

# **Minutes of Liberty League Winter Meeting January 25, 2019 – Orlando, Fla. (NCAA Convention)**

**Present:** Kris Hall (Bard); Steve Yianoukos, Laurel Kane (Clarkson); Brian Miller (Hobart & William Smith), Susan Bassett, Erienne Roberts, Will Rothermel (Ithaca); Lee McElroy (RPI); Kristine Shanley, Jacob Lees (Rochester); Lou Spiotti, Bethany Marren, Scott McVean (RIT); Bob Durocher, Fran Grembowicz (St. Lawrence); Gail Cummings-Danson, Megan Buchanan (Skidmore); Jim McLaughlin, Beth Tiffany (Union); Michelle Walsh, JoAnn Acquarulo, Kaitlin Leach (Vassar); Deb Steward (William Smith); Tracy King, Katie Meline (Liberty League).

**Guests:** Cerri Banks, Vice President for Student Affairs/Dean of Students (Skidmore), Robb Flowers, Vice President for Campus Life (Hobart and William Smith), Sandra Johnson, Senior Vice President for Student Affairs (RIT), David Mapstone, Dean of Students (Hobart), NJ Kim, National SAAC Member (Emory), Annie McMillan, National SAAC Associate Member (Vassar).

## **I. Call to Order**

Susan Bassett (Liberty League President) called the meeting to order at 1:29 p.m.

## **II. Review of Minutes**

The minutes of the September 18, 2018, meeting at Turning Stone in Verona, N.Y., were reviewed. No changes or corrections were noted.

**Motion:** A motion (McElroy, Steward) to approve the minutes from the September 18, 2018, meeting PASSED 11-0-0.

## **III. Financial Report**

Liberty League treasurer Deb Steward provided a review of the financial report for FY19. The league has a current bank balance of \$341,847 with a projected budget surplus of \$16,615 for the fiscal year.

A five-year budget projection indicated that no change in the current dues structure was needed for FY20 and FY21. Current annual membership dues are \$20,000 for a full-member institution, \$2,000 for an associate member participating in a round-robin sport and \$250 for an associate member participating in a single-site championship. Beginning in FY22, a budget deficit of approximately \$6,000 was forecasted under the current dues. It was recommended that dues be increased to \$22,000 for full members and \$500 for single-site associate members beginning in FY22. Steward also budgeted funds for a part-time administrative assistant so the day-to-day budget duties could be transitioned to the league

office. While duties may eventually be transitioned to the league office, Susan Bassett recommended that the league retain a treasurer role to continue providing financial oversight. A formal vote on future dues will be conducted at the league's May meeting.

#### **IV. Commissioner's Report**

- A. Rowing Liaison:** With Nekisha Henry (Skidmore) leaving her position, a new administrative liaison for Liberty League rowing is needed. Gail Cummings-Danson had indicated to King that Skidmore is willing to continue serving in the liaison role. Megan Buchanan will serve as liaison for the current academic year. Once a permanent replacement for Henry has been hired, Skidmore will determine who will serve as liaison.
  
- B. FAR Conference Call:** As a follow-up to the Sept. 18 meeting, King indicated that an introductory conference call with the Liberty League Faculty Athletic Representatives has been scheduled for Wednesday, Feb. 6. Approximately seven FARs indicated that they would be available to participate on the call. King will provide a list of individuals who responded. An agenda is currently being drafted. The Division III FAR Working Group has recently published a brochure entitled "The Highly Engaged FAR" that makes recommendations for campus and conference engagement. Information from the brochure will be utilized for the discussion.
  
- C. Communication Initiatives:** In an effort to better engage campus constituents (i.e., Presidents, Athletics Director Reports, Faculty Athletics Representatives), King proposed a quarterly newsletter similar to Division III communication with member presidents. The newsletter could keep individuals apprised of key league and national issues. Given that the member schools have welcomed six new presidents in the past two years, these individuals may lack familiarity with their colleagues and league issues. Robb Flowers (HWS Vice President for Campus Life) suggested that the league may want to consider setting up a meeting for presidents and ADRs, similar to what was done in September 2011. King will explore options for a date and time.

