



## **The Aspire Group Case Study Bowl: Packing the House for the NCAA Women's Basketball Final Four**

### **The Scenario:**

You are a leading consultant for Raise Your Game, Inc., a respected sport management consulting team focused on partnering with sport and entertainment properties to develop strategies for revenue maximization. Your team is widely known as the industry “gurus” regarding ticket packaging and pricing strategies that drive fan consumption and engagement with sport properties.

### **Your Client:**

The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) partnered with your team to build a sales and marketing strategy focused on creating sell outs for the Final Four of the Division I Women's Basketball tournament. The Women's Basketball Final Four is one of 23 Division I championship events that the NCAA hosts throughout the collegiate athletic season. Each year, the Women's Basketball Final Four is awarded to a host region through an extensive bid process that evaluates numerous critical elements including the region's venue(s), ability to welcome thousands of out-of-town guests, and the local fervor for supporting the event. With annually revolving site locations, the NCAA is challenged with starting from ground zero each year with selling tickets.

Women's Basketball is a growing sport within the collegiate athletic landscape with 11.3 million fans attending games during the 2015-16 season across the three Divisions in the NCAA. Division I games accounted for 8.2 million (73%) fans of the total attendance, which was the highest mark achieved by Division I Women's Basketball in its storied 35-year history.

### ***The Final Four and Attendance History***

Since the inaugural Division I Women's Basketball Championship in 1982, 7.5 million fans have attended and cheered on their favorite teams in route to a National Championship. Initially the tournament featured 32 teams competing through five rounds of a single elimination tournament. As of 2016, the Division I Women's Basketball Championship features 64 of the top Division I teams competing to get to the Final Four, the pinnacle moment of the season. The tournament's 64 teams are seeded across four regions with one team from each region emerging to compete in the Final Four. The Final Four and regionals are hosted at a host site, whereas games in the first two rounds are hosted by the top-seeded team in their home venue.

Within the 34-year history of the tournament, attendance for the Final Four sessions grew from 7,766 (1982) fans per session to 14,871 (2016), a growth of 91.5%. However, the sub-15,000 attendance per session in 2016 was the first time since 1994 that the Final Four averaged less than 15,000 fans throughout the semifinals and championship rounds. At the event's peak, the Final Four was witnessed by 59,238 fans throughout the weekend, averaging 29,619 across each session.

### ***Current Situation***

In 2017, the NCAA host the Final Four in Dallas, Texas at the American Airlines Center. To position the Final Four to be more accessible, the NCAA altered the playing format of the Final Four to showcase the semifinals on a Friday and the final on the Sunday prior to the Men's Basketball Championship on Monday. Additionally, the spectator attendance was expanded in 2016 with the addition of the Division II and Division III Final Four hosted at the same site location as Division I.

Tickets to the 2017 Final Four were released on October 28<sup>th</sup>, 2016 to the general public with all-session tickets (semifinals and the Championship) starting at \$75. Fans can purchase single session tickets or an all-session pass. Tickets are tiered based on seat location and range from \$35 to \$62.50 for single session tickets and \$75 to \$225 for the all-session pass. In an effort to expand the Final Four ticket menu, the NCAA introduced group, corporate/hospitality, and Women's Basketball alumni tickets within the past two years.

There are a variety of targeted ticket packages available, most notably of which are group tickets and the Finals Fanatics package. Group ticket pricing is available in the balcony end zone of the American Airlines Center for groups of 25 people are larger starting at \$65. The Final Fanatic package combines the Final Four experience with a local Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA) team to create a unique package. In 2016, the package, known then as the Balcony Bash, featured the Indiana Fever to host a one-of-a-kind party experience in upper level seats. For 2017, fans can purchase an upper-level "balcony" ticket to the Final Four and they will receive a ticket to a food voucher and a ticket to a Dallas Wings game.

