

Minutes of Liberty League Winter Meeting January 12, 2024 – Phoenix, Ariz. (NCAA Convention)

Present: David Lindholm (Bard); Laurel Kane (Clarkson); Liz Dennison, Chris Gray (Hobart and William Smith); Susan Bassett, Tyler Heisey (Ithaca); Kristie Bowers (RPI); Morgan Stout (Rochester); Jackie Nicholson, Bethany Marren, Olivia Winkfield, Rickey Stevens (RIT); Randy LaBrake, Fran Grembowicz (St. Lawrence); Gail Cummings-Danson, Megan Buchanan, Peter Fisher (Skidmore); Beth Tiffany (Union); Michelle Walsh, Kaitlin Leach, Matt Brennie (Vassar); Tracy King, Katie Meline (Liberty League).

Guests: Dr. Marc Conner (President, Skidmore); Dionis Polanco (NCAA Student Immersion Program Attendee, Union).

I. Call to Order

Jackie Nicholson called the meeting to order at 1:30 p.m. Meeting attendees introduced themselves.

II. Review of Minutes

The minutes of the October 19, 2023, meeting were reviewed. No changes or corrections were noted.

Motion: A motion (Walsh, Bowers) to approve the minutes from the October 19, 2023, meeting PASSED 11-0-0.

III. Financial Report

- A. **FY24 Budget Report:** Current bank balance totals \$335,975.10 with nearly all revenues received. Current expenses for FY24 total \$125,601.35 with a slight budget deficit of approximately \$4,000 projected. King reminded members that the league received a \$24,000 NCAA grant to support diversity, equity and inclusion programming. Funds can be utilized to support either conference or institutional programming.
- B. **FY25 Membership Dues:** As agreed upon at the January 13, 2023, meeting, full member dues for 2025 will increase from \$20,000 to \$21,500.

IV. Commissioner's Report

- A. **National SAAC Associate Member Appointment:** Lauren Zeglen (RIT) has completed her term as the Liberty League's associate member on the Division III National SAAC. The league will need to appoint an individual to serve as

associate member for the upcoming year (January 2024 to January 2025). Beginning next January, the Liberty League will nominate individuals to serve as a primary member of National SAAC. For the associate member, King will email institutional SAAC advisors to solicit nominations. A vote will then be conducted to determine the new associate member.

- B. Championship Banner Distribution:** To enhance the league championship experience, NCAA grant (tier 3) funding was utilized to purchase a set of championship banners for each institution. One large 36-foot banner and two 6-foot banners will be distributed to each institution to be utilized during league championship events. The banners are intended to be utilized for multiple occasions and not one-time use.
- C. Women's Golf Championship Update:** Pinehaven Country Club (Guilderland, N.Y.) has been confirmed as the site for the 2024 Liberty League women's golf championship. Union coach Matt McPhillips, who has worked at Pinehaven, secured the course on behalf of the league. The rate is \$60 per player per round (\$600 for a five-player team for the tournament), which is the same rate as the 2023 championship at Edison Club. Union is working to secure a room block at a local hotel.

V. NCAA / National Issues

- A. Management Council Update:** Michelle Walsh provided an update on key Management Council issues.
- **Men's Ice Hockey Bracket Expansion:** The Division III men's ice hockey championship bracket will be expanding from 12 to 13 teams for the upcoming 2024 championship.
 - **Media Right Agreement:** Division III will see an increase in revenue due to the NCAA's recently signed media rights deal with ESPN. As part of the agreement, several Division III championship games will be broadcast on ESPN+.
 - **Pause of Membership Assessment:** The Division III membership dues assessment will be paused for a period of two years as the division seeks to spend down its mandated reserve.
 - **Noncontroversial Legislation:** Cannabinoids have been removed from the list of NCAA banned substances via noncontroversial legislation. This affirms the role of the NCAA drug testing program to address performance enhancing substances, of which cannabinoids are not.
 - **Division III Championships Enhancements:** The Championships Committee is exploring championship enhancements, including increasing championship per diem, combining pools B and C into one at-large pool along with expansion of the Division III football championship. Walsh encouraged schools to complete NCAA championship surveys, which serve to guide the work of the Championships Committee.

B. Discussion/Vote on 2024 NCAA Legislative Proposals: NCAA Legislative proposals were discussed and straw polls were taken to establish a league position for each proposal.

- **Proposal 1 – Revise the Philosophy Statement:** to revise the Division III Philosophy Statement to better reflect Division III’s unique values and positioning in today’s intercollegiate athletics landscape (Proposal 1 alone: 8-3-0, Support; Proposal 1 amended by 1-1 only: 2-9-0, Oppose; Proposal 1 amended by 1-2 only: 4-7-0, Oppose; Proposal 1 amended by both 1-1 and 1-2: 8-3-0, Support).
- **Proposal 1-1 – Amend the Philosophy Statement:** to amend Proposal 2024-1 to add in language from the current philosophy statement regarding the focus of Division III athletics on the four-year undergraduate experience (4-7-0, Oppose).
- **Proposal 1-2 – Amend the Philosophy Statement:** to amend Proposal 2024-1 to retain the language from the current philosophy statement regarding awarding of financial aid to student-athletes. The proposed amendment adds the language precluding athletically related aid into the proposed new philosophy statement (8-2-1, Support)
- **Proposal 2 – Amendment-to-Amendment Deadline Change:** to amend the Amendment-to-Amendment deadline to provide the sponsors of membership proposals more flexibility and time to amend proposals. Specifically, the deadline for sponsors of the original proposal to submit an amendment-to-amendment that increases the modification of its proposal would be changed from September 15 to November 1, providing adequate time for its inclusion in the Final Notice (11-0-0, Support).
- **Proposal 3 – Division Membership – Tennis Participants:** to change the minimum number of participants required in tennis from six to four (10-0-1, Support).
- **Proposal 4 – Division Membership – Establish Stunt as an Emerging Sport for Women:** to add stunt as an emerging sport for women and establish legislation related to playing and practice seasons and membership (8-0-3, Support).