#### **V. NCAA / National Issues**

- A. Discussion/Vote on 2019 NCAA Legislative Proposals:** NCAA Legislative proposals were discussed and straw polls were taken to establish a league position for each proposal.
  - **Proposal 1 – Board of Governors, Independent Members:** to add five independent members to the NCAA Board of Governors (Association-wide vote was conducted on Thursday with the proposal passing 792-203-13. Liberty League supported the proposal 6-5-0. Based on a straw poll taken on Tuesday, the league vote was cast in opposition).

- **Proposal 2 – Football Start Date:** to establish the first permissible practice date as 23 days before the institution’s first regular-season contest (6-0-5, Support).
- **Amendment 2-1 – Football Thursday Exception:** to establish that the first permissible practice date for an institution that conducts its first contest on a Thursday of the opening weekend is 23 days before the following Friday (5-1-5, Support).
- **Proposal 3 – Field Hockey and Soccer Acclimatization Period:** in field hockey and soccer, to add three additional acclimatization days to the preseason practice period (1-9-1, Oppose).
- **Proposal 4 – Mandatory Graduation Rate Reporting:** to include as a condition of Division III membership, that an institution submit on an annual basis student-athlete graduation rate reporting data for the academic success rate (8-3-0, Support).
- **Proposal 5 – Pre-Enrollment Educational Expenses:** to permit individuals to accept educational expenses prior to collegiate enrollment from any individual or entity other than an agent, professional sports team or representative of an institution’s athletics interests (11-0-0, Support).
- **Proposal 6 – Final Term Experiential Learning Requirement:** to extend the existing final term exception to the full-time enrollment requirement to include student-athletes that are carrying all courses necessary to complete degree requirements, but have an outstanding experiential learning requirement (11-0-0, Support).
- **Proposal 7 – Social Media and Publicity Exceptions:** to establish an exception to the restrictions on electronic transmissions and publicity before commitment legislation to permit athletics department staff members to connect and take actions on social media platforms (9-1-1, Support).

National SAAC member NJ Kim, a baseball student-athlete from Emory University, and associate member Annie MacMillan, a volleyball student-athlete from Vassar College, joined the meeting and shared the committee’s positions on the NCAA legislative proposals. National SAAC supports all legislative proposals with the exception of Proposal 3 – soccer and field hockey acclimatization period. MacMillan reminded the group about the Division III partnership with Special Olympics and the 50/50 challenge in recognition of the 50th year of Special Olympics. She also indicated that mental health is a key initiative with the National SAAC. As part of the campaign, the NCAA is producing customized mental health resource cards for each institution. The deadline to order cards is January 30.

- B. Skyline Conference/Mount Saint Vincent Proposal:** A number of Liberty League presidents received a letter from Mount Saint Vincent president Charles Flynn in December that had been circulated widely among Division

III presidents. President Flynn, who indicated he was writing on behalf of the Skyline Conference, declared the current Division III governance process is “broken.” The Division III Presidents Council came to a consensus that there is no need for a comprehensive review of DIII or legislation that would dramatically restructure the division. If the Skyline Conference desired to propose legislation, it could do so through the regular legislative process and a membership-sponsored proposal.

- C. **Proposed Division III Regional Realignment:** King reported that a committee of Division III commissioners provided recommendations for proposed regional realignment. Those recommendations will be forward to the Division III Championships Committee for possible implementation in the 2020-21 academic year. The proposal sought to balance the number of institutions across all regions and standardize the number of regions based on sponsorship levels in each sport. The committee noted that men’s lacrosse, with a Division III sponsorship of 246 institutions, currently has just two regions while field hockey, with 166 sponsoring institutions, has six regions. The proposal sought to establish the number of regions based on sport sponsorship. King felt that the impact on the Liberty League would be minimal as the league would still be grouped with other New York conferences in the different proposed regions.
  
- D. **Proposed ABCA Extension of Baseball Season:** King reported that the American Baseball Coaches Association (ABCA) surveyed Division III coaches to gauge interest in extending the Division III baseball (and softball) season by two weeks. Weather and student-athlete experience were cited as the primary benefits of extending the season. The survey noted that, based on the results of the data, legislation could possibly be proposed for the 2020 NCAA Convention. Jim McLaughlin indicated that the Liberty League baseball coaches discussed the proposal on their Jan. 7 conference call. While the coaches recognized the benefits of extending the season and playing in better weather conditions, they were cognizant of the challenges of keeping student-athletes on campus after the academic year has concluded at most institutions.

