

Minutes of Liberty League Fall Meeting October 19, 2023 – Zoom Video Conference

Present: David Lindholm, Stefanie Carrington (Bard); Laurel Kane, Ben Gaebel (Clarkson); Brian Miller, Liz Dennison, Chris Gray (Hobart and William Smith), Tyler Heisey (Ithaca), Kristie Bowers, Katie Paradise (RPI); George VanderZwaag, Kris Shanley, Morgan Stout (Rochester); Jackie Nicholson, Scott McVean, Bethany Marren (RIT); Bob Durocher, Randy LaBrake, Fran Grembowicz (St. Lawrence); Gail Cummings-Danson, Megan Buchanan, Peter Fisher (Skidmore); Jim McLaughlin, Beth Tiffany, Wally Bzdell (Union); Michelle Walsh, Matt Brennie (Vassar); Tracy King, Katie Meline (Liberty League).

I. Call to Order

Jackie Nicholson (Liberty League President) called the meeting to order at 11:04 a.m.

II. Review of Minutes

The minutes of the May 31-June 1, 2023, spring meeting in Verona, N.Y., were reviewed. No changes or corrections were noted.

Motion: A motion (Nicholson, Walsh) to approve the minutes from the May 31-June 1, 2023, meeting PASSED 11-0-0.

III. Financial Report

King reviewed the financial report for recently completed FY23 along with FY24. The league finished FY23 with a budget surplus of \$15,729.33. This was primarily due to unused NCAA Grant Tier 4 funds that were applied to toward the assistant commissioner salary line. A budget deficit of approximately \$3,900 is currently projected for FY24. All associate member dues payments have been collected and nine of the 11 full-member dues payments have been collected. Current bank balance totals \$406,883.38, which does not include a CD valued at approximately \$52,000.

IV. Commissioner's Report

- A. **NCAA Division III FAR Orientation:** The NCAA is soliciting nominations for the Division III FAR Orientation program, Feb. 22-24, in Indianapolis. The orientation is open to FARs who have served in their roles for no more than two years. Each institution and conference may nominate a FAR – the deadline is Nov. 15. Hobart and William Smith intends to nominate its FAR.
- B. **Liberty League SAAC Fall Meeting – Oct. 22:** The Liberty League SAAC fall meeting will be held Sunday, Oct. 22, at the Delta by Marriott in Utica. SAAC advisors at each institution were asked to provide a list of attendees by

Tuesday, Oct. 17. The meeting will include a DiSC assessment session facilitated by Vassar deputy athletic director Kaitlin Leach, a discussion of NCAA and Liberty League issues, and a review of campus SAAC best practices.

- C. **Liberty League Presidents Fall Meeting – Nov. 1:** A Liberty League presidents meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, Nov. 1. King will be assisting Skidmore president Marc Conner, the league’s representative on the Division III Presidents Advisory Group, on agenda development for the meeting. President Conner is looking to invite a speaker to discuss key NCAA legal issues related to employment, recruitment and enrollment. Michelle Walsh has been invited to participate to provide a Management Council update.
- D. **WeCOACH Institutional Contacts:** King indicated that the league has renewed its conference membership with the WeCOACH development program for 2023-24. Each institution needs to provide a primary contact. King will circulate a list to confirm the primary contact for each school.

V. League Governance / Issues

- A. **Sport Liaison Assignment – Football:** King shared that Dr. Kristie Bowers, new athletic director at RPI, has agreed to replace Lee McElroy as the football AD liaison for football.
- B. **Sports Medicine Handbook – Revisions/Updates:** The athletic trainers have proposed revisions to the Liberty League Sports Medicine Handbook. The streamlined document removed a number of sections the athletic trainers believed were not necessary. The question was raised during the athletic trainers’ meeting as to whether the document opens the league or institutions up to any sort of liability since it pertains to the medical care of student-athletes. The consensus among the administrators was that it should be reviewed by legal counsel to determine if there are any issues. The league does not currently have legal counsel on retainer, but King can solicit requests for proposals to review the document.

