



Southern Conference

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Southern Conference to add women's lacrosse as 22nd sport ***Three full members, three associate members will begin SoCon competition in 2017-18***

SPARTANBURG, S.C. – The Southern Conference will add women's lacrosse as its 22nd varsity sport for the 2017-18 academic year, Commissioner John Iamarino announced Tuesday. Associate members Central Michigan, Delaware State and Detroit Mercy will join full members Furman, Mercer and Wofford to form a six-member league that will have an automatic bid to the NCAA Championship.

"This is a meaningful step for both the Southern Conference and the six members who will compete for our championship," Iamarino said. "It enables our three full-time programs to bring another sport under the SoCon umbrella. And we look forward to serving our three associate members, Central Michigan, Delaware State and Detroit Mercy."

Central Michigan, Delaware State, Detroit Mercy, Furman and Mercer currently compete under the 11-member ASUN Conference banner, while Wofford will launch its inaugural season of competition in 2018. Going forward, the Southern Conference and the ASUN will both field six-member leagues with automatic NCAA bids.

"Obviously, access to automatic qualification to the NCAA championship was an important piece in putting this together," Iamarino said. "I can't overstate the high level of cooperation we have received from Commissioner Ted Gumbart and his staff at the Atlantic Sun Conference in bringing this about. Both conferences try to place their student-athletes' experiences at the top of their priorities. We've now given two sets of six teams much better opportunities to compete in NCAA postseason play."

The SoCon's addition of women's lacrosse further demonstrates its cooperative relationship with the ASUN, which fielded men's lacrosse in 2014 before the Southern Conference assumed stewardship of the sport beginning with the 2014-15 academic year. The two conferences are also longtime collaborators in the administration of the Coastal Collegiate Sports Association (CCSA), a league that houses swimming and diving programs from both conferences.

Detroit Mercy has played women's lacrosse in the ASUN since the league debuted the sport in 2013, while Furman and Mercer joined in 2015, the first season of competition for both programs. Central Michigan joined in 2016 when it launched its program, and Delaware State, whose first season of competition was 2013, will play its lone season in the ASUN in 2017 after spending four years as an independent.

Women's lacrosse will be the third sport added by the SoCon in a four-year span. In addition to men's lacrosse debuting in 2014-15, rifle returned to the league this academic year following a 31-year absence.

The Southern Conference, in its 96th season of intercollegiate competition, is a national leader in emphasizing the development of the student-athlete and helping build lifelong leaders and role models. The conference has been on the forefront of innovation and originality in developing creative solutions to address issues facing intercollegiate athletics. From establishing the first conference basketball tournament (1921) to tackling the issues of freshman eligibility (1922) to developing women's championships (1984) to becoming the first conference to install the 3-point goal in basketball (1980), the Southern Conference has been a pioneer. The Southern Conference is the nation's fifth-oldest NCAA Division I collegiate athletic association.

The conference currently consists of 10 full-time members in six states throughout the Southeast and sponsors 21 varsity sports and championships that produce participants for NCAA Division I Championships.

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