## VI. League Governance

- A. **Associate Membership Inquiries – Rowing/Swimming:** King reported that Nazareth AD Pete Bothner had inquired about Liberty League associate membership in women’s rowing. Nazareth currently has a club rowing program and is scheduled to elevate the program to varsity status for the 2019-20 academic year. King noted the league currently has seven full members sponsoring varsity women’s rowing – Ithaca, Rochester, RIT, Skidmore, St. Lawrence, Union and William Smith – and receives an NCAA automatic bid. Additionally, St. John Fisher is an associate member. Is there a benefit to the league to add Nazareth? Susan Bassett noted that providing a

championship opportunity for Nazareth could help to grow a women's sport that does not have broad sponsorship in Division III. A question was raised as to how the participation of another team might impact the racing schedule at the Liberty League championship as the Saratoga Lake course currently utilizes seven lanes. It was agreed that a conference call with the rowing coaches should be conducted to discuss Nazareth's interest, the potential impact on the championship and to establish a recommendation.

Bassett also reported that she was contacted by an athletics director in the Empire 8 to gauge whether the Liberty League would consider adding Alfred, Nazareth, Hartwick and Utica to the league's swimming and diving championship. Prior to the Liberty League championship being moved to a season-ending meet in February, the Liberty League teams had competed with the Empire 8 teams in the UNYSCSA championship. With Stevens departing the Empire 8 at the conclusion of the 2018-19 academic year, the Empire 8 championship will include just four teams. Several administrators reported that their coaches liked the size and format of the Liberty League championship. The smaller size results in shorter trials sessions in the morning and subsequently more rest for swimmers competing in the finals sessions in the evening. Having more teams, however, might also increase the level of competition and improve times. Bassett agreed to discuss the interest of the Empire 8 members with the Liberty League coaches at their pre-championship meeting in February.

- B. Nondiscrimination Policy / LGBTQ Guide:** When the NCAA released its LGBTQ Nondiscrimination Policy Guide in the summer, Kris Hall indicated that Bard reviewed campus and department policy documents to ensure that the school had policies to support nondiscrimination. She suggested that the Liberty League consider adding appropriate language to its policy documents, noting that the NCAA guide had four sample statements the league could review and consider. The Executive Committee will review the statements and will make a recommendation for the league's May meeting.
- C. League Benchmarking:** Bob Durocher thanked the league members for recent assistance in benchmarking of certain positions. He asked whether a larger league-wide benchmarking study would be of interest to others in the league. Certain institutions may not be willing to release confidential salary information. While a study of FTEs might be helpful, positions often include secondary responsibilities that might make it difficult to compare positions. Other data, such as budgeting, travel squads and meal money, could also be considered. King was asked to gather potential benchmarking tools from other conferences and will present findings to the group in May.
- D. Ignite CX Proposal:** King indicated that he had discussed a possible arrangement with Ignite CX, subsidiary of Learfield Sports, to sell Liberty League championship merchandise online. The league currently has an

online store through BSN Sports that generates little in terms of merchandise sales as the generic league merchandise has little appeal. Ignite CX has the ability to sell league championship merchandise by setting up flash stores in conjunction with Liberty League championships. Individuals, including parents, have often expressed interest in purchasing championship t-shirts, but such orders currently need to be taken and funds collected by institutions. The flash stores set up by Ignite CX would enable individuals to purchase and pay for merchandise online without schools having to process orders. There was support expressed for exploring the proposal further. It was recommended that King contact other conferences that might have utilized Ignite CX for similar arrangements. Deb Steward also had a potential vendor, Adpro Sports, for the league to consider and would forward the contact information to King.