C. Appointment Process for PC / MC Representative: With the passing of Proposal #7 at the 2023 NCAA Convention, which ensures that each Division III multi-sport conference will have one representative on either the Presidents Council or Management Council, the Liberty League will have to appoint an individual to serve on one of the Councils. It is anticipated that the Councils will approve a rotation schedule by April or May. The process of soliciting nominations to fill openings has not been announced. For Liberty League representatives, the consensus was to solicit nominations rather than attempt to establish an alphabetical rotation among the member institutions.

- D. Potential Meeting with President Baker:** NCAA president Charlie Baker has extended an invitation to meet with presidents and athletic directors from every conference, as he did last year. President Baker's office has initially offered Monday, Feb. 5, from 1:15 to 2:15 as a potential meeting time with the Liberty League. The consensus was that a meeting would be beneficial if a majority of the league's presidents and athletic directors are available. King will survey the groups to gauge availability.
- E. Selection Criteria Database:** Division III is strongly considering moving to a selection criteria database (i.e., PairWise) to select at-large teams to NCAA team championships, replacing criteria that is often subjectively applied by NCAA sport committees. PairWise is currently utilized for at-large selections in ice hockey and has been piloted with a number of Division III sports. No concerns were raised among league members. The consensus was that PairWise would be an improvement over the current selection process.

VI. League Championships / Scheduling / Sport Issues

- A. Video Exchange Compliance:** A number of basketball coaches have expressed frustration with teams not adhering to the league's video exchange guidelines with respect to upload deadlines. Coaches feel there are no consequences for teams that are late in uploading videos to the Synergy exchange server. Synergy does not currently have controls for locking or suspending accounts. For coaches that fail to meet upload deadlines, the consensus was that the athletic director should be notified and will be responsible for addressing the issue with the respective coach. Also, the league can maintain a list of teams that fail to adhere to the deadline and share the list at the spring meeting.
- B. Football Scheduling / Membership Update:** Since October, football-playing institutions have been exploring options that would assist teams in completing schedules. With other conferences expanding their football memberships and/or forming scheduling alliances, non-conference scheduling opportunities within the northeast have diminished significantly. As a result, Liberty League teams face significant challenges in scheduling non-league opponents, especially in weeks 3 and 4. The league has explored potential conference partnerships with both the Commonwealth Coast Conference and the Empire 8 and has also approached a number of institutions regarding possible associate memberships. A working agreement with the Empire 8 appears to be one of the only viable options. As of 2024, the Empire 8 will have nine football members, four of which are associate members. Under a potential agreement, King reported that one of the Empire 8's associate members would switch to the Liberty League. The Liberty League teams would then agree to schedule two games each against Empire 8 teams.

- C. League Schedule Development:** New league schedules need to be adopted for the 2025-26 season for field hockey, men's/women's soccer, men's lacrosse, women's lacrosse and softball. The schedule development process typically involves sport groups proposing a format, the commissioner drafting a schedule based on the proposed format and the administrators either adopting or rejecting the proposal. Proposals that are rejected are often done so because they are in conflict with the league's general scheduling principles (e.g., proposing more weekday games). The consensus among administrators was that most schedule formats work well. The field hockey schedule has included two Friday-Sunday weekends. Since efforts have been made to reduce Sunday play in league contests, that format should be revisited to see if there is another format that could be utilized to eliminate Sunday competition.
- D. Basketball Officiating Proposal:** Basketball coordinators Mike Schmidt (WBB) and Tom Reinisch (MBB) have proposed a new three-year fee schedule for 2024-2027. The proposal includes a new mileage tier. Officials traveling between 70-99 miles would receive a \$20 stipend under the proposal. While the price of gas has declined, the coordinators are struggling to retain officials. The stipend provides a fuel reimbursement while also providing compensation for officials who may be traveling 2-3 hours round trip for officiating assignments. The administrators sought additional information as to the potential impact on each. Since the same proposal was made to the Empire 8 and SUNYAC, those conferences should be contacted to determine whether they support the proposal.
- E. Baseball Crossover Weekend Format:** At the June 1, 2023, league meeting, the league agreed to move to 9-inning games for all Liberty League baseball games while also utilizing the 10-run rule. The league schedule includes one weekend of cross-division games where teams play doubleheaders on Saturday and Sunday. A question was raised as to whether all games in the cross-division doubleheaders would be nine innings or would be a 9/7 format. When polled, the coaches voted (7-3) in favor of nine-inning games. No action was taken on changing the format for that weekend.

VII. Future Meeting Dates

- A. Spring Meeting:** The spring meeting is scheduled for May 29-30 at The Landing Hotel in Schenectady, N.Y.

VIII. Adjournment

Meeting adjourned at 4:14 p.m.