



## Do positives of Penn State's CBI tourney participation outweigh the negatives? Yes.

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Last night, Penn State basketball was able to overcome Hampton's pesky playing style and **survive its opening round College Basketball Invitational game.**

What remains up for debate is whether the benefits of participating in the CBI outweigh the program's expenses, both from economic and perception standpoints.

I believe they do, but not by as wide of a margin as I'd like.

Opinion on Penn State entering the CBI has been mixed since we "accepted a bid," after the major NCAA-run tournaments had filled out their own fields. As I learned more about the third tier of postseason college basketball competitions, my thought process evolved as follows:

*We get to keep playing basketball even though we have a losing record? That's pretty cool.*

*Wait, we have to pay to be in this tournament? That's pretty stupid.*

A brief primer for those not in the know: Almost a decade ago The Gazelle Group, which is **some sort of consulting business based out of Princeton, New Jersey**, was given permission by the NCAA to establish its own postseason tournament. As is the case with college football's bloated lineup of bowl games, the mutual gains were obvious: teams and their fan bases get experience, exposure, and entertainment; The Gazelle Group presumably gets money.



Penn State head coach Pat Chambers directs his team in Chicago at the Big Ten Conference tournament. There were no AP photos taken at the PSU-Hampton CBI game. (AP Photo/Michael Conroy)

But in terms of this article, the financial underpinnings of college sport as a whole are not my concern. All I want to know is what impacts entering the CBI specifically have on Penn State. First, the positives:

Obviously, the players will benefit from the extra practice and live game action, particularly against unfamiliar opponents. I'd wager a guess that Pat Chambers' crew hadn't seen a school play with the type of aggressive, take-no-prisoners attitude that Hampton put on display last night. Chambers has also made it known that he plans to give his younger players extended playing time for the duration of our stay in the CBI, even if it reduces our chances of winning. With last night being such a foulfest, that script was going to play itself out regardless, as players needed to be rotated frequently—still, the importance of gaining valuable experience cannot be understated.

From there, the secondary gains become a bit murkier. For whatever reason, *two* of the CBI's four quarterfinals will be aired on the CBS Sports Network, thus giving the lucky participants some (theoretical) extra exposure, and lucky fans with the right cable providers some (theoretical) extra entertainment. To watch the game last night, I needed to pay fifteen bucks and trust that the stream would work properly.

Not seeing the point of that, I took a trip back in time and fired up my AM radio for the occasion (Steve Jones—if you're reading this, you're the best!). Should Penn State manage to make the best-of-three championship series, those games will also be televised. Otherwise, we're out of luck.

Of course, for the particularly dedicated fans the games can also be watched in person. I went to our NIT games back when I was in school, and they were a blast—does anyone remember **Talor Battle's buzzer-beater against George Mason in 2009?**

I thought it was really cool to see us play unfamiliar teams; I also just generally enjoy college basketball, so when I was in town, going was a no-brainer. Should we host a CBI championship game this year and my schedule accommodates, I'd have no issue with making the 90-mile trek.

This brings us right into the negatives—most of which revolve around money. Unfortunately, **not as many people get as excited about Penn State basketball as I do**, particularly after a 15-17 regular season. And even though the CBI is something, it's certainly not the Big Dance (or even the NIT, really). The result is what we got last night: an announced attendance of 2,118, which in reality was probably much lower. And that was with Pat Chambers buying every student's entry into the game, not to mention all-you-can eat pizza (from Rotelli, no less)!

FREE pizza. FREE student tix. WIN a \$50 gift card. Why aren't you here yet?

**[pic.twitter.com/efPH4MQ97T](https://pic.twitter.com/efPH4MQ97T)**

— Nittany Nation (@Nittany\_Nation) **March 19, 2014**

Now I don't expect the Athletic Department to be sending Coach Chambers an invoice for tickets and pizza anytime soon, but the point is the same—it's hard to offset the costs of hosting a CBI game when your

arena is 80% empty. Fortunately, I believe the Gazelle Group, in all their wisdom, understands this. From what I've been told, first-round CBI game fees are in the neighborhood of 30,000 dollars; the fees then step up for subsequent rounds, justifiable by the expected increases in attendance.

30 G's is really a drop in the bucket for Penn State athletics—even smaller schools such as Siena (who hosts Penn State in round two) can foot that bill. Last-minute travel costs are also a consideration, but if South Dakota State could make it down to Norfolk to play Old Dominion, I don't think Penn State should sweat too much. Historical figures indicate that attendance rises dramatically as the CBI progresses—should Penn State host a finals game, I'd even predict a financial gain regardless of lingering fan apathy or how much The Gazelle Group decides to escalate costs.

Indeed, I don't think the trouble with Penn State playing in the CBI is economic at all, but rather in issue of perception. Depending on one's perspective, the team's experience gains could be trivial; a potential loss to a small mid-major school could be damaging to young players' psyches; attending games in an empty BJC could turn even more fans and students off from the live game experience. These concerns, while far-fetched, are definitely conceivable—and do nothing to allay the trepidations of those who recognize basketball is already the FIFTH most popular indoor sport on campus.

Of course, winning a thrilling championship game over Texas A&M, Oregon State, or Princeton—in front of 10,000 screaming fans—would wash all of those fears away in one fell swoop. At this point that's what I'm hoping for, but even if we fall short of those success and attendance benchmarks I don't think that playing in the CBI is any real cause for concern.

The ultimate success of this program will be built on the backs of Pat Chambers, his players, and the fans who want to will this team into the upper echelon of the B1G, not out of our athletic department's coffers.

In the meantime just sit back, turn on your AM radio, and enjoy the ride.

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