The NCAA uses a multifaceted approach to sell tickets to the Final Four experience with available ticket packages through the NCAA and the host venue. Specifically, the NCAA leverages relationships with each Division I program to sell tickets to their fan bases and uses an outbound sales center to reach out to the NCAA's fan database. They also partnered with PrimeSport as the official ticket and hospitality provider to offer premium packages including travel and event hospitality.

To expand the fan experience past competition, the NCAA hosts a fan fest, known as Tourney Town, during the Final Four weekend adjacent to the venue. This is a free event designed to celebrate collegiate athletics, specifically Women's Basketball, with ticket purchasers and general community members. During the 2016 Final Four in Indianapolis, Tourney Town welcomed 21,923 attendees over the three-day span. "Our goal with Tourney Town is to attract a wide range of attendees. We want to engage our most hardcore fans and use the event to introduce collegiate Women's Basketball to new fans. Our challenge is finding the optimal way to get Tourney Town attendees to purchase tickets and ticket purchasers to attend Tourney Town. We need to raise the value of both events," noted Tracie Hitz, Director of Championships and Alliances for the NCAA.

Within the sessions, the NCAA is currently exploring having a concert in between semifinal games with a big name musical act. Depending on the implementation strategy, the concert might be held in a separate venue from the games, but featured in a combination package including a finals ticket plus the concert.

"We want the Final Four to appeal to a variety of university alums, fans, and the general community of the host venue. The focus needs to be on the core sporting experiencing of witnessing the top four collegiate Women's Basketball teams, but we know that we need to cast a wider net to sell out our sessions," explained Tracie Hitz.

Surrounding the Final Four experience, there are three specific events that involve Women's Basketball coaches, alumnus, and advocates. Historically, the Women's Basketball Coaches Association (WBCA) hosts its annual convention during the Final Four. The convention has grown over the past years with nearly 3,000 coaches attending. However, only a third of the coaches attend either the semifinals or championship sessions. In conjunction with the WBCA conference, the NCAA hosts 'Beyond the Baseline', a summit dedicated to the women's advancement within and out of sport. To attract past players, the NCAA created AlumNation, a specific ticket package for alumni incorporating unique events and tickets. The WBCA convention, 'Beyond the Baseline', and AlumNation are key opportunities to grow attendance during the Final Four sessions.

"We are excited to partner with Raise Your Game, Inc. to generate new strategies for filling the venue during the Final Four. Having a sold out, cheering arena is vital to growing the brand of Women's Basketball and the NCAA's Final Four platform. Our team is eager to understand the ticket packages and marketing strategies to increase our attendance and maximize revenue, while ensuring an unforgettable experience," said Tracie Hitz.

#### **Data:**

To assist your team with your analysis, the NCAA has provided the following data sets within the following pages:

- 2016 NCAA Division I Women's Basketball Championship attendance report by round and host location
- NCAA Division I Women's Basketball Championship attendance history (breakdowns by specific tournament rounds, total attendance, and average attendance per session)
- Market Research Snapshots from the 2015 Division I Women's Basketball Tournament:
  - 2015 Women's Final Four Attendee Report
  - 2015 Women's Basketball Preliminary Rounds Attendee Report

**Case Study Questions:**

1. What strategies should the NCAA use to sell out both sessions of the Final Four (semifinals and championship)?
2. How can the Women's Final Four appeal to new fan segments, including younger audiences? What are the segments that they should concentrate on and how should they be targeted?
3. What recommendations would you give to the NCAA to optimize their ticket product menu?
4. What retention strategies could the NCAA use to keep fans coming year-over-year whether as annual attendees or repeat purchasers within a specific region?
5. What type of ticket package should the NCAA create to best showcase the planned concert experience whether it is hosted during the semifinals or off-site?

# 2016 NCAA® DIVISION I WOMEN'S BASKETBALL CHAMPIONSHIP

## ATTENDANCE

### FIRST ROUND

**Austin, Texas (Frank Erwin Center)**

Session 1 – 2,645

**College Park, Maryland (XFINITY Center)**

Session 1 – 5,374

**College Station, Texas (Reed Arena)**

Session 1 – 4,040

**Columbia, South Carolina (Colonial Life Arena)**

Session 1 – 10,276

**Columbus, Ohio (St. John Arena)**

Session 1 – 2,626

**Corvallis, Oregon (Gill Coliseum)**

Session 1 – 4,702

**Lexington, Kentucky (Memorial Coliseum)**

Session 1 – 2,701

**Louisville, Kentucky (KFC Yum! Center)**

Session 1 – 5,823

**Los Angeles, California (Pauley Pavilion)**

Session 1 – 2,552

**Notre Dame, Indiana (Joyce Center)**

Session 1 – 6,310

**Stanford, California (Maples Pavilion)**

Session 1 – 3,106

**Starkville, Mississippi (Humphrey Coliseum)**

Session 1 – 5,115

**Storrs, Connecticut (Harry A. Gampel Pavilion)**

Session 1 – 4,784

**Syracuse, New York (Carrier Dome)**

Session 1 – 2,445

**Tempe, Arizona (Wells Fargo Arena)**

Session 1 – 3,134

**Waco, Texas (Ferrell Center)**

Session 1 – 4,990

**2016 First-Round Total: 70,614 (4,413 avg.)**

### SECOND ROUND

**Austin, Texas (Frank Erwin Center)**

Session 2 – 2,345

**College Park, Maryland (Comcast Center)**

Session 2 – 4,396

**College Station, Texas (Reed Arena)**

Session 2 – 4,013

**Columbia, South Carolina (Colonial Life Arena)**

Session 2 – 10,048

**Columbus, Ohio (St. John Arena)**

Session 2 – 2,558

**Corvallis, Oregon (Gill Coliseum)**

Session 2 – 6,074

**Lexington, Kentucky (Memorial Coliseum)**

Session 2 – 3,056

**Louisville, Kentucky (KFC Yum! Center)**

Session 2 – 7,515

**Los Angeles, California (Pauley Pavilion)**

Session 2 – 1,656

**Notre Dame, Indiana (Joyce Center)**

Session 2 – 5,750

**Stanford, California (Maples Pavilion)**

Session 2 – 1,961

**Starkville, Mississippi (Humphrey Coliseum)**

Session 2 – 7,094

**Storrs, Connecticut (Harry A. Gampel Pavilion)**

Session 2 – 6,316

**Syracuse, New York (Carrier Dome)**

Session 2 – 3,842

**Tempe, Arizona (Wells Fargo Arena)**

Session 2 – 2,957

**Waco, Texas (Ferrell Center)**

Session 2 – 4,665

**2016 Second-Round Total: 72,246 (4,640 avg.)**

**2016 First & Second Rounds Total: 142,860 (4,464 avg.)**

# **2016 NCAA® DIVISION I WOMEN'S BASKETBALL CHAMPIONSHIP ATTENDANCE**

## **REGIONALS**

### **Bridgeport Regional (Webster Bank Arena)**

Semifinals – 8,898

Final – 9,008

### **Dallas Regional (American Airlines Center)**

Semifinals – 7,109

Final – 6,050

### **Lexington Regional (Rupp Arena)**

Semifinals – 8,509

Final – 3,349

### **Sioux Falls Regional (Denny Sanford Premier Center)**

Semifinals – 4,610

Final – 4,055

**2016 Regional Semifinals Total:** 29,126 (7,281 avg.)

**2016 Regional Finals Total:** 22,462 (5,615 avg.)

**2016 Regional Total:** 51,588 (6,448 avg.)

## **2016 WOMEN'S FINAL FOUR (Indianapolis, Indiana/Bankers Life Fieldhouse)**

**National Semifinals:** 15,227

**National Championship:** 14,514

**2016 Women's Final Four Total:** 29,741 (14,871 avg.)

**2016 CHAMPIONSHIP TOTAL:** 224,189 (5,338 avg.)

**NCAA DIVISION I WOMEN'S BASKETBALL CHAMPIONSHIP ATTENDANCE HISTORY**  
(1982-2016)

Year	FIRST/SECOND ROUND				REGIONALS				WOMEN'S FINAL FOUR				TOTALS			
	Sessions	Total *Attend.	Avg. Session		Sessions	Total *Attend.	Avg. Session		Sessions	Total *Attend.	Avg. Session		Sessions	Total *Attend.	Avg. Session	
1982	16	32,737	2,046		8	18,656	2,332		2	15,531	7,766		26	66,924	2,574	
1983	20	32,876	1,644		8	24,558	3,070		2	16,253	8,127		30	73,687	2,456	
1984	15	36,678	2,445		8	36,943	4,618		2	11,537	5,769		25	85,158	3,406	
1985	16	44,517	2,782		8	39,042	4,880		2	15,245	7,623		26	98,804	3,800	
1986	24	50,780	2,116		8	30,486	3,811		2	15,556	7,778		34	96,822	2,848	
1987	24	61,740	2,573		8	28,942	3,618		2	31,230	15,615		34	121,912	3,586	
1988	24	82,068	3,420		8	34,507	4,313		2	17,167	8,584		34	133,742	3,934	
1989	32	101,848	3,183		8	46,949	5,869		2	18,788	9,394		42	167,585	3,990	
1990	32	102,621	3,207		8	49,408	6,176		2	39,490	19,745		42	191,519	4,560	
1991	32	109,553	3,424		8	28,590	3,574		2	15,796	7,898		42	153,939	3,665	
1992	32	131,097	4,097		8	42,074	5,259		2	24,493	12,247		42	197,664	4,706	
1993	32	135,198	4,225		8	63,887	7,986		2	32,282	16,141		42	231,367	5,509	
1994	48	212,812	4,434		8	43,750	5,469		2	23,932	11,966		58	280,494	4,836	
1995	32	152,968	4,780		8	59,490	7,436		2	36,076	18,038		42	248,534	5,917	
1996	32	173,284	5,415		8	54,510	6,814		2	46,582	23,291		42	274,376	6,533	
1997	32	158,476	4,952		8	34,019	4,252		2	33,428	16,714		42	225,923	5,379	
1998	32	177,423	5,544		8	72,053	9,007		2	35,952	17,976		42	285,428	6,796	
1999	32	199,866	6,246		8	65,155	8,144		2	35,506	17,753		42	300,527	7,155	
2000	32	199,793	6,244		8	49,534	6,192		2	40,120	20,060		42	269,387	6,414	
2001	32	208,801	6,525		8	70,159	8,770		2	41,102	20,551		42	320,062	7,621	
2002	32	212,175	6,655		8	55,354	6,919		2	59,238	29,619		42	326,767	7,778	
2003	32	204,213	6,382		8	73,954	9,244		2	56,420	28,210		42	334,587	7,966	
2004	32	214,290	6,697		8	67,954	8,494		2	36,422	18,211		42	318,666	7,587	
2005	24	135,591	5,650		8	39,601	4,950		2	57,874	28,937		34	233,066	6,855	
2006	24	90,483	3,770		8	61,562	7,695		2	37,284	18,642		34	189,329	5,569	
2007	24	114,932	4,789		8	43,592	5,449		2	41,408	20,704		34	199,932	5,880	
2008	24	140,429	5,851		8	52,725	6,591		2	43,310	21,655		34	236,464	6,955	
2009	32	131,156	4,099		8	49,865	6,233		2	37,099	18,550		42	218,120	5,194	
2010	32	141,460	4,421		8	41,432	5,179		2	48,752	24,376		42	231,644	5,516	
2011	32	146,787	4,587		8	68,021	8,503		2	33,894	16,947		42	248,702	5,921	
2012	32	124,580	3,893		8	41,152	5,144		2	38,056	19,028		42	203,788	4,852	
2013	32	155,212	4,850		8	56,800	7,100		2	35,090	17,545		42	247,102	5,883	
2014	32	132,277	4,134		8	72,246	9,031		2	35,096	17,548		42	239,619	5,705	
2015	32	150,686	4,709		8	49,520	6,190		2	39,540	19,770		42	239,746	5,708	
2016	32	142,860	4,464		8	51,588	6,448		2	29,741	14,871		42	224,189	5,338	

TOTALS	1,019	4,642,267	4,555	280	1,718,078	6,136	70	1,175,299	16,789	1,369	7,515,575	5,489
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\* Figures taken from official box scores

NCAA/05/23/16/RN

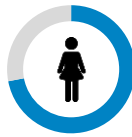


# 2015 Marketing Research Snapshot



## Division I Women's Basketball Preliminary Rounds

### Who is already attending?



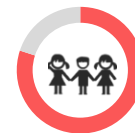
**72%**  
Female



**6/10**  
Traveled 500 miles or more



**42%**  
Are 1<sup>st</sup> time attendees



**80%**  
Do not have children @ home



**91%**  
Have graduated from college



**46% make 100k+**

**\$100k**  
Average household income



**71%**  
Are under 50 years old

#### TOP REASONS FOR ATTENDING:

- 1 Fan of women's basketball
- 2 Fan of college sports
- 3 Association with host institution
- 4 Live in the area

### What about potential attendees (fans)?



**29%**  
Household income over \$100K



**56%**  
Have coached or played basketball

**2x** **AGE** **50+**

Potential attendees are twice as likely to be over 50 than current attendees.



**44%**  
Feel 'very informed' about upcoming sporting events



**~50%**  
Cite travel cost and distance as attendance barriers

**9 in 10**  
Interested in attending the championship



**44%**  
Had attended the championship in the past

### How can we reach our target audience?

- **Promote at events for women's basketball and other sports:** The vast majority of fans have attended regular season women's basketball games in the past year (primarily high school and college). Attendees are also fans of college football and men's basketball, so cross-promotion should also be effective.
- **Use varied communication channels:** Email, the leading preferred source for tournament information, offers the flexibility needed for the quick turnaround period of 4-6 days' notice.
- **Promote to teams' local markets:** As the teams playing is a big attendance motivator, concentrate marketing in the teams' hometowns. In particular, news stories on through local media outlets are a top source for tournament information – promotion in local papers and through local sportscasters would likely be effective.
- **Go where they play:** Marketing and promotional efforts targeted at high school, recreational and youth leagues would likely be effective. Consider working with a local well-known basketball player or coach who would attend these events as an ambassador to promote the championship.

#### PREFERRED TOURNAMENT COMMUNICATION:



**86%**  
E-mail



**72%**  
TV



**60%**  
Newspapers

**~10**

Number of both college and high school regular season women's basketball games attended

**82%**



Cite the particular teams playing as "Very influential" to the decision to attend any sporting event



**Of women's basketball fans...**



**63%**  
Are also college men's basketball fans

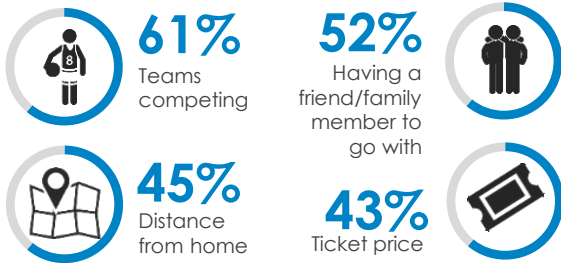


**56%**  
Are also college football fans



## » How can we move the attendance needle? .....

### STRONGEST INFLUENCES ON WBB CHAMPIONSHIP ATTENDANCE:



9 in 10  
Aware of the Selection Show

~50%  
Pre-Sale Priority Seating would "definitely" make them attend (if home team not selected as host, ticket automatically refunded)

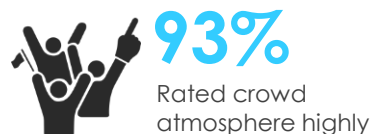
### TOP WBB DESCRIPTORS:



- **Build awareness:** Get the word out. Fans need to hear about the event through preferred methods (below) as less than half of women's basketball fans surveyed feel 'Very Informed' about upcoming events. Promoting the Selection Show can also help build early awareness of teams and host schools.
- **Provide clear ticket information:** Fans indicated one barrier to attendance is ticket information, leading to misperceptions about availability of tickets or good seats. Clear, consistent and early information regarding ticket and seat availability is vital, as well as promotion of any ticket packages.
- **Consider single-session ticket packages:** One in five fans cited the two-day commitment as an attendance barrier. Over a third of attendees would be interested in single-session tickets; single tickets help to include those who cannot commit to all three games.
- **Image marketing:** Leverage the positive image of women's basketball and the exciting, energetic team spirit and the intense atmosphere at the championship. These messages could likely turn fans into attendees, but also resonate with lapsed fans and encourage them to attend again.
- **Promote the atmosphere:** Over three-fourths of attendees found the promotional themes "Experiencing it live – being in the stands brings the same to life" and "The intensity of the competition on court is gripping to watch" to be motivating.

## » What can we do to maximize enjoyment? .....

- **Create team-focused promotions/events:** Interest in attending the championship is strongly tied to the teams participating. Give fans opportunities to show their team loyalty - for example, consider team-specific tailgating areas for fans to congregate before the games or team meet-and-greets.
- **Display most-wanted content on the video boards:** Attendees are most interested in seeing real-time video from the game, team history/stats and acknowledgement of well-rounded student-athletes on the video board at future rounds.
- **Offer family-focused promotions:** A perceived lack of "family friendliness" is a barrier to attendance among both casual and lapsed fans. Offering family-friendly ticket promotions (e.g. specially-priced children's tickets for every two full priced adult tickets) could solve this issue.
  - Only one in five attended the championship with someone under the age of 18, but family ticket packages could increase young fans attending.



### DIGITAL MEDIA ACTIVITIES:



### VIDEO BOARD CONTENT:



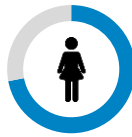


# 2015 Marketing Research Snapshot



## 2015 Women's Final Four

### Who is already attending?



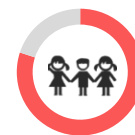
**72%**  
Female



**8/10**  
Traveled 100 miles or more



**26%**  
Are 1<sup>st</sup> time attendees



**80%**  
Do not have children @ home



**90%**  
Have graduated from college



**\$100k**  
Average household income



**71%**  
Are under 50 years old

#### TOP REASONS FOR ATTENDING:

- 1 Fan of women's basketball
- 2 Fan of college sports
- 3 Used to participate

### What about potential attendees (fans)?



**6 in 10**  
Participated in women's basketball



**44%**  
Attended the women's basketball championship in the past

#### ATTENDANCE BARRIERS:



**56%**  
Cost of travel



**48%**  
Distance to travel



**9 in 10**  
Interested in attending the championship



**35%**  
Feel 'very informed' about upcoming sporting events



Of women's basketball fans...



**63%**  
Are also college men's basketball fans

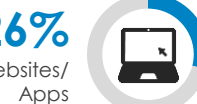


**56%**  
Are also college football fans

### How can we reach our target audience?

- **Promote at college and high school games:** The majority of fans attend both regular season college and high school women's basketball games – promoting at these events could encourage finals attendance too. As over half of fans are current or former participants, promote at recreational and youth league events as well to generate interest.
  - Cross-promotion with other college sports, particularly men's basketball and football, should also be effective.
- **Promote locally:** Local news is an important sports info source for fans, including newspapers and television coverage. Public relations would be beneficial in both the host city and in the teams' home markets.
- **Customized communications:** E-mail is the preferred format for championship updates from the NCAA, but recipients should be able to set preferences for their subscriptions. Allowing fans to select both when they start receiving updates and how often they receive them would be appealing.

