

# Minutes of Liberty League Fall Meeting September 19, 2024 – Zoom Video Conference

**Present:** Stefanie Carrington, Andy Salvatore (Bard); Laurel Kane, Ben Gaebel (Clarkson); Brian Miller, Liz Dennison (Hobart and William Smith); Tyler Heisey (Ithaca); Kristie Bowers, Tucker Glass (RPI); George VanderZwaag, Kris Shanley, Morgan Stout (Rochester); Jackie Nicholson, Scott McVean, Jeff Siegel (RIT); Franco Bari, Randy LaBrake, Fran Grembowicz (St. Lawrence); Gail Cummings-Danson, Megan Buchanan, Peter Fisher (Skidmore); Jim McLaughlin, Beth Tiffany, Wally Bzdell (Union); Michelle Walsh, Kaitlin Leach, Matt Brennie (Vassar); Tracy King, Katie Meline (Liberty League).

## I. Call to Order

Gail Cummings-Danson (Liberty League President) called the meeting to order at 12:01 p.m.

## II. Hudl Presentation Review

An information session with Hudl representative Spencer Barr was provided for meeting attendees in which new products and services were reviewed. Hudl is required for Liberty League video exchange in the sports of football, men's soccer, women's soccer and women's volleyball. Additionally, men's and women's lacrosse are required to utilize Hudl for video exchange through each organization's coaches association. While there is no cost for exchanging video through Hudl, institutions pay for additional services including mounted Hudl Focus cameras, video breakdown and practice filming and storage. Eight of 11 institutions have Hudl athletic department packages (Clarkson, RPI, Rochester currently do not) ranging in cost from \$10,900 to \$41,400. Hudl may be seeking Division III conferences at no charge to pilot InStat for Basketball. The Liberty League currently utilizes Synergy for basketball video exchange and breakdown.

## III. Review of Minutes

The minutes of the May 29-30, 2024, spring meeting in Schenectady, N.Y., were reviewed. No changes or corrections were noted.

**Motion:** A motion (Cummings-Danson, Nicholson) to approve the minutes from the May 29-30, 2024, meeting PASSED 11-0-0.

## IV. Financial Report

- A. **FY24 Final Budget / FY25 Budget Update:** King reviewed the financial report for recently completed FY24 along with FY25. The league finished FY24 with a slight operating deficit of \$1,078.09, better than the forecasted deficit of \$3,932.65. Additionally, \$73,021.82 was withdrawn from the league checking account and combined with \$51,978.18 from the existing certificate

of deposit to form a new \$125,000 seven-month CD at a 5.0% interest rate. The new CD matures on Jan. 14, 2025, and should return approximately \$3,000. The CD can be either rolled over or reinvested at a new rate.

For FY25, a budget surplus of \$1,500 is projected. Full member dues have been collected from eight of 11 institutions and associate member dues have been collected from three of six institutions. NCAA Conference Grant funds – approximately \$102,000 – are typically received in mid-September. The checking account balance as of Sept. 12, 2024, totals \$238,410.58.

- B. Budget / Dues Planning – FY26-29:** Based on current budget projections, with no dues increase for FY26, the league would have an operating deficit of approximately \$6,000. With a 2.5% dues increase – from \$21,500 to \$22,000 – a flat budget is projected.

**Motion:** A motion (Miller, Nicholson) to raise dues by \$500 to \$22,000 for FY26 PASSED 11-0-0.

It was noted associate member dues for football have not increased from \$2,000 since at least 2009. Single-site associate member dues (golf, rowing, squash) were increased from \$250 per team to \$500 per team in FY24. Based on the annual Division III Commissioners Association survey, the average football associate member dues in FY24 were \$4,300 while single-site associate member dues were \$1,600. It was agreed that King would survey other regional conferences and make a recommendation for associate member dues for FY26.