Motion: A motion (Bowers, Nicholson) to adopt the revised sports medicine handbook with the expectation that it will undergo a legal review to assess potential liability PASSED 11-0-0.

- C. **Liberty League Code of Conduct / Violations:** As a follow-up to the discussion at the spring meeting regarding the league’s handling of conduct-related issues, King shared the sections on Sportsmanlike Conduct and Violations of the Code of Conduct from the league’s Team and Sport Guidelines. Institutions are expected to take appropriate action if unsportsmanlike acts arise with their respective teams. Institutional actions

that are deemed insufficient may be referred to the Executive Committee for further action by the league.

VI. League Championships / Scheduling

- A. **Football Scheduling Agreements:** King shared that the league's football-playing institutions met Oct. 18 to discuss non-conference scheduling options. Finding four non-league games, particularly in weeks 3 and 4, continues to be a challenge. Following the spring meeting, it appeared the Liberty League would be included in a non-conference football scheduling agreement that included the Empire 8 and Landmark Conference. Since September, the Landmark has opted to enter into a partnership with the Centennial Conference and NJAC, which are closer geographic partners. In addition the Empire 8 also announced that it was adding Alfred State as a football-only member, increasing the conference's football membership to nine schools. While the Empire 8 members will now need just two non-conference games, the conference remains interested in working with the Liberty League on non-conference scheduling opportunities. Two main options were discussed: 1.) a possible scheduling agreement with another conference, such as the Commonwealth Coast Conference, which currently has six members; 2.) possible associate members from other conferences. The league will continue to pursue both options in an effort to address its scheduling challenges.
- B. **Men's Golf Guidelines - Revised:** Following the spring meeting, the men's golf coaches have worked to revise the Liberty League men's golf sport guidelines to address potential weather-related concerns and to better reflect how the tournament is currently conducted. The Liberty League fall preview tournament has also been removed from the guidelines as it is no longer part of the process of determining the league champion. The coaches felt there were other options for fall tournaments and it no longer served a purpose. There were no issues or concerns expressed with the revisions.

Motion: A motion (Cummings-Danson, Durocher) to adopt the revised Liberty League men's golf guidelines PASSED 6-0-5.

- C. **2024 Women's Golf Championship Course:** Following the Liberty League women's golf championship last spring at the Edison Club (Rexford, N.Y.), the coaches were supportive of returning to the same location in 2024. It was later determined that the Northeast Women's Golf Conference (NWGC) will be conducting its championship at the Edison Club that same weekend. The NWGC has a two-year rotation where it plays at Edison in even years. The club pro has indicated the course could accommodate both the Liberty League and NWGC tournaments simultaneously, but they would have to be conducted as a shotgun start with approximately 80 players. The Liberty League coaches prefer to conduct the Liberty League Championship as a

stand-alone tournament. Union coach Matt McPhillips has explored several Capital Region options. The preference among the coaches is Pine Haven Country Club (Guilderland, N.Y.) at a rate of \$65 per player per round (the Edison Club rate was \$60). Other potential options include Van Patten Golf Club (Clifton Park, N.Y.) and Teugega Country Club (Rome, N.Y.) while the Edison Club remains a fallback option. McPhillips hopes to confirm with Pine Haven the week of Oct. 23.

D. Soccer Video Exchange: Liz Dennison raised the issue of soccer video recording and exchange, which has been an issue for some coaches. Video quality can vary from school to school based on filming location, height of the camera, distance from the field, and the degree to which the camera is zoomed in or out. There is not a lot of consistency around the league. Some schools have moved to automated cameras such as the Hudl Focus Flex, which may or may not improve the overall video quality and consistency. Other sports, such as women’s lacrosse, have adopted a set of universal guidelines through the national coaches association. Soccer does not. The administrators recommended that the coaches propose a set of Liberty League filming guidelines that prioritize what they expect to see with respect to zooming in and out.

