

Bottom line: Travel is costly

College teams share penny-pinching tips

By Jack Carey
USA TODAY

OXON HILL, Md. -- Increased travel costs in the face of stagnant or declining athletic budgets can put a crimp on travel for collegiate athletic teams. Schools are looking for creative ways to cut costs or raise funds, and that's especially true among colleges that are not in high-profile Division I conferences or do not have many of their events on TV.

The issue was the topic of a panel discussion Wednesday at the NCAA Convention, where

NCAA Convention

college administrators and travel industry executives traded ideas.

Lisa Sweany, senior associate athletics director at Grand Valley State (Mich.), a Division II athletic power, said that in the past four or five years, some athletes in its spring sports have been asked to pay for at least part of airline tickets when travelling to the South for early-season contests.

"I think that's more prevalent than we would like to admit," she said. "Most of the time our teams will try to fundraise to make those dollars so the kids don't have to buy it. Or maybe they would only have to put \$50 or \$100 toward the ticket instead of the full \$300 or \$400."

"And we understand some kids might not be able to afford that, so we might have to do more fundraising. We don't want to put undue pressure on those student-athletes to allow them to compete. Our administration has been very supportive ... but with that said, they are asking us to try to find ways to cut some

costs, and we're trying to get creative in making changes in our operating budgets because we have to travel. Some of our (opponents) are 12- or 14-hour charter bus rides."

While Sweany said dropping sports is not being considered at her school, others are feeling the pinch. Western Washington, also a Division II school, dropped football last week, partly as a result of travel considerations.

David LeCompte, chief executive officer of Short's Travel Management, advised Wednesday's attendees to consider airlines that don't charge baggage fees, which he said can save as much as \$80 a person; have athletes combine luggage so fewer bags are checked; use airports that might not be the closest to campus but have cheaper flights; and rather than chartering one bus, try two large vans.

David Maguire, athletics travel manager for the University of Texas, advised schools to have one person coordinate travel rather than have individual coaches do bookings for teams.