## **V. Commissioner's Report**

- A. NCAA Division III National SAAC Nominations:** The Liberty League is scheduled to appoint an individual to serve on the National SAAC effective with the NCAA Convention in January. Three individuals have submitted nominations to serve as the league representative – Brooke LaVallee (Skidmore, Women's Lacrosse – current National SAAC associate member); Elizabeth Carleton (Rochester, Rowing); Brenna Schoenfeld (Ithaca, Field Hockey). The selection will be made by the Division III Nominating Committee.
- B. NCAA Division III Management Council Representative:** The Division III nominating committee has approved the nomination of Dr. Kristie Bowers to serve as the Liberty League's appointee to the Management Council. The appointment extends through the January 2029 NCAA Convention. The next Management Council meeting is scheduled for October 21-22.
- C. Liberty League NCAA RAC Representatives:** The Executive Committee has selected new RAC representatives for the sports of Football (Dan Puckhaber, St. Lawrence), Women's Soccer (Zac Shaw, Clarkson); Women's Basketball

(Meredith Mesaris, Vassar), Men's Lacrosse (John McCreery, Vassar), Women's Lacrosse (Alyssa Treanor, Union), and Women's Tennis (Tavis Rieger, St. Lawrence). The committee sought to balance institutional representation among the league's 16 RAC representatives.

- D. Liberty League SAAC Fall Meeting – Oct. 20:** The Liberty League's fall SAAC meeting is scheduled for Sunday, Oct. 20, at the Delta by Marriott hotel in Utica – the same location as last year. Vassar Deputy AD Kaitlin Leach will facilitate a session on the NCAA's OneTeam training program.
- E. Liberty League Championship Trophies:** MTM Recognition, which has produced the Liberty League's championship trophies for the last two years, has discontinued the model of trophy that has been presented at league championships the last two years. The new style will be similar in size and cost to the discontinued model.
- F. Championship Award Guys Ring Proposal:** Championship Award Guys, which produces medals and Most Outstanding Performer Awards for the league championships, submitted a proposal to be the exclusive championship ring provider for the league. The league would receive a \$30 rebate on each unit sold. There is no interest in a league-wide ring proposal.
- G. Soccer Card Update:** Data from the first three weeks of the men's soccer season has shown an increase in the average number of yellow cards per game. Eight teams are currently averaging more than 1.6 yellow cards per game. In 2023, one team averaged more than 1.85 yellow cards per game. Cards can be issued for a variety of reasons, including tactical fouls and unsporting behavior. King will contact soccer officiating coordinator Randy Lozier to determine if there are specific reasons for the increase.

## VI. League Governance / Issues

- A. Sport Liaison Assignment – Baseball:** George VanderZwaag, who had previously served as sport liaison for baseball prior to being replaced by David Lindholm in the spring, has agreed to resume baseball liaison responsibilities with Lindholm's recent departure from Bard.
- B. Sports Medicine Handbook Review:** The 3 Fold Group has completed its external review of the Liberty League's Sports Medicine Handbook. Specific recommendations include splitting up the current sports medicine content by governance-focused and sports medicine detail content. It was also suggested that the league consider revising all sports medicine policies and procedures to eliminate reiterating requirements that are already written by national and state authorities (e.g., NCAA or NATA requirements). The recommendations will be reviewed with the head athletic trainers with the intention of condensing the document and eliminating unnecessary information.

- C. **Liberty League Standing Committees:** As a follow-up to the spring meeting, Michelle Walsh surveyed the members on the possible implementation of league standing committees. Committees commonly utilized by other conferences include: Awards Committee; Championships Committee; Constitution/Bylaws Committee; Finance Committee; Scheduling Committee. Interest was expressed in possible committees for awards, championships, scheduling and technology. Walsh and King will prepare committee responsibilities and timelines to review with the group at the next meeting.
- D. **Liberty League Benchmarking / Salary Study:** As a follow-up to the spring meeting, a potential benchmarking and salary study was discussed. While some institutions would be unable to provide specific staff salaries, an average starting salary or salary range might be beneficial. Other data, including full-time/part-time, number of months (e.g., 10 or 12 months) and secondary responsibilities was suggested for comparison purposes. King will assess options for potential survey instruments.

