Murmurs about a 2011 USA Rugby National Collegiate 7s Championship have been getting louder and louder lately. When Kevin Battle, chair of the Men's College Competitions Committee, first said creating a 7s national championship was on his committee's to-do list, it seemed as though such a competition was a year or two away from formation.

Urging from the Board of Directors has moved the creation of a 7s national championship to the forefront of the Competitions Committee's priorities, and now even dates and a qualification structure for a 2011 competition are beginning to bubble to the surface.

USA Rugby has targeted December 16-17 as their desired date for a 24-team national championship tournament. The venue is undetermined, and Battle says the date of the championship event could change to conform to the availability of a venue.

"It's not solidified just yet, but we're certainly edging closer and trying to get those definite answers as soon as possible so we can let people know," said Battle.

"We're looking at about 12 conference or regional tournaments. So, for instance, SoCal won't have our own conference tournament, because I don't think there will be enough teams to garner an automatic bid, but say like a California region, which would include the likes of say St. Mary's, San Diego State, Santa Barbara and Cal Poly, that don't fit in, say the Pac-12 or Big Ten or SEC.

"There will be 12 automatic bids…and then we'll have 12 at-large bids, and that's still to be determined. It'll be the Competitions Committee, as well as maybe a few other folks we invite, who sort of weight in."

Battle says each qualifier tournament is required to film its games and make them available to the Competitions Committee, as some tournaments may see multiple teams receive bids to Nationals.

"Obviously, a lot of tournaments are going to have a lot of really great teams, and it might behoove us to have a second or third, and maybe even a fourth-place, team get a seed and chance to play in the national championships."

The regional tournaments will be the avenue for teams who aren't included to invite-only qualifiers. The Atlantic Coast Invitational, for example, is expected to be a qualifier, and only teams who compete in the traditional ACC will be invited to play. Each of the conference-based qualifiers will have the option to close their events.

But, "There needs to be an opportunity for every team to be able to play their way in," said Battle. "That's the definition of having a national champion, is that it absolutely is the best and everybody has a chance."

Editorial note:
Battle said eight of the 12 qualifying tournaments have been identified and have concreted their dates, but he would not divulge those tournaments. Below I have listed the tournaments rumored to be qualifiers. It's unlikely both the Heart of America and the Big XII will be qualifiers, but parties attached to both tournaments believe theirs is the qualifier.

August 27
Big Ten Madison, Wisc.

September 17-18
Atlantic Coast Greensboro, NC

September 24
Heart of America Lawrence, Kan.
SEC TBD
Independence Conf. Tallahassee, Fla.

October 15
Big XII Norman, Okla.

October 22
Pac 12 Stanford, Calif.

November
Ivy League TBD