E. COVID Cancellation & Rescheduling Policy: While COVID has not resulted in any cancellations during the fall season, it could potentially have a greater impact during the winter and with indoor sports. King shared the league policy regarding non-weather-related postponements and cancellations, which was adopted following the COVID shutdown. The policy reads as follows:

“Non-Weather-Related Postponements and Cancellations. If a team is unable to compete due to issues unrelated to weather (e.g., illness or injuries), the contest may be rescheduled if it is feasible to do so. The rescheduled contest will count toward overall and league standings. If the contest is unable to be rescheduled, the opposing team will be awarded a win for league-standing purposes only. The win will not change the team’s overall record and will not be recognized by the NCAA, but will be utilized to seed teams for Liberty League championship participation.”

No revisions or changes were proposed to the current policy.

VII. NCAA / National Issues

A. Division III Management Council Update: Michelle Walsh provided an update on behalf of the Division III Management Council, including: a legislative recommendation from CSMAS to remove cannabinoids from the list of NCAA Banned Substances; an increase in Division III championship per diem to \$125 for participating teams and \$55 for host teams, effective

immediately; a two-year pilot program on mental health hardship waivers; gambling concerns and the associated penalties.

- B. 2024 Division III Proposed Legislation:** The four Division III legislative proposals were briefly reviewed. Proposals include:
- 1. Division III Philosophy Statement:** In addition to the proposed changes to the Division III Philosophy Statement, there have been two amendments from the membership, including a.) primarily focusing on intercollegiate athletics as a four-year undergraduate experience; b.) assuring that financial aid is not awarded to any student on the basis of athletics leadership, ability, participation or performance.
 - 2. Amendment-to-Amendment Deadline:** Changing the deadline for sponsors to amend their proposals from Sept. 15 to Nov. 1.
 - 3. Sport Sponsorship – Minimum Participants in Tennis:** To change the minimum number of participants required in tennis from six to four to have consistency between the membership requirements and the playing rules.
 - 4. Establishing Stunt as an Emerging Sport:** To add stunt as an emerging sport for women and establish legislation related to playing and practice seasons and membership.
- C. NCAA DEI Review Framework:** The NCAA Office of Inclusion released a Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Review Framework for Conferences on Sept. 13. The review is mandatory for Division I institutions and conferences, but optional for Divisions II and III. The Liberty League has not previously conducted any sort of conference DEI review. The review framework is extensive. As a way to further engage the league’s Athletics Diversity and Inclusion Designees (ADIDs), it was suggested that the league identify small number of items for the ADIDs review rather than attempt to complete the entire document.

VIII. Other Business

- A. 2024-25 Basketball Schedule – Opening Weekend:** Laurel Kane noted that the 2024-25 Liberty League basketball schedule listed the opening weekend as the Friday and Saturday immediately after Thanksgiving. The league’s opening weekend has typically been the following weekend. King indicated that several coaches had reached out to express concerns about that weekend. After speaking with Brian Miller (basketball liaison), King agreed that the opening weekend should indeed be the following weekend. A revised schedule was circulated to the coaches with the scheduling change.
- B. Distribution of Used Equipment:** Gail Cummings Danson indicated that Skidmore is looking to donate used athletics equipment. Outside groups collect the used equipment, but often charge shipping. Cummings-Danson

inquired as to possible options to donate equipment without having to pay shipping costs.

- C. **Liberty League Future Soccer Schedules:** Walsh indicated that the future Liberty League soccer schedule only extends to the 2024 season and a new schedule will need to be adopted.

VIII. 2023-2024 Meeting Dates

- A. **Winter Meeting:** Friday, Jan. 12, 2024; NCAA Convention (Phoenix), Jan. 10-13, 2024.
- B. **Spring Meeting:** May 29-June 30, 2024 (The Landing Hotel / Rivers Casino – Schenectady, N.Y.).

XI. Adjournment

Meeting adjourned at 12:49 p.m.