

Representative Thompson, absolutely. With nearly 8 million American high school athletes competing for roughly 550,000 NCAA opportunities, colleges should be looking aggressively at ways to expand that pathway through stronger club-to-varsity systems, junior varsity competition, new teams, and other ways to identify and develop more American talent.

But expansion must come with a genuine commitment to development. Many small colleges and universities already operate junior varsity or developmental programs, particularly within the NAIA and Division III levels. These programs can provide valuable opportunities, but they can also serve primarily to boost enrollment. The concern arises when athletes are recruited with the suggestion that they could eventually compete at the varsity level, even though the institution has no meaningful plan or intention to help them advance. When that happens, families can be left paying tuition and students take on debt, based on an expectation the program never intended to fulfill.

I would propose a model in which Division I institutions establish developmental practice squads for promising American athletes who need additional time and coaching. These athletes would receive structured training, regular evaluations, and a genuine opportunity to earn a varsity roster position. Advancement would not be guaranteed, but the pathway would be real, transparent, and supported by the institution.

These developmental athletes should also have access to the same scholarship opportunities available to varsity roster athletes. If colleges are serious about developing talent, they must invest in these young people. Developmental squads should not become an admissions tool designed to increase tuition revenue while offering little prospect of advancement.

That is precisely why this issue is so important and why Congress should act with urgency. At the moment when we should be expanding and strengthening that narrow pathway, the incentives increasingly point in the opposite direction: toward using finite roster spots to acquire already developed talent from around the world rather than investing more deeply in the enormous pool of talent here at home.

We can already see the shift. More than 25,000 international athletes now compete in NCAA sports, nearly three times the number two decades ago. That overall number masks the central concern: those athletes are not evenly distributed across the more than 500,000 roster opportunities. They are heavily concentrated in particular sports and programs, where opportunities for American athletes can become scarce or disappear altogether. As internationally built programs succeed, competitors have an incentive to adopt the same recruiting model.

Tennis shows how quickly that can transform an entire sport, and we are seeing the trend accelerate elsewhere. In Division I basketball alone, international participation increased from 668 athletes in 2009–10 to 1,838 in 2024–25, a 175 percent increase. European participation roughly tripled, from 291 to 879.

This is not simply another version of American high school recruiting. Many international athletes develop through club, academy, and professional systems that operate independently of

schools. That gives coaches access to athletes who may already have years of elite or professional-style development before arriving on an American college campus.

We are also seeing a broader shift away from developing young American athletes. One of the most acclaimed coaches in college basketball, Rick Pitino, has been candid about his approach. The Wall Street Journal captured it in the headline, “Rick Pitino’s Rule for a March Madness Roster: No Kids.” His strategy favors older, experienced, ready-made players, including international talent, rather than relying on traditional high school recruiting and years of player development.

That illustrates the incentive problem. Why would a coach under pressure to win immediately spend years identifying and developing young talent when an already developed player is available?

The Home Team Act would change that incentive. By ensuring that a meaningful share of college roster opportunities remains available to American athletes, schools would again have a reason to search deeper into our domestic talent pool. Recruiting attention, resources, and development dollars would have greater reason to flow toward American high schools, stronger club-to-varsity pipelines, and overlooked young athletes who could become exceptional with several years of coaching and competition.

A meaningful Division I practice-squad model would complement that effort. It would give institutions a way to invest in promising athletes before they are ready for varsity competition, while giving those athletes scholarship opportunities and a credible route to advancement. The measure of success should be whether players develop and earn opportunities to move forward, rather than simply how many additional students enroll.

Once coaches stop recruiting domestic pipelines, programs build their recruiting networks overseas, and young American athletes and their families conclude that the college pathway is no longer realistic, rebuilding those systems can take years or decades. Tennis is the warning. What begins as a recruiting advantage can become the competitive norm as other programs copy it. We are already seeing similar incentives and trends spread into basketball, soccer, golf, track, and other sports.

We should welcome international athletes and the competition and diversity they bring. At the same time, we should ensure that our premier varsity development system continues to invest in the millions of young Americans competing in high school sports.

We should do both: expand opportunities for American athletes to compete and restore the incentive for colleges to identify, invest in, and develop the extraordinary talent we already have here at home. Any new developmental programs must advance that purpose through meaningful coaching, scholarship opportunities, honest expectations, and a genuine chance to reach the varsity level.