#### TOP AWARENESS SOURCES:



#### GAMES ATTENDED IN PAST YEAR:



#### PREFERRED UPDATE CONTENT:

- 1 Championship Activities
- 2 Event Maps
- 3 Host City Info

#### PREFERRED TOURNAMENT COMMUNICATION:

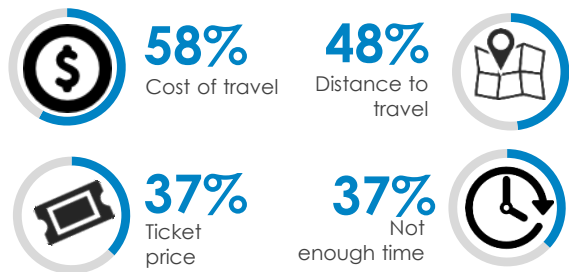
**57%**  
Want updates 1x/day or more often



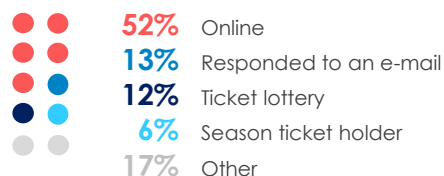
**37%**  
Want updates to start as soon as they buy tickets

## » How can we move the attendance needle?

### BARRIERS TO WFF ATTENDANCE:



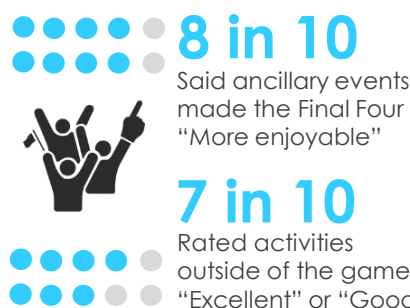
### TICKET PURCHASE METHOD:



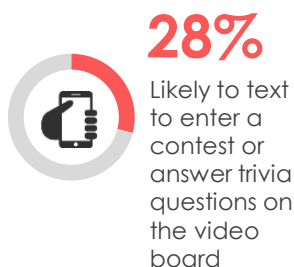
- **Online engagement:** Fans are likely to use websites and social media for women's basketball information. Engage them with content of interest, such as live scoreboards, live game stats, player/coach profiles and the ability to watch multiple games simultaneously.
- **Break down ticket-related attendance barriers:** Communicate ticketing promotions to fans who decide not to attend for ticket-related concerns. Some examples include: early-bird ticketing with single-session tickets, discounted "family packs," travel packages including hotels, flights and concessions, and the opportunity to purchase tickets in all seating locations.
- **Use strong image marketing:** Promote the Women's Final Four as a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to experience the intensity of women's basketball. The crowd atmosphere is one of the highest-rated aspects of the championship – invite fans to become a part of the excitement!

## » What can we do to maximize enjoyment?

- **Build awareness of ancillary events:** About half of game attendees who did not attend Tourney Town were unaware of it. In aided testing, two-thirds of attendees recalled a flyer arriving with their game ticket as an awareness source; in unaided testing, three in ten mentioned word of mouth.
- **Expand Ancillary Events:** Expanding offerings to include more clinics and skills contests, food-and-drink festivals or lounge areas, concerts with big-name artists and school bands and tailgating events.
  - "Family-friendly" activities are appealing to attendees – consider this positioning during promotions.
- **Bigger, better Tourney Town:** The number of Tourney Town activities for adults received lower ratings than the number of activities overall. Incorporate food courts (featuring local foods) and lounge areas as well as musical performances by nationally-known artists and school bands.
  - Amp up basketball-related activities overall with activities like photo ops, player autograph sessions, and displays about the history of the sport and the teams.
- **It's all about the teams:** Promote team-centered activities like pep rallies and team-tailgating areas, as the teams playing are a main motivator in attendance. This would likely appeal to attendees who plan to meet up with family and friends at the championship.



### DIGITAL MEDIA ACTIVITIES:



### VIDEO BOARD CONTENT:

