

2025 Post-Season Survey

The North Carolina High School Tennis Coaches Association conducted a comprehensive survey of tennis coaches following the 2025 women's tennis season.

The survey was conducted via Google Forms, with links emailed to every known coach in the state. The initial request for responses was emailed on November 11th, and a follow-up request was sent on December 4th.

Editor's Note: The survey contained numerous opportunities for coaches to respond to open-ended questions. We have not included those comments in this "public" report, as we did not have permission to publish the comments broadly.

However, those comments were shared with our entire Board of Directors, with the NCHSAA staff responsible for tennis, and, where appropriate and helpful, with USTA-NC staff members.

One hundred and five coaches, and one athletic director, completed the survey, representing approximately 30% of the tennis-playing schools in the state.

Approximately one third of the respondents were NCHSTCA members, while the remainder were not.

NCHSTCA Membership		
Yes	35	33.0%
No	71	67.0%
Total	106	100.0%

The respondents were widely distributed across all eight classifications.

Respondents by Classification		
1A	5	4.7%
2A	6	5.7%
3A	13	12.3%
4A	18	17.0%
5A	19	17.9%
6A	17	16.0%
7A	15	14.2%
8A	13	12.3%
Total	106	100.0%

The vast majority of respondents were coaches who had coached women's tennis in the fall of 2025.

Respondents by Role		
Coach Women Only	48	45.3%
Coach Men Only	2	1.9%
Coach Both Women and Men	55	51.9%
Athletic Director	1	0.9%
Total	106	100.0%

Questions About the 8A Classification

In the 2025 realignment, the 8A classification was capped at 32 schools, 31 of which fielded women's tennis teams in the fall.

As noted above, we had thirteen coaches from 8A schools responding to the survey, and we addressed questions about 8A exclusively to those coaches, given the unique nature of the 8A classification.

The first question we posed concerned the structure of the regional assignments in 8A. The 2025 regions were created by the NCHSAA with a goal of keeping conferences in the same region. Because of the geographical distribution of the 8A schools, this resulted in an "unbalanced" regional structure, with ten schools assigned to the East, seven in the Mideast and Midwest, and eight in the West. This, in turn, resulted in there being a pre-regional only in the East.

The current regional structure also resulted in the Mideast region being composed entirely of schools from the Quad City 7 conference, making the conference tournament and the regional tournament synonymous.

We asked the 8A coaches if they would favor a balanced structure, with eight schools assigned to each region, even if it meant that schools in the same conference would be split between two regions.¹

The chart below shows the responses from 8A coaches to this question.

8A Regional Assignments		
Approve of the Current Structure	4	30.77%
Prefer a Balanced Structure	7	53.85%
Did not respond	2	15.38%
Total	13	100.00%

These responses show a preference for a balanced structure, but the result is not statistically significant.

Last summer, the NCHSTCA recommended the balanced structure, and we still believe this is the fairest way to divide the 32 8A schools into four classifications.

However, it is also clear that more intensive outreach to 8A coaches and athletic directors is necessary to get a clear picture as to what the 8A schools actually prefer.

¹ It should be noted that conference affiliation did not appear to be the guiding principle when assigning schools to regions in the 1A-7A classifications. Numerous schools were assigned to regions different from those of their fellow conference members.

The second question we asked 8A coaches concerned the structure of the regional tournaments themselves.

Last fall, the NCHSAA limited the state individual tournaments to eight participants, meaning that, in a four-region structure, only the two finalists from each region advanced to the state tournament.

In 8A, because the field is limited to 32 schools, it is possible to create a two-region structure, with the four semifinalists in each region advancing to the state tournament.

We posed these two options to the 8A coaches, with the following results.

8A State Tournament Qualifying		
4 Regions With 2 Qualifiers Each	0	0.0%
2 Regions With 4 Qualifiers Each	7	53.8%
Other Responses	6	46.2%
No Response	0	0.0%
Total	13	100.0%

It's clear that 8A coaches do not like the current structure, and that result is statistically significant.

Question About 1A State Championships

In the fall of 2025, there were fourteen 1A schools which fielded tennis teams. The NCHSAA held separate championships for 1A in both the individual and dual-team tournaments.

However, traditionally, there are fewer men's teams than there are women's teams, and that is particularly true in 1A tennis. Last spring, there were only eight 1A schools which fielded men's tennis teams.

We only had five 1A coaches respond to the survey, but we asked those five a specific question about 1A state championships; namely, how many teams constitute the minimum number to have a viable state championship.

Minimum Number of Teams		
24	0	0.0%
16	0	0.0%
12	0	0.0%
8	0	0.0%
No minimum	4	80.0%
No opinion	1	20.0%
Total	5	100.0%

The overwhelming preference is to have a separate 1A championship regardless of the number of teams participating.

However, the sample size is very small (even though it represents over one third of the schools that participated in the state tournament last fall).

Editor's note: the NCHSAA has decided to combine the 1A and 2A classifications for the 2026 Men's season this spring. Their survey of 1A schools revealed that only eight were planning to field men's tennis teams, and they could not justify separate championships with such a small field in 1A.

Questions About the Size of the State Individual Tournaments

With the move to eight classifications, the NCHSAA decided to change the number of state tournament qualifiers from 16 to 8 in each classification. The justification for this change was that it worked out to about the same number of players participating in state tournament play.

Anecdotally, we heard a lot of complaints about this format, and thus, wanted to ask several questions regarding this issue.

The first question we asked was simply whether coaches preferred the new format (8 entries), or the old format (16 entries).

Preferred Size of State Individual Tournaments		
8	24	22.6%
16	72	67.9%
No Preference	10	9.4%
Total	106	100.0%

Coaches favor returning to the 16-entry brackets in the state individual tennis tournaments by a margin of 3 to 1.

We wanted to know if classification or tournament success had an impact on the opinions expressed by coaches concerning the size of the individual tournament.

Preferred Size of State Tournament By Class			
	8	16	No Preference
1A	2	1	2
2A	2	4	0
3A	4	8	1
4A	4	12	2
5A	4	14	1
6A	4	10	3
7A	4	10	1
8A	0	13	0
Total	24	72	10

As the chart above indicates, the coaches in all classifications, with the exception of 1A, favor returning to a 16-entry state tournament.

And, in 1A, the tournament has always been an 8-entry bracket with four qualifiers from each of two regionals.

Preferred Size of State Tournament by Tournament Success			
	8	16	No Preference
We had players who reached the regional final and qualified for the state tournament.	3	16	3
We had players qualify for the state tournament and others who lost in the regional semifinals.	7	13	0
We had players who lost in the regional semifinals.	4	20	1
All of our players lost in the pre-regional or in the first two rounds of the regional tournament.	10	22	6
We did not participate in the individual tournament in any way.	0	1	0
Total	24	72	10

As the chart above indicates, even coaches whose players qualified for the state tournament under the 8-entry formula used last season preferred the 16-entry brackets at the state tournament, and by a substantial margin.

Finally, we asked the coaches how important this issue was to them.

Importance of State Tournament Size				
	8	16	No Preference	Total
Not at all important	3	4	6	13
Somewhat important	13	26	3	42
Very important	6	22	1	29
Extremely important	2	20	0	22
Total	24	72	10	106

As indicated by the chart, those who favor returning to a 16-entry draw were more likely to characterize this as a “very important” or “extremely important” issue for them.

As one would expect, those who expressed “no preference” also tended to rate the issue as “not at all important”.

In summary, there is a clear majority of coaches, across all classifications, and regardless of tournament success, who favor returning to a 16-entry bracket at the state individual tournament, and this issue is of significant importance to the coaching community.

Editor's note: At its winter Board of Directors meeting held on January 31st, the NCHSTCA Board voted unanimously to pursue a return to 16-entry brackets at the state individual tournaments.

Questions About the Pre-Regional Events

In the fall of 2025, the NCHSTCA and the NCHSAA cooperated to create a new pathway for individuals to qualify for the regional tournaments: the pre-regional.

These events were held across the state, at a variety of locations, during the last week of the regular season.

Approximately three fourths of the survey respondents participated in a pre-regional event.

Pre-Regional Participation		
Yes	77	72.6%
No	29	27.4%
Total	106	100.0%

We asked those who participated in the pre-regional two different questions to assess the pre-regional.

