

Minutes of Liberty League Winter Meeting January 16, 2025 – Nashville, Tenn. (NCAA Convention)

Present: Stefanie Carrington, Malik Walfall (Bard); Laurel Kane (Clarkson); Brian Miller, Liz Dennison (Hobart and William Smith); Susan Bassett (Ithaca); Kristie Bowers (RPI); Kristine Shanley, Morgan Stout (Rochester); Scott McVean, Jeff Siegel, Bethany Marren (RIT); Gail Cummings-Danson, Peter Fisher (Skidmore); Franco Bari, Randy LaBrake (St. Lawrence); Jim McLaughlin (Union); Michelle Walsh, Kaitlin Leach, Matt Brennie (Vassar); Tracy King, Katie Meline (Liberty League).

Guests: Dr. Marc Conner (President, Skidmore); Adrian Bautista (Dean of Students and Vice President for Student Affairs, Skidmore); Brooke LaVallee (National SAAC, Skidmore); RefQuest+ Staff.

I. Call to Order

Gail Cummings-Danson called the meeting to order at 1:26 p.m. Meeting attendees introduced themselves.

II. Review of Minutes

The minutes of the September 19, 2024, meeting were reviewed. No changes or corrections were noted.

Motion: A motion (Walsh, Cummings-Danson) to approve the minutes from the September 19, 2024, meeting PASSED 11-0-0.

III. Financial Report

- A. FY25 Budget Report:** Current bank balance totals \$334,473.38 with all membership dues payments and NCAA grant revenues received (\$348,734.03). Current expenses total \$95,260.65 with a slight budget surplus of approximately \$1,500 projected. As part of the NCAA Officiating Reform Initiative, the NCAA has eliminated the \$2,000 basketball officiating improvement grant provided to conferences.
- B. Liberty League CD:** The Liberty League certificate of deposit (CD), with an original amount of \$125,000, matured on Jan. 14, 2025. This was a 7-month CD at 4.88% and generated approximately \$3,629 in interest. The Executive Committee agreed to roll the full amount into a new 7-month CD at 4.10%, maturing on Aug. 22, 2025.

- C. **Associate Member Dues:** As a follow-up to the fall meeting, Liberty League associate member dues were reviewed. Current associate member dues are \$2,000 for football members and \$500 for single-site championship members (golf, rowing, squash). Football dues have remained unchanged since at least 2010 while full-member dues have increased 168% during the same time. A survey of five conferences in the region revealed that the average dues for football associate members averaged \$5,433. A concern with significantly increasing football dues could be the potential withdrawal of those members.

Motion: A motion (Cummings-Danson, Bowers) to increase single-site associate member dues to \$1,000 for FY26 and then increase in subsequent years by a percentage equal to the increase in full-member dues; to increase football associate member dues to \$2,500 in FY27 and then increase in subsequent years by a percentage equal to the increase in full-member dues PASSED 11-0-0.

IV. Commissioner's Report

- A. **SAAC Member Appointment:** Elizabeth Carleton, a junior on the Rochester women's rowing team, has been selected as the Liberty League's new National SAAC representative (primary member) and will begin her three-year term following the NCAA Convention. The outcome of the vote on proposal 2025-1 will not impact Elizabeth's appointment. Skidmore sophomore Brooke LaVallee, a member of the women's lacrosse team, has served as the league's associate member on the National SAAC during the past year.
- B. **Soccer Yellow Card Report:** Yellow cards increased significantly from the previous season in both men's soccer (29 percent increase) and women's soccer (34 percent increase). Cards can be issued for a variety of reasons, some of which may include unsporting behavior while others may be for tactical fouls. While the exact reason for the increase this season is unclear, the data will continue to be tracked next year. It was suggested that the Empire 8 and SUNYAC could be contacted to determine if other conferences that utilize the same officials also saw increases in yellow cards.
- C. **Executive Coaching:** King circulated a document from former RIT women's basketball coach and senior woman administrator Amy Reed on executive coaching. Reed has transitioned into a career in executive coaching, which she believes can assist coaches dealing with burnout. Schools can contact Reed directly with questions or to schedule sessions.

V. NCAA / National Issues

- A. **National SAAC Update:** LaVallee updated the league on Division III National SAAC initiatives and also shared the committee's position on the six legislative proposals. National SAAC supports all six proposals. LaVallee also thanked the members for the opportunity to represent the league on the committee.

B. Discussion/Vote on 2025 NCAA Legislative Proposals: NCAA Legislative proposals were discussed and straw polls were taken to establish a league position for each proposal.

- **Proposal 1 – Change SAAC Composition:** to allow each multi-sport conference and group of independents to have a primary representative on National SAAC (11-0-0, Support).
- **Proposal 2 – Multi-Sport Conferences – Minimum Size Requirement:** to align NCAA Division III legislative requirements for a multi-sport conference to be consistent with the membership size requirements for a single-sport conference, as well as to align legislative requirements for membership size for a multi-sport conference with the NCAA Division III legislation related to eligibility for automatic qualifiers and access to NCAA Division III championships (10-1-0, Support).
- **Proposal 3 – Legislative Authority – Amend the Legislative Process:** to amend the Division III legislative process to establish an initial membership proposal submission deadline of July 1 that only requires statements of intent and rationale, along with the impacted bylaws; allows for a comment period for proposals through September 1; establishes an alternate membership proposal submission deadline of September 15 if the proposal meets the sponsorship threshold of four multi-sport conferences or 20 member institutions representing four multi-sport conferences (11-0-0, Support).
- **Proposal 4 – Federated Playing Rules – Exemptions for Division III:** to establish a process by which Division III may consider federated sport-specific playing rules that have either a financial or philosophical impact for Division III institutions (11-0-0, Support).
- **Proposal 5 – Division Membership – Three-Year Provision Reduction:** to establish a waiver of the reclassification three-year provision to shorten the process from three years to two years. (10-1-0, Support).
- **Proposal 6 – National Collegiate Championship – Women’s Wrestling:** to establish a National Collegiate Championship in women’s wrestling and to establish a women’s wrestling committee (10-0-1, Support).
- **Proposal EM-1 – Transfer Regulations – Allowing Certification After a Term of Enrollment:** to amend the eligibility process for transfer student-athletes that were academically ineligible had they remained at their previous institution as follows: (a) the student-athlete would remain ineligible for competition upon transfer, and (b) the institution could certify that student-athlete as eligible after one regular term of full-time enrollment based on that institution’s academic standards for all student-athletes (8-1-2, Support).

C. Management Council Update: Kristie Bowers provided an update on key Management Council issues.

- **NLRB:** Federal legislation is needed to clarify the employment status between student-athletes and institutions (student-athletes are not employees).
- **House Settlement:** The pending settlement is important for the NCAA in that it will potentially settle five lawsuits. If the cases had not been settled, the cost to the NCAA and institutions could have been significantly higher.
- **Sports Betