer on their classmates and share in pride of victory or agony of defeat – experiences that create camaraderie among the student body. Importantly, introducing varsity teams need not destroy the intramural culture. BYU-Idaho can run both: a robust intramural program open to all (maintaining broad participation and the “everyone plays” ethos) alongside a few varsity squads that represent the school externally. Many universities successfully balance the two tiers of sport.
- **Past Initiatives or Rumors:** Over the years, there have been periodic rumors that BYU-Idaho might reintroduce sports, reflecting continued interest. In late 2022, a short-lived fake social media video circulated, showing a football helmet with “BYUI” and hinting at a team “Coming Fall 2023” (Social media post implying sports team coming next year to BYU-Idaho is fake - East Idaho News) (Social media post implying sports team coming next year to BYU-Idaho is fake - East Idaho News). This hoax spread quickly enough that the university had to officially debunk it as false – which it did, reiterating that no varsity teams existed at BYU-I since 2001 (Social media post implying

sports team coming next year to BYU-Idaho is fake - East Idaho News). The very fact such a prank went viral suggests an underlying excitement at the idea of BYU-Idaho athletics. It's reasonable to believe that if an official announcement were made to establish teams, the student reaction would be overwhelmingly positive.

- **Benefits for Student Unity:** Intercollegiate sports could serve as a **unifying force** on campus. They offer common talking points and shared experiences – Monday morning conversations about the big game, or groups of roommates road-tripping to an away match. School spirit can also increase **student engagement** in other areas: attendance at games often correlates with higher involvement in clubs, alumni connection, and a sense of loyalty to the institution. BYU-Idaho's mission is focused on developing disciple-leaders; being part of a fan base that supports their peers in competition can teach sportsmanship, solidarity, and healthy school pride. There's also an opportunity for **service and leadership** within sports: students can form booster clubs, volunteer as game ushers, or organize pep rallies, further expanding involvement. The petition to resurrect sports noted that having teams would *“uplift and inspire kids in the Southeastern Idaho community”* through outreach and youth camps (Petition · Resurrect sports at BYU-Idaho - United States · Change.org), implying BYU-Idaho athletes could become role models and unify the campus with the local community as well.

In conclusion, **student interest in intercollegiate sports at BYU-Idaho is real and growing**, and the potential engagement benefits are compelling. A football team and basketball teams would give students new reasons to come together in positive, spirited ways. As one small-college president observed, beyond the enrollment numbers, *“there's something about the rush of football that also invigorates the campus”* (Small colleges bet on new sports to boost enrollment). That invigorating effect – a boost in morale, pride, and unity – is precisely what BYU-Idaho stands to gain. The key will be ensuring that this new enthusiasm complements, rather than detracts from, the university's spiritual and academic atmosphere (see Section 7 on cultural challenges). With proper guidance, sports can be introduced *in harmony* with BYU-Idaho's values, enriching student life on multiple levels.

5. Comparisons to Other Universities (Challenges and Successes)

BYU-Idaho's situation is somewhat unique – a large undergraduate-focused university, owned by a church, with no varsity sports for over two decades. However, there are comparable institutions and precedents that can offer insights into implementing or expanding intercollegiate athletics:

- **Peer Church Schools Adding Sports:** One illuminating comparison is **Southern Virginia University (SVU)**. SVU is a small private college in Virginia with a mission and student body that draw heavily from Latter-day Saint (LDS) values (though it's not

LDS-owned). SVU became a four-year college in 1996 and *immediately began an intercollegiate athletic program* in 1997. Over the past 25 years, SVU has expanded to **30 varsity teams** (NCAA Division III) including football, basketball, volleyball, etc. It demonstrates that even a relatively small, church-oriented campus can successfully run a broad athletics program. Challenges SVU faced included gaining NCAA membership (it transitioned from NAIA to NCAA D-III over time) and balancing resources for many sports. Yet, SVU has leveraged athletics as a cornerstone of campus life and a tool for enrollment growth (SVU's enrollment, ~1,000 students, includes a large percentage of student-athletes). SVU's mission is similar in instilling leadership and values; they present sports as another arena for character development. BYU-Idaho, on a larger scale, could emulate SVU's approach of slowly growing a sports program consistent with its values. The SVU case is a **success story** – it now competes nationally in D-III and provides an outlet for LDS athletes who want a smaller environment than BYU-Provo.

- **Small Colleges Reviving Football:** Many small colleges in the 2010s decided to add or revive football programs specifically to bolster campus life and enrollment. The **College of Idaho**, a liberal arts college in Caldwell, ID, is a prime example. It had discontinued football in 1978 but voted to reinstate it in 2012, with the team taking the field in 2014 (College of Idaho board votes to reinstate football – Deseret News). Their rationale closely parallels what BYU-Idaho might consider: tapping into enthusiasm for the sport and attracting students who “would love a chance to play near their families and get an education that will set them up for a lifetime of success,” as College of Idaho’s athletic director explained (College of Idaho board votes to reinstate football – Deseret News). They noted that many Idaho athletes who couldn’t make Boise State or Idaho’s NCAA teams were leaving to play at out-of-state small colleges; with a new NAIA football team, those students could stay in Idaho (College of Idaho board votes to reinstate football – Deseret News). BYU-Idaho similarly could attract students who aren’t Division I recruits but still want to compete. The College of Idaho also explicitly touted football as a way to *boost enrollment, fundraising, and school profile* (College of Idaho board votes to reinstate football – Deseret News). Indeed, early returns were positive: in the year after announcing football, Paine College (another small school adding football) saw **150 new student-athletes enroll, increasing total enrollment by 11%** (Colleges and Universities Continue Adding Football Teams in 2014 - National Football Foundation). Many small institutions have reported higher male enrollment and even more diverse student bodies after adding sports (for example, Calvin University’s first football season coincided with a 10% rise in nonwhite enrollment, as new student-athletes contributed to diversity) (Small colleges bet on new sports to boost enrollment). The **success** in these cases is measured in both numbers and intangibles – College of Idaho enjoyed a surge of community support (with local attendance and media attention) that raised its profile in the region. A challenge they had was funding the startup; they launched a fundraising campaign for facilities and partnered with the city for stadium upgrades (College of Idaho board votes to reinstate football – Deseret News) (College of Idaho board votes to reinstate football – Deseret News). BYU-Idaho can learn from these examples by aggressively marketing the new teams to prospective students and engaging local

communities (Rexburg and the LDS community) to build support.

- **Similar-Size Universities with Established Sports:** BYU-Idaho's enrollment is approximately 20,000 (on campus, not counting online), which is quite large compared to most NAIA or Division II schools. A useful comparison might be to some **mid-sized religious universities**:
 - **Liberty University** (VA) is an evangelical Christian university that grew to ~15,000 on-campus undergrads and built a robust Division I athletics program (including starting a football team in 1989 that eventually moved up to the FBS level). Liberty used sports to create national visibility and local unity, though their scale and resources differ from BYU-I's context.
 - **Oral Roberts University** (OK) and **Pepperdine University** (CA) are religiously affiliated schools of a few thousand students that compete in Division I (though neither has football). They show that smaller religious schools can field competitive teams (primarily basketball, baseball, etc.) which become a point of pride and student engagement on campus. The challenge for these institutions is often financial – Pepperdine, for instance, uses a mix of student fees and endowment support to fund athletics, and must carefully balance academics and sports.
 - **Regional Public Universities:** While not mission-similar, looking at schools like **Idaho State University** or **Weber State University** (both in the Mountain West region, with around 10,000–12,000 students and FCS football programs) can give perspective on facility needs and community engagement. These schools have longstanding traditions and community support for sports, which BYU-Idaho would be trying to spark from scratch. One advantage BYU-Idaho has is an existing tight-knit campus culture and alumni base that could be mobilized quickly in support of new teams.
- **Other LDS Church Educational Institutions:** Within BYU-Idaho's own institutional family, there are instructive contrasts:
 - **BYU (Provo)** – the flagship BYU has a celebrated Division I athletics program which undoubtedly boosts school spirit and unity among students and alumni. Many BYU-Idaho students are already fans of BYU's teams. However, BYU in Provo has a different mission emphasis (including research and graduate programs) and far greater resources for athletics, so it may not be an apt direct comparison for scale. That said, any BYU-Idaho program would likely try to emulate BYU's standards of honor (honor code compliance for athletes, no Sunday play, etc.), and could potentially benefit from BYU-Provo's expertise (perhaps scheduling exhibition games with BYU's JV or club teams, or coaching clinics).
 - **BYU-Hawaii** – a very relevant case, but from the opposite direction. BYU-Hawaii, a small sister university (~2,700 students) had a successful NCAA Division II athletics program for decades (with national championships in

women's volleyball and tennis). In 2014, BYU–Hawaii announced it would **phase out intercollegiate athletics by 2017**. The decision was made after years of study, primarily to reallocate resources to expand enrollment and serve more international students (BYU-Hawaii Ends Intercollegiate Athletics Era | Athletic Business). The president of BYU–Hawaii explained that admitting 20% more students (500 additional) would do more good for the Church's mission than continuing to support sports for a few hundred athletes (BYU-Hawaii Ends Intercollegiate Athletics Era | Athletic Business). This is essentially the same calculation (many vs. few) that led BYU-Idaho to drop sports in 2001. The BYU–Hawaii experience highlights the **challenge** that sports can be seen as diverting funds from broader educational purposes. It also shows the emotional cost – the end of BYU–Hawaii sports was met with sadness by students and alumni (BYU-Hawaii Ends Intercollegiate Athletics Era | Athletic Business), and even two years later, the community felt the void left by athletics. BYU–Hawaii promised a “vibrant intramural/activity program” in lieu of varsity teams (BYU-Hawaii Ends Intercollegiate Athletics Era | Athletic Business), much like BYU-Idaho's approach. For BYU-Idaho leaders considering a reversal, the BYU–Hawaii case is a caution: it suggests that if sports are reintroduced, one must be prepared to justify them against other opportunities (like expanding enrollment or academic programs) and ensure they truly add value to *many* students, not just a few.

- **Outcomes and Metrics of Success:** Other universities have measured the success of adding sports in various ways:
 - **Enrollment and Retention:** As mentioned, many schools see enrollment bumps. Also, having sports can improve **student retention** – athletes often persist to graduation due to team commitments, and spirited campus life can make all students more likely to stay. Fontbonne University (MO), which added football in 2022, noted better-than-expected retention associated with its new athletes (Small colleges bet on new sports to boost enrollment).
 - **Financial ROI:** Some analyses (e.g., a study in *Higher Ed Today*) argue that adding football does not always yield a long-term enrollment advantage for every school, especially if demographics are against it (College Football Unlikely to Boost Campus Enrollment, Per Study). However, intangible returns like increased alumni donations and publicity can manifest later. For BYU-Idaho, success might not be measured in profit, but in whether the teams bolster the university's mission (are student-athletes graduating and becoming leaders? Is the campus happier and more unified?).
 - **Challenges:** Several schools expanding athletics have cautioned about “*unexpected changes to campus culture and falling academic standards*” if sports become too dominant or if admissions start prioritizing athletes over other students (Small colleges bet on new sports to boost enrollment). Adrian College, for instance, had to ensure its rapid growth in athletes didn't dilute academic quality – a relevant caution for BYU-Idaho, which holds academic and spiritual

standards high. Additionally, some universities struggle with the **integration of athletes** into the general student body; cliques or preferential treatment can arise. BYU-Idaho's honor code and culture of equality could mitigate this, but it is something to watch.

In summary, BYU-Idaho can glean **lessons from other institutions**:

- A phased, well-supported introduction of sports can succeed even at values-focused campuses (SVU's example).
- Football, in particular, has been a catalyst for growth and spirit at many small colleges (College of Idaho, Calvin University).
- The school must be mindful of the potential trade-offs (as illustrated starkly by BYU-Hawaii's choice to end sports for broader impact).

By studying these comparisons, BYU-Idaho can adopt best practices – for example, focusing on **student experience over commercialism (D-III style)**, leveraging sports to recruit a more diverse student body (like some NAIA schools have done), and engaging the community to turn games into uplifting events. The successes elsewhere show it *can* be done, and the challenges forewarn BYU-Idaho of what to plan for and avoid.

6. Title IX Compliance and Gender Equity

Any expansion of athletics at BYU-Idaho must rigorously comply with **Title IX**, the federal law requiring equal opportunity for men and women in educational programs, including sports. Title IX will play a central role in shaping the plan for new teams, especially given the focus on adding two men's teams (football and men's basketball) and only one women's team (women's basketball) in the initial proposal. Key considerations for compliance include balancing participation numbers, scholarships, and resources between genders:

- **Proportional Participation:** Title IX's primary test for athletics is often the **proportionality test** – schools should provide athletic opportunities to male and female students in proportion to their undergraduate enrollment ratio (Title IX - More than a Title | Tracksmith). In practice, this means if BYU-Idaho's student body is, say, 50% female and 50% male, roughly half of varsity athletes should be female. Football makes this challenging: a single football team might carry 80–100 players, who are almost exclusively male. By adding men's football and basketball (approximately 95 male athletes combined) and women's basketball (~15 female athletes), BYU-Idaho would create a huge imbalance if no other women's teams are added. Men could outnumber women in athletics by roughly 95 to 15 in that scenario – nowhere near the roughly equal gender enrollment of BYU-Idaho (in fact, BYU-Idaho's enrollment skews slightly female). This would *not* pass Title IX muster. To comply, BYU-Idaho would **need to introduce additional women's sports** to even out the opportunities. Colleges with football often add multiple women's teams as "roster balance" – as one analysis puts it, *"since football has such a large roster with no large female sport to naturally balance it, universities look*

to sports like women's track and field, cross country, and rowing as roster sinks to drive up their female athletic opportunity numbers" (Title IX - More than a Title | Tracksmith). In BYU-Idaho's case, likely candidates for women's sports could include:

- **Women's Volleyball** – A popular sport in the LDS community and one in which BYU-Idaho could be competitive (many female students play volleyball in high school). Roster ~15.
 - **Women's Soccer** – Soccer has a roster of 20–25 and could utilize existing fields. It also complements the fall football season with a women's fall sport.
 - **Women's Track & Field/Cross Country** – These sports can roster large numbers of women (20–40 across cross-country, indoor, and outdoor track). BYU-Idaho has a track and could leverage it. The combined cross-country/track team is often used by colleges to boost women's participation numbers.
 - **Softball** – Roster ~18, spring sport, common offering if facilities (a softball field) exist or can be built.
 - **Others:** Women's basketball is already counted; beyond that, BYU-Idaho could consider women's swimming (if the indoor pool can be used competitively) or women's rugby (if looking for a niche sport, though rugby isn't NCAA-sanctioned broadly).
- The exact sports to add would be determined by a survey of female student interest (Title IX's third prong is accommodating the underrepresented gender's interests) and practical facility considerations. But **at minimum, for Title IX, the school should plan to add 2–3 women's teams alongside football and men's basketball.** For example, adding women's volleyball and soccer immediately would bring roughly 40 more female athletes, making the gender ratio closer to balance (e.g., 95 men : 55 women, which is still off if enrollment is 50/50). Over time, a women's track program could further expand female opportunities. The goal would be to show continual progress toward equity if exact proportionality isn't met on day one.
 - **Scholarships:** Title IX also examines scholarships and whether financial aid is distributed proportionally. If BYU-Idaho participates at a level that offers athletic scholarships (NAIA or NCAA Division II), it must ensure that the total scholarship dollars for female athletes is roughly equal to that for male athletes, in proportion to their participation. Football scholarships often skew this because a football team might offer, say, 30 partial scholarships (if NAIA) or up to the equivalent of 36 full scholarships (NAIA limit) – all to men. Balancing that would require significant scholarship funding for women's teams (multiple sports combined). One way some Division II schools handle this is by not fully funding football scholarships or by offering more but smaller scholarships to women (like many partial scholarships in women's track, soccer, etc.). BYU-Idaho could also choose to compete in **Division III or a non-scholarship model**, which simplifies compliance since no athletic scholarships are given to anyone. In that case, the concern is roster spots and resources, not scholarship dollars. If scholarships are involved, BYU-Idaho will need a meticulous plan to equitably fund female athletes (possibly relying on academic scholarships for female athletes to supplement, though

those don't count as athletic aid).

- **Treatment and Resources:** Title IX compliance isn't just numeric. The university must provide equal quality in facilities, coaching, equipment, travel, and publicity for men's and women's teams. For example, the women's basketball team should have access to the main gym at prime practice times just as the men's team does, and should travel and stay in lodging equivalent to the men. The coaching staff salaries for comparable men's and women's sports should be proportional and based on experience (it would be problematic if, say, the men's basketball coach is paid lavishly and the women's coach is underpaid without justification). BYU-Idaho will need to **budget for women's sports appropriately**: if new women's teams are created, they get new uniforms, good facilities (e.g., the women's soccer team gets priority on the soccer field, not an inferior field), and support services (trainers, medical, academic advising) equal to what the men's teams get. The athletic director and Title IX coordinator should annually review things like per diem allowances, scheduling of games (equal promotion of women's game nights), and even band/cheer presence to ensure fairness. Since BYU-Idaho is starting fresh, it has the chance to bake in equity from the beginning – for instance, unveiling men's and women's teams together, perhaps even coordinating doubleheaders (women's and men's basketball games back-to-back to give both teams visibility).
- **Oversight and Reporting:** BYU-Idaho would be required to report athletics data via the Equity in Athletics Disclosure Act (EADA), detailing participation and spending by gender. These reports are public and often scrutinized. A plan that demonstrably approaches parity will protect BYU-Idaho from complaints. Engaging female students in planning (maybe forming a committee to suggest which women's sports to add and gauge interest) can help ensure the university “fully and effectively accommodates” female athletic interest – one of the compliance prongs of Title IX.

In essence, **Title IX will require BYU-Idaho to substantially grow women's athletics alongside any men's program expansion.** If football is the big new addition for men, BYU-Idaho must make an equally strong commitment to women's sports to balance that scale. This is not just about avoiding legal trouble; it aligns with the school's values of fairness and opportunity. By providing new opportunities for female athletes, BYU-Idaho can foster leadership and unity across *both* genders. It might consider highlighting a sport where BYU-Idaho could excel quickly – for instance, women's volleyball is an arena BYU-Idaho could potentially compete at a high level (drawing on LDS talent pools) and garner its own spectator support, thus giving women's athletics a prominent place in campus culture.

In planning, an ideal scenario by a few years in might be: **Men's teams:** Football, Basketball; **Women's teams:** Basketball, Volleyball, Soccer (and perhaps Track/Cross Country); plus maybe one additional men's sport (like baseball or track) to round things out without tipping the gender balance. This kind of lineup would meet NAIA minimum sports, satisfy Title IX proportionality (roughly equal numbers of male and female athletes), and serve a broad range of student interests.

7. Potential Challenges and Proposed Solutions

Implementing intercollegiate sports at BYU-Idaho is a complex endeavor that faces several **major challenges**. Below, we identify these obstacles and suggest **viable solutions** or mitigation strategies for each:

- **Administrative and Policy Hurdles:** The most fundamental challenge is that the move would require approval from the BYU-Idaho administration and the Church Board of Education (which oversees Church-owned schools). Historically, the policy has been *no varsity sports* at BYU-Idaho; reversing that is no small matter. Some leaders may worry that introducing sports could distract from BYU-Idaho’s spiritual and educational mission. President Gordon B. Hinckley once noted that BYU-Idaho was “*an experiment...We did away with intercollegiate football...instead of a few involved in intercollegiate sports, the whole student body is in intramural sports, and having a wonderful time*” (Gordon B. Hinckley | “Inaugural Remarks” | Speeches | BYU-Idaho). This philosophy is ingrained in BYU-Idaho’s identity.
 - **Solution:** Proponents of intercollegiate teams must make a persuasive case that sports *will enhance* the mission, not detract from it. They can present data (as in this report) that sports can build leadership, unity, and even spiritual camaraderie. One approach is to frame the teams as an extension of the student activities program – i.e., another avenue to develop disciple-leaders, where student-athletes commit to honor, discipline, and represent BYU-Idaho’s values on a public stage. Importantly, assuring administrators that **intramural opportunities will remain robust** is key. The plan should explicitly state that intramural sports (the “every student” model) will continue unaffected; the varsity teams are an additive opportunity for those with higher skill and competitive desire. If done correctly, the varsity program’s success could actually *boost* intramural interest (more students getting inspired to play for fun after watching their peers compete).
 - Another element is financial prudence: present a business plan showing the university won’t incur undue burden – e.g., initial funding via donations or a minimal student fee, so core budget priorities are not compromised. If Church leaders see that the ***“many vs few” trade-off (BYU-Hawaii Ends Intercollegiate Athletics Era | Athletic Business) has been addressed (by funding sports separately and maintaining educational quality for all students), they may be more inclined to approve. Starting with a pilot or trial (such as club teams that compete against other colleges unofficially, then upgrading to varsity) could be a conservative approach to get a foot in the door administratively.
- **Cultural Considerations:** BYU-Idaho’s campus culture is currently focused on academics, spiritual life, and inclusive activities. Some in the community might worry that introducing college sports could bring negative influences: for instance, an attitude of excessive competition, or a divide between athletes and non-athletes, or even concerns about a “party culture” that sometimes surrounds college sports (tailgating, etc.). While

BYU-Idaho's honor code would mitigate most typical college-sports vices (no alcohol, strict conduct for students), the **culture shift** is still a factor.

- **Solution:** Deliberately shape the culture of the new athletic program from day one. BYU-Idaho can institute a **strict code of conduct for athletes** that aligns with the school's honor code – in fact, athletes can be held up as paragons of the honor code (just as BYU-Provo expects its athletes to uphold high standards). Coaches hired should be not only technically competent but also strong in the school's values, ensuring they recruit students who will fit BYU-Idaho's atmosphere. To maintain unity, integrate athletes with the general student body: encourage athletes to live in normal campus housing (not segregated athlete dorms), have them participate in regular campus devotionals and service projects, and perhaps assign them as peer mentors or tutors (leveraging their leadership status for good).
- Another cultural point: **No Sunday play**, which is non-negotiable for BYU-Idaho, could result in scheduling challenges or missing certain postseason events. This might put teams at a competitive disadvantage or cause friction in conferences. BYU-Idaho will need to foster understanding among conference peers (much as BYU and other religious schools have done) and be willing to sacrifice some opportunities (e.g., not competing in a tournament that schedules on Sunday). Clear communication and early advocacy in the NAIA/NCAA membership process can largely solve this (many conferences readily accommodate it once aware).
- Lastly, involve the campus spiritually in the teams: begin games with a prayer (a practice at some church schools), emphasize sportsmanship messages in the student newspaper and devotionals. If the campus sees that sports are being done "the BYU-Idaho way," there will be less concern about cultural erosion. Over time, new positive traditions will form (perhaps a game-day devotional or fireside, or team-led community service days) that fuse sports with BYU-Idaho's spiritual mission.
- **Financial Sustainability:** Even with the best planning, funding athletics is an ongoing challenge. Costs can rise due to inflation, coaching turnover, or needed facility repairs. If initial revenue projections fall short (say ticket sales are lower than hoped or fundraising tapers off after the novelty wears off), the university could face a budget gap.
 - **Solution:** Treat the athletic program with a mentality of fiscal discipline and **scalability**. Start small – for example, maybe begin with just basketball teams in Year 1 to test the waters, then add football in Year 2 after some infrastructure is in place and community support is built. This staggers expenses. Pursue cost-saving measures common in Division II/D-III programs: schedule more regional games to reduce travel costs, use multi-purpose staff (e.g., one athletic training staff serves all teams, rather than separate hires for each), and limit non-conference overnight trips. Leveraging volunteerism can also help; BYU-Idaho has a tradition of student leadership in activities – possibly some

assistant coaching or team management roles could be filled by student volunteers or interns (under supervision of professionals) to both save money and provide educational experience.

- Continuously engage alumni and donors through an athletic booster club to create a steady stream of contributions earmarked for athletics. For example, an “Adopt-a-Player” fundraising model (where donors sponsor a scholarship or equipment for a specific athlete) can personalize contributions. The school could also explore hosting revenue-generating events at its facilities: high school tournaments, sports camps in summer run by the new coaches, etc., which both generate some income and market BYU-Idaho’s program to potential recruits.
- If student interest is very high, another solution is to **incrementally raise the student fee** (with proper approval) once teams are established and students themselves see the value. Many campuses have increased athletic fees after teams showed success and popularity, as students are then more willing to chip in for what feels like “our team.”
- In terms of equipment, seeking sponsorship deals for gear (even at small college level, sometimes companies will provide discounts or free equipment if teams use their brand) could reduce costs for uniforms and apparel.
- **Talent and Competitiveness:** Starting new teams from scratch means initially they may struggle competitively against schools with long-established programs. There’s a risk of discouragement if teams lose badly or frequently in early years. Also, recruiting good athletes to an unknown program is challenging.
 - **Solution:** Set realistic expectations and focus on building gradually. Hire coaches who are not only good teachers of the game but also *builders* of programs. In recruiting, coaches can sell the uniqueness of BYU-Idaho: a chance to be a pioneer on a new team, the supportive LDS environment, and the opportunity to compete while also preparing for a career (since BYU-I is known for academics). Many LDS athletes might jump at the chance to attend BYU-Idaho if they weren’t quite D-I caliber – this pool of talent (currently going to junior colleges or D-III schools elsewhere) could yield surprisingly competitive teams early on.
 - Even if win-loss records are rough at first, emphasize other measures of success: sportsmanship awards, academic all-conference honorees, community service hours, etc., to show the teams contribute value. To build fan support despite losses, market the **game-day experience** (halftime shows, prize giveaways, etc.) so attending is fun regardless of outcome. As the program gains its footing, competitiveness should improve – especially if BYU-Idaho leverages LDS recruiting pipelines similarly to how BYU-Provo taps into a network of church members worldwide. It may find strong athletes who want an LDS college but didn’t get a BYU offer; now they have a second option at BYU-Idaho.
- **Logistical and Staffing Challenges:** BYU-Idaho currently has no athletic department infrastructure. Everything from sports medicine to game scheduling to compliance will have to be built. This is a challenge in that many moving parts must come together.