## VII. League Championships / Scheduling Sport Issues

- A. **Awards Committee Recommendations:** An ad-hoc awards committee consisting of eight athletic communications members met on Sept. 11 to review and consider seven awards proposals that were tabled at the spring meeting. The tabled proposals included:
1. **Basketball:** To add a 6th member to the first and second team all-league recognition.
  2. **Men's Lacrosse:** To add a Specialist of the Year/Week to the Liberty League awards program.
  3. **Women's Lacrosse:** To add a Midfielder of the Year award to the Liberty League Women's Lacrosse awards program.
  4. **Women's Lacrosse:** To add a Goalie of the Year award to the Liberty League Women's Lacrosse awards program.
  5. **Women's Lacrosse:** To add a Draw Specialist to the All-Liberty League first and second team.
  6. **Rowing:** To replace the traditional Novice Crew of the Year award with an All-Novice Team, selected in a manner similar to the All-Liberty League teams.
  7. **Softball:** To reintroduce the all-tournament team to the Liberty League softball championship awards program.

The awards committee made the following recommendations:

1. **All-Liberty League Third Team:** In sports in which there are 10 or more participating teams (i.e., baseball, basketball, women's lacrosse, soccer, swimming and diving), to add a full third team in place of the honorable mention list. Rather than increase the size of all-league teams in certain

sports, such as the basketball proposal, the committee agreed that the number of all-league teams – two or three – should be based on the number of teams participating in each sport. Sports with greater participation should have more individuals recognized as All-Liberty League.

2. **Women's Lacrosse Midfielder of the Year:** The committee supported the addition of a Midfielder of the Year award in women's lacrosse. While the league currently recognizes Offensive and Defensive Players of the Year, midfielders often play both offensive and defensive roles, but may not have the same statistics as attackers, defenders and goalkeepers. Midfielders might also get overlooked in regional and national awards if they are not selected as one of the league's top award recipients. Regarding the proposals for the men's lacrosse specialist and women's lacrosse goalie, the committee agreed that the top individuals in the league at those positions are already recognized as first-team honorees and it would be redundant to add a Specialist of the Year or Goalie of the Year to recognize the individual who is already first team all-league. A draw specialist in women's lacrosse is also typically a midfielder whose role is more than simply taking draws. This player would have the opportunity to earn all-league honors as a midfielder. The committee also recognized that adding a midfielder of the year award in women's lacrosse could lead to consideration in other sports that have a midfielder position.
6. **Rowing – All-Novice Team:** The committee agreed that recognizing a group of first-year rowers would be the equivalent of picking an all-rookie team in other sports, which the league does not do. A first-year rower still has an opportunity to earn all-league honors, like any other rower. The committee was not in favor of adding an all-novice team to the rowing awards.
7. **Softball All-Tournament Team:** The committee reviewed the reasons that the Liberty League all-tournament teams had been discontinued following the 2018-19 year. The all-tournament teams added little value to the student-athlete experience. For sports in which tournament rounds were conducted at different sites, it was challenging for the championship host to select and recognize individuals without seeing their games. In instances where coaches would select individuals from their own teams, many did so without consideration of statistics or performance (e.g., selecting an individual who was a senior who may not have received other recognition). After the championship game, the losing team often leaves the venue, so only athletes from the winning team are recognized. The all-tournament teams were often not publicized. For these reasons, the committee was not in favor of reinstating all-tournament teams.

**Motion:** A motion (Bowers, Cummings-Danson) to accept the recommendations of the awards committee – adding an All-Liberty League third team in sports in which

10 or more teams participate; adding a Midfielder of the Year award in women's lacrosse – PASSED 11-0-0.

- B. Single-Site Championship Funding Review:** A committee of administrators convened on August 6 to review Liberty League single-site championships and how they are currently funded. The committee agreed to gather data from championships the past three years in the sports of cross country, indoor and outdoor track and field and swimming and diving, to compare expenses to approximate costs of participating teams. It was determined that in most cases the costs for host institutions appeared to be comparable to estimates for participating institutions, although they might vary based on roster size. In swimming and diving, due to the revenue generated through ticket sales and entry fees, the expenses for the host institution, Ithaca College, were typically less than participating teams. However, but the expenses also did not include costs for event management, athletic training coverage and custodial services that the host provides. The consensus was that if the championship was conducted at an off-campus venue, such as the Webster Aquatic Center, the shared costs for participating teams would be significantly higher. No action was taken to change current funding models for single-site championships.