The first question had to do with the concept itself, using a pre-regional to determine regional qualifiers as opposed to using conference tournaments. We asked those who had participated in pre-regionals to rate the concept as “fair and efficient”, on a scale of 1 to 6, with 6 being the most favorable rating.

Pre-Regional Concept "Fair and Efficient"		
1	0	0.0%
2	4	5.2%
3	9	11.7%
4	17	22.1%
5	24	31.2%
6	23	29.9%
Total	77	100.0%
Average Rating	4.7	

Clearly, the pre-regional process was viewed favorably by the coaches who participated in it, which is especially noteworthy given that the process was brand new, and not well understood prior to the events taking place.

We also asked those coaches to evaluate the implementation of the pre-regional, whether the event was conducted smoothly and fairly, or not. Again, we asked for a rating on a scale of 1 to 6, with 6 being the most favorable rating.

Pre-Regional Implementation		
1	1	1.3%
2	1	1.3%
3	10	13.0%
4	12	15.6%
5	25	32.5%
6	28	36.4%
Total	77	100.0%
Average Rating	4.9	

In general, coaches were very pleased with how the pre-regional events themselves were conducted. The vast majority thought the process went smoothly and fairly. This is a credit to the dozens of pre-regional directors enlisted to run the events, and to the coaches themselves for embracing the new format, solving local problems cooperatively, and making the events work.

Questions About Conference Tournaments

With the advent of the pre-regional events as the first stage of the state individual championships, the viability of holding conference tournaments was called into question.

We asked a couple of questions regarding conference tournaments.

Did Your Conference Hold a Conference Tournament?		
Yes	28	26.4%
No	78	73.6%
Total	106	100.0%
Did You Favor Having a Conference Tournament?		
Yes	58	54.7%
No	48	45.3%
Total	106	100.0%

It's curious that almost twice as many coaches wanted to hold a conference tournament as actually participated in one. This seeming inconsistency may be explained by the fact that holding a conference tournament requires unanimous consent within a conference, or by the fact that the decision to hold a conference tournament is often made by athletic directors who may have different priorities.

One option that coaches may wish to explore is holding an invitational event, in which teams would choose to participate if they wish. These events might cross conference or classification lines, and would give players an opportunity to prepare for regional and state competition.

Questions About Pre-Regional and Regional Assignments

The vast majority of coaches were satisfied with their pre-regional and regional assignments.

Satisfied with Pre-Regional or Regional Assignment		
Yes	89	84.8%
No	16	15.2%
Total	105	100.0%

We asked for comments from the coaches who were not satisfied with their pre-regional and/or regional assignment. Many of the comments cited lengthy travel times to their pre-regional sites, or else, were really about the decision to move to eight classifications, which was a bylaw amendment overwhelmingly adopted by the member schools.

From the comments, we did identify two situations where schools may want to explore a change in their pre-regional or regional assignment, and we are reaching out to those schools to see how they would like to proceed.

Questions Regarding Regional Seeding Meetings

Regional seeding meetings have been a consistent source of tension for many years. Although the nature of these seeding meetings was unchanged from prior years, the change in the number of qualifiers advancing to state tournaments had an impact on coaches' perceptions about these meetings.

We asked a variety of questions about seeding meetings. The first was, simply, how fair and accurate coaches believed the seeding meeting results to be. We asked coaches to rate this on a scale of 1 to 6, with 6 being "extremely accurate and fair".

Regional Seeding "Fair and Accurate"		
1	5	4.8%
2	8	7.6%
3	9	8.6%
4	34	32.4%
5	34	32.4%
6	15	14.3%
Total	105	100.0%
Average Rating	4.2	

As the chart indicates, the majority of coaches believe the regional seeding process is basically fair and accurate, but there's room for improvement.

The second question we posed was to ask which of various factors regarding regional seeding had been a concern. Coaches were permitted to select multiple options.

Factors of Concern Regarding Regional Seeding		
A lack of objective rating information about the players.	50	49.0%
Most coaches have not seen players from outside their conference or area.	88	86.3%
Some conferences have many coaches in the meeting, and others have just one or two.	37	36.3%
Coaches are not neutral and disinterested. They have a vested interest in getting their players seeded.	31	30.4%
Coaches making prior agreements to support each other's players.	15	14.7%
Total Responses	102	

Another issue seems to be the number of entries to be seeded, and how they are to be paired.

We asked a question about three suggestions we have heard regarding the seeding process, and we asked this question twice, once assuming the state tournament remains at eight entries, and a second time, assuming the state tournament returns to a 16-entry bracket.

Suggested Changes to the Seeding Process (Assuming an 8-entry state tournament)		
Ending the "coin flip" between the #3 seed and the #4 seed, and placing the #3 seed in the bottom half of the draw automatically, to play the #2 seed.	54	56.3%
Ending the provision that teammates not be placed in the same half of the draw if both are seeded.	16	16.7%
Voting on, and placing, a #5 and #6 seed in the same quarters as the #3 and #4 seeds.	53	55.2%
Total Responses	96	

Suggested Changes to the Seeding Process (Assuming an 16-entry state tournament)		
Ending the "coin flip" between the #3 seed and the #4 seed, and placing the #3 seed in the bottom half of the draw automatically, to play the #2 seed.	52	54.7%
Ending the provision that teammates not be placed in the same half of the draw if both are seeded.	16	16.8%
Voting on, and placing, a #5 and #6 seed in the same quarters as the #3 and #4 seeds.	55	57.9%
Total Responses	95	

There doesn't appear to be much difference in opinions based on the size of the state tournament draw. And, there's very little support for ending the practice of putting teammates in the opposite halves of the regional brackets.

But, there is a slight majority open to the other two ideas, though it should be noted that both of those suggestions run counter to USTA rules regarding tournament construction.

Editor's note: The NCHSTCA Board authorized the development of a proposed change in the handbook language regarding the criteria to be used in seeding meetings, to bring our practice in line with USTA regulations found in the Friend at Court.

Specifically, we are preparing language that would specify:

- *That the coaches assembled constitute the "Seeding Committee" (amazingly, the current handbook regulations do not even specify that the seeds are determined by a vote of the coaches!)*
- *That coaches may not enter into pre-arranged agreements to support one another's players in the seeding process.*
- *That the coaches shall use the "all factors" method of seeding the tournaments, meaning that coaches are free to share any relevant data about their players, including records, head-to-head competition, UTR or WTN ratings, USTA rankings, and tournament results.*
- *That other coaches are free to weigh that data as they wish, and cast their votes accordingly.*

Questions About USTA High School Digital Platform

For the 2025-26 tennis seasons, the USTA has mandated the use of the USTA High School Digital Platform (aka “Serve Tennis”) for the state individual championships.

We asked a few questions about the adoption process. The first question was simply about the number of coaches that have claimed their school, the first step in using the platform.

Schools Claimed on HS Digital Platform		
Yes	62	59.0%
Someone else gave me access	3	2.9%
No	40	38.1%
Total	105	100.0%

Slightly more than 60% of coaches responding to the survey have access to their schools in the USTA platform.

However, overall adoption is likely to be somewhat less, as those responding to the survey are likely to be more active and engaged than is the total coaching population as a whole.

We asked those who had claimed their school to characterize their experience with the claiming process.

Experience with the Claiming Process		
Simple and straightforward	26	40.0%
A little confusing in places	30	46.2%
Very frustrating	9	13.8%
Total	65	100.0%

There's clearly a learning curve to be navigated regarding the use of the USTA High School Digital Platform, but the responses indicate some progress in getting coaches familiar with the software.

Questions About the State Dual-Team Tournaments

With the new realignment, the NCHSAA adopted bracket sizes for the dual-team tournaments of 48 for classes 1A-7A, and 24 for class 8A. These bracket sizes were the same for other team sports.

There has been some conversation about whether these bracket sizes are the most appropriate, including a question on this topic in a survey conducted by the NCHSAA in October.

We asked our coaches what they believed the “optimal” size of the dual-team brackets should be.

Optimal Size of Dual-Team Brackets (1A-7A)		
24	7	6.9%
32	42	41.2%
40	8	7.8%
48	29	28.4%
Every willing team	16	15.7%
Total	102	100.0%

Optimal Size of Dual-Team Brackets (8A)		
12	2	2.2%
16	19	20.9%
20	0	0.0%
24	41	45.1%
Every willing team	29	31.9%
Total	91	100.0%

In 1A-7A, there’s no consensus as to the optimal size of the dual-team brackets. There’s a substantial number of coaches interested in reducing the field to 32, and an almost equal number that are in favor of keeping the field at 48 or more.