- **Solution:** Invest in a small but solid **athletics administration team** early. Hiring an Athletic Director with experience either starting programs or with ties to LDS sports (for cultural fit) would be crucial. This person can then hire coaches and support staff. Possibly some resources can be shared or outsourced initially – for example, BYU-Idaho could contract with a local physical therapy group or hospital for athletic training services rather than hiring a full staff immediately. They might also collaborate with BYU-Provo or Idaho State University for advice on compliance setup. Utilizing student interns from BYU-Idaho’s exercise science or business programs in areas like sports marketing, event management, and athletic training could also alleviate staffing needs while giving students professional experience.
- Schedule management can be aided by joining a conference (which provides a pre-set schedule template). For non-conference games, the AD can start by scheduling fellow religious schools or local colleges who may be excited to play BYU-Idaho for the novelty, even if BYU-I is new (e.g., small Christian colleges in Utah/Idaho could become natural rivals). Community volunteers and student workers can be trained to handle game operations (ticketing, statistics, etc.) under staff supervision.
- **Maintaining Academic Focus:** A potential issue is ensuring student-athletes keep up in BYU-Idaho’s rigorous three-track academic system (where students attend on rotating tracks throughout the year). Athletes will need to manage missions (many LDS students serve missions at some point, which could interrupt athletic eligibility) and classes, possibly year-round.
 - **Solution:** Proactively coordinate academics and athletics. BYU-Idaho might allow athletes some flexibility in the track system (ensuring, for example, that football players are always on campus in fall for the season, and basketball players in winter). Academic advisors assigned to athletes can help them plan schedules around competition. The culture should reinforce that they are *students first*. Celebrating academic achievements of teams (team GPA announcements, graduation success) will keep priorities straight. As for missions, the program can actually use that as a strength: treat returning missionaries as “new recruits” that bolster the team with maturity. It’s similar to BYU-Provo’s approach where many athletes leave for two years and come back – coaches will plan rosters with mission timings in mind (possibly recruiting a bit larger roster to account for those away in any given year). The school could also consider NCAA/NAIA eligibility rules regarding missions (usually a mission pause doesn’t count against eligibility years, which helps).

In conclusion, while the challenges are **significant**, none are insurmountable with careful planning and alignment to BYU-Idaho’s core values. The decision to implement intercollegiate sports must come with a commitment to do so in a way that *enhances the student experience holistically*. By learning from other institutions, engaging stakeholders at all levels, and rolling out the programs deliberately and equitably, BYU-Idaho can overcome these obstacles. The

result could be a set of athletic teams that *complement* the university's spiritual and academic mission – teams that bring students together, strengthen loyalty to the school, and provide new avenues for personal growth, all while remaining financially and culturally sustainable.

Conclusion – Establishing a football team and men's and women's basketball teams at BYU-Idaho would be a transformative venture. It requires navigating financial planning, upgrading facilities, clearing regulatory hurdles, galvanizing student interest, learning from peer examples, upholding Title IX, and proactively addressing challenges. By doing so, BYU-Idaho can create an athletics program true to its unique mission – one that fosters unity and engagement on campus. The enthusiastic response likely from students and alumni (as evidenced by petitions and the general nationwide trend of using sports to invigorate campuses) suggests that, if executed wisely, the return of intercollegiate sports could usher in a new era of **Spirit of Ricks meets Cougar blue**, blending tradition with new school spirit. It is a bold step, but with unity as both the means and the end, it's a step that could profoundly enrich the BYU-Idaho experience for years to come.

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