The Liberty League was also informed by the Saratoga Rowing Association (SRA) that it would be charged \$8,000 by SRA to run the league's rowing championship, claiming it was losing money on the event in prior years. SRA also indicated that it would only be willing to host the event on Friday (not Saturday or Sunday). Skidmore paid approximately \$6,000 when it was the designated host school in 2023. Skidmore and Union have served as the host institution on a rotating basis since neither team incurs any lodging expenses. The two schools agreed to split the cost beginning in the spring of 2026. For 2025, Skidmore will pay half of the \$8,000 with the other half being paid by NCAA conference grant funds.

## VIII. NCAA / National Issues

- A. NCAA Officiating Reform Initiative:** The NCAA Officiating Reform Initiative was reviewed. The NCAA has extended its current agreement with RefQuest Plus (RQ+), its officiating services provider and is implementing a long-term strategy to provide additional resources and tools to assist all conferences in addressing concerns about officiating. The reform initiative has potential cost savings for conferences that choose to participate. To do so, a conference would have to use RQ Assign to assign officials in all sports (in 2024-25, softball is the only league sport not assigned through RQ+). The conference – all of its members – would also have to use RQ Pay to pay officials. Currently, only four schools – Ithaca, RPI, Union, Vassar – utilize RQ Pay to pay officials. RQ+ estimates the value to the Liberty League of participating in the initiative to be \$14,450. This is based on a free license for the coordinator to assign and the waiving of assignment fees. A conference would have to be fully compliant

by 2025-26 in order to receive the benefits (the conference does not need to be fully compliant to participate in 2024-25). Several institutions expressed concerns with possibly paying officials through RQ Pay. King suggested setting up an information session with a representative of RQ+ to answer questions about the initiative.

- B. NCAA Soccer Championship Start Date:** The NCAA Championships Committee is considering pushing back the start of the Division III men's and women's soccer championships one week. If approved, this would mean the NCAA soccer championships would start on the same weekend as the NCAA football and volleyball championships. In a survey conducted by the NCAA, soccer coaches were overwhelmingly in support of the move while less than half of ADs, athletic trainers and conference commissioners supported the change. When all responses were calculated together, the majority supported the proposed change, but it was skewed by the response from the coaches. Moving soccer back a week could potentially have a positive impact on soccer scheduling, providing another weekend for league play. It will further impact the overlap of the fall and winter seasons, adding additional work to support staff. In a straw poll, the league's athletic directors were unanimously opposed to moving the soccer championship date back a week.
- C. NCAA Division III Championships Production:** King shared that in order to host NCAA championship events during the 2024-25 year, schools will have to live stream the events and provide a play-by-play commentator. The NCAA will provide a stipend of \$1,000 per day to assist with the production cost. This will be part of the championship host budget reconciliation.
- D. NCAA Basketball Championship Video Review Requirement:** In order to host NCAA basketball championship games, schools will be required to provide video replay in all rounds. Minimum requirements include: one camera angle; a monitor (laptop/tablet) at the scorer's table; a hard-wired or strong internet connection at the scorer's table. Given that video review will be required in NCAA tournament play, its potential use in Liberty League tournament games was discussed. The league had previously adopted a stance of not utilizing video review during the regular season. Similar to media timeouts, which are utilized in NCAA tournament play, the use of video review in the league tournament would give potential hosts an opportunity to implement the technology and coaches an opportunity to understand how it will function in the NCAA tournament.

**Motion:** A motion (Miller, Kane) to require host institutions in the Liberty League men's and women's basketball championships to implement video review per NCAA Championship requirements, PASSED 6-4-1.

## VIII. Other Business

- A. **NCAA Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Review Framework:** With the NCAA's DEI Review required for multidivisional institutions as part of their sponsorship of Division I sports, Miller inquired if the league's other multidivisional schools had completed the review. Bowers had completed the review in her previous role at Boston University and offered to provide feedback on the review process. The other multidivisional institutions expressed a willingness to participate in the conversation and agreed to set up a meeting to continue the dialogue.

**IX. 2024-2025 Meeting Dates:**

- A. **Winter Meeting: Thursday, Jan. 16, 2025;  
NCAA Convention (Nashville), Jan. 14-17, 2025**
- B. **Spring Meeting: May 28-29, 2025 (Schenectady, N.Y.)**

**X. Adjournment**

*Meeting adjourned at 12:49 p.m.*