In 8A, there’s a substantial majority in favor of leaving the bracket as is, or else, adopting the “everybody plays” format.

What's not clear from this initial analysis is how a team's post-season success impacts a coach's view of how many teams should make the playoffs. It's a reasonable hypothesis that coaches of teams that traditionally make deep runs in the playoffs would favor a smaller field, since they are not worried about making the playoffs and would prefer a shorter tournament. As the adage goes, "Where you stand depends on where you sit."

However, testing that hypothesis is beyond the scope of this initial analysis.

We also asked questions about travel as it relates to the dual-team tournament.

The first question was simply to ask if coaches were concerned about the amount of travel required by the current dual-team format.

Concerned About Travel Burden		
Yes	26	25.0%
Somewhat	51	49.0%
No	27	26.0%
Total	104	100.0%

As shown in the chart above, almost three fourths of coaches believe that the travel required by the current dual-team format is excessive, or somewhat so.

The second question we asked was whether coaches would support various ideas that would work to reduce travel times for dual-team tournament matches.

The two ideas proposed were:

- Dividing the state into four "sections" akin to the regionals used in the individual tournament, and playing to a sectional champion, then having the four sectional champions play in a "final four" for the state championship.
- Dividing the state into four "sections" akin to the regionals used in the individual tournaments, and play the first two rounds within that section before playing against teams from the adjacent section in the round of 16.

We also offered the option of keeping the current two-region format and accepting the travel burden as is.

As the chart on the following page indicates, there's a majority who would entertain a four-section format, but maintaining the current structure still has substantial support.

Support for Ideas to Reduce Travel		
4 Sections - Sectional Champion	31	29.8%
4 Sections - First two rounds	32	30.8%
Current 2-region format	41	39.4%
Total	104	100.0%

Questions About the Current System of Classifying Schools

There's been a lot of discussion about classification policies. Currently, schools are classified strictly by school size, without reference to school type, socioeconomic factors, or enduring athletic success.

We asked the coaches whether they believed "the current classification system creates a fair playing field which gives all schools a reasonable chance to compete for a state championship".

Current Classification System "Fair"		
Yes	39	36.8%
Somewhat	44	41.5%
No	23	21.7%
Total	106	100.0%

Again, we have not done a deep dive into the demographics of which coaches favor the current system, and which are more critical. This may very well be another instance of "where you stand depends on where you sit".

Questions About the RPI Rating System

RPI (Ratings Percentage Index) is used by the NCHSAA to rank teams in a given classification, select teams for the state dual-team tournament, and seed them into the brackets.

We asked two questions about the RPI system.

The first question asked coaches to rate the accuracy of the RPI ratings.

Is RPI "Accurate"?		
"Very accurate"	12	11.4%
"Somewhat accurate, and that accuracy varies from case to case."	76	72.4%
"Slightly better than using raw overall record alone."	15	14.3%
"Adds no value whatsoever."	2	1.9%
Total	105	100.0%

Most coaches rate the RPI system as "somewhat accurate". This corresponds to the data we've collected regarding playoff results this fall, where tennis had an "upset rate" (the lower-seeded, lower-RPI team winning the match) of about 15%.

The RPI formula is a combination of a team's overall winning percentage and the winning percentage of its opponents, and, in turn, their opponents. The goal of the last two factors is to create a sense of a team's strength of schedule.

We also asked whether coaches were satisfied with the balance between a team's raw overall record and its strength of schedule.

Balance between a Team's Record and Strength of Schedule		
The balance is about right.	52	51.0%
More emphasis on a team's raw overall record	8	7.8%
More emphasis on a team's strength of schedule	42	41.2%
Total	102	100.0%

About half of the coaches are satisfied with the current formula. Of those who would like to see a change, the majority would prefer a formula that weighs strength of schedule more heavily. (The change made by the NCHSAA in 2025 adjusted the formula in favor of raw overall record.)

Questions About the Post-Season Schedule

The current post-season schedule calls for the complete dual-team tournament and the regional and state individual tournaments to be played within a three-week period. This results in some players being asked to compete on five days within an eight-day period.

We asked the coaches how they felt about this schedule, and whether they would be interested in exploring changes.

Is the Post-Season Schedule Too Condensed?		
Yes	27	25.5%
Somewhat	36	34.0%
No	43	40.6%
Total	106	100.0%

A majority of coaches believe the schedule is too condensed, or somewhat so. However, a strong minority believe the current schedule is fine and does not pose an undue burden on players.

In addition, we asked if coaches would support a change to a four-week post-season. We asked this question in two versions. The first version envisions an extension of the current calendar by one week, leaving the regular season unaffected.

Favor a longer season, with 4-week post-season		
Yes	32	30.2%
I'd like to learn more about this idea.	31	29.2%
No	43	40.6%
Total	106	100.0%

About one half of the coaches who believe the post-season is too condensed are ready to embrace a four-week post-season that does not affect the length of the regular season. The rest are interested in learning more about this idea.

We also asked this question with the provision that the extra week of post-season play would be taken from the regular season, with the total tennis calendar being unchanged.

Favor a 4-week post-season, with a shorter regular season.		
Yes	29	27.4%
I'd like to learn more about this idea.	28	26.4%
No	49	46.2%
Total	106	100.0%

When posed in this fashion, with a shorter regular season, support for expanding the post-season calendar dropped by six coaches, meaning that almost half of the coaches would be opposed to this alternative.

Editor's Note: At its Board meeting in January, the NCHSTCA Board of Directors reviewed a proposed four-week postseason schedule, with no change to the regular season, and voted to prepare a survey of the coaching community to assess interest in this particular calendar proposal. Watch for that survey in the coming weeks.

Questions About Teams with Very Few Players

During the fall 2025 season, we identified a number of teams with fewer than four players on their roster. Four is the minimum number required to win a dual-team match.

We asked the coaches how they thought the NCHSAA should handle situations such as these.

The first question we asked was whether players from such teams should be allowed to participate in the state individual tournament, starting with the pre-regional.

Allowed to Participate in Individual Tournament		
Yes	68	64.2%
No	18	17.0%
No opinion	20	18.9%
Total	106	100.0%

A clear majority of coaches believe that players from teams with very few players should be allowed to participate in the individual tournament.

The next question we posed was about how those teams should be counted when calculating the distribution of berths between Pool A and Pool B of a given region. The options were:

- Count the school as a full team = 1
- Count the school as a half team = 0.5
- Not count the school at all = 0

Impact on Regional Berth Calculations		
Count as full team (1)	26	26.3%
Count as half team (0.5)	53	53.5%
Not count at all (0)	20	20.2%
Total	99	100.0%

It would appear from the results that counting a team with fewer than four players on the roster as one half a team in the calculations is a compromise that most coaches could live with.

We then turned our attention to the impact of these teams on the dual-team tournament.

We asked whether victories recorded during the regular season against such schools should count in the RPI calculations, given that it is mathematically impossible to lose a match against a team with three or fewer players.

Should matches count in RPI ratings		
Yes	45	43.7%
No	43	41.7%
No opinion	15	14.6%
Total	103	100.0%

The coaches are evenly split on this question.

Finally, we asked if these schools should be allowed to compete in the dual-team championships.

Compete in Dual-Team Tournament		
Yes	17	16.2%
No	76	72.4%
No opinion	12	11.4%
Total	105	100.0%

The coaches are overwhelmingly against the idea that a team with three or fewer players should be allowed to compete in the dual-team tournament, and believe that such schools should be automatic “opt-outs”.

Questions About Schools Without Tennis Teams

Over 101 schools in North Carolina did not field women's teams last fall, and even more schools are projected not to field men's tennis teams this spring.

We asked coaches what they felt was the most serious obstacle a school faces when it starts a tennis program.

Obstacles to Starting a Tennis Team		
Finding and training a qualified coach	23	25.3%
Access to tennis courts at or near the school campus	11	12.1%
Insufficient support and/or funding from the athletic department	12	13.2%
Lack of interest among potential players	45	49.5%
Total	91	100.0%

Editor's note: The NCHSTCA is working with USTA to identify USTA members who might be interested in coaching high school tennis, and introducing those individuals to athletic directors interested in starting a tennis program.

USTA is also developing a suite of services to support a new high school program, including free equipment, mentoring and training for new coaches, facility assistance, and advocacy support.