## VII. League Championships / Scheduling / Sport Issues

- A. **Single-Site Entry Fees:** As the league considers entry fees for certain single-site championship sports, it was agreed at the fall meeting that additional data was needed. The 2019 indoor and outdoor track seasons will provide the league with two years of data since the implementation of the two-day championships. It will also create a better baseline for determining costs for hosts and traveling teams. King compiled a spreadsheet for teams to submit costs for 2018 and 2019. Information will be gathered following the outdoor championship and presented at the spring meeting.
- B. **Sportsmanship – Soccer:** Bassett expressed concern with the level of sportsmanship in soccer, particularly on the men’s side. Soccer officials, more so than other sports, seem to tolerate or allow abusive language and behavior from student-athletes. Bassett suggested that the administrators could draft a statement to coaches conveying expectations for proper sportsmanship. The topic will also be an agenda item at the upcoming coaches meeting. It was suggested that soccer assignor Kevin McGoff be invited to the meeting to share the perspective of the officials on sportsmanship.
- C. **Empire 8 Football Proposal:** The Empire 8 forwarded the Liberty League a formal proposal for a football scheduling agreement between the two conferences. The Empire 8 and Liberty League previously agreed on a series of games from 2019 to 2022. As new administrators and coaches have joined the league, there have been questions raised about expectations of the games that were agreed upon. The proposal seeks to clarify expectations. Some schools had elected to play more games against Empire 8 teams than others based on preferences of prior administrators and coaches. The Empire 8 was also seeking to reaffirm the Liberty League’s commitment to the New York Bowl, which was intended to provide a postseason opportunity for the second-place team in each conference. The past two years, Ithaca (Liberty

League) and Cortland (Empire 8) have finished second, meaning they would have been slated to play in the bowl game a week after their season-ending rivalry game. Both schools preferred to not play in back-to-back weeks. As a result, Ithaca opted to play in an ECAC bowl game both seasons, which resulted in the Liberty League needing to find another team for the New York Bowl. Third- and fourth-place teams were not anticipating an additional game. It was agreed that a solution needs to be found to the Ithaca-Cortland matchup so the burden does not always fall on the Liberty League to find another team that may not be prepared to play. A follow-up call with the football members will be scheduled to discuss the scheduling proposal and bowl game.

- D. Volleyball Match Times:** At the Jan. 16 meeting of the volleyball coaches, Kris Hall indicated that the coaches proposed adjusting match time on Friday of the league's split-site weekend from 6 p.m. to 4 p.m. On the split-site weekend teams are either home Friday and away Saturday, or vice versa. With the Friday matches, some teams currently have to travel approximately four hours, play a 6 p.m. match, and then return home, possibly after 1 a.m. By proposing a 4 p.m. start time, teams will be able to return home at a more reasonable hour in preparation for Saturday's home match. Hall noted that teams would only have to travel on Friday for the split-site weekend every other year. The match times for other league weekends would remain 7 p.m. Friday and 2 p.m. Saturday.

**Motion:** A motion (Hall / Kane) to change the start time on Friday of the Liberty League split-site volleyball weekend (when teams are home one day and away the other) from 6 p.m. to 4 p.m. PASSED 7-1-3.

- E. Baseball Tournament – Offsite Practices:** On the Jan. 7 conference call of the baseball coaches, Jim McLaughlin shared a discussion of the baseball coaches regarding offsite practices (batting practice) during the Liberty League tournament. Rather than utilizing its scheduled batting practice time at the league tournament held at Rochester, RIT chose to take batting practice on campus. A coach questioned whether it was an unfair advantage for a team to practice offsite. Since the league generally follows NCAA tournament protocol, the coaches sought feedback on whether offsite practices were permitted during NCAA competition. King confirmed with a Division III baseball committee member that the NCAA does not prohibit offsite practices during tournament play. Any team that practices offsite is responsible for securing and paying for facilities on its own. The league will follow the NCAA guideline and will not implement a more stringent policy.
- F. Esports Sponsorship / Interest:** King surveyed the group to gauge the interest in esports on member campuses. RPI and RIT both reported having esports clubs that fall under student affairs/student activities. Other schools reported interest as well. At the present time, esports does not fall under the

supervision of the athletics department at any Liberty League institution. The rapid development of esports, including the involvement of the NCAA, will continue to be monitored.

### **VIII. Future Meeting Sites / Dates**

Meeting dates for 2018-19 were reviewed.

- A. **Spring Meeting:** May 29-30, 2019, at Turning Stone Resort.

### **IX. Adjournment**

*Meeting adjourned at 4:45 p.m.*