Jump Ball! NCAA Authorizes Use of Iconic "March Madness" Brand for Women's Basketball Championship

BY LYNETTE PACZKOWSKI • OCTOBER 20, 2021

What comes to mind when you hear the phrase "March Madness?" Prior to September of this year, if your answer was NCAA basketball, you'd have been wrong. That's right, prior to September of this year, only the NCAA ***Men's*** Basketball Championship was authorized by the NCAA to utilize the iconic "March Madness" brand.

Beginning with the 2022 Tournaments, however, both NCAA men and NCAA women will use "March Madness" branding.

There is no clear answer as to why this decision didn't come sooner, but one can conclude that the social media blitz during the 2021 championships hastened the NCAA's efforts to bring more equality to the sport. There were several Tweets and Instagram posts highlighting discrepancies between the tournaments on everything from meals to training facilities and workout spaces to swag bags and other perks.

Notably, "March Madness" has been trademarked since 1993, with no apparent exclusivity or differentiation between the genders. The NCAA submitted that the mark was for "entertainment in the nature of basketball tournaments between college teams."

Following the 2021 social media blitz, the NCAA retained a law firm to investigate gender disparities among the NCAA's championship events. Unsurprisingly, the firm's report (the "Kaplan Report") recommended this shift in branding and related marketing.

CLIENT TIP

The law firm's initial focus was on the gender equity issues that surfaced during the 2021 NCAA Division I Men's and Women's Basketball Championships. The full report is publicly available, as is a user-friendly summary of the report. The next phase of review will include an examination across the NCAA's other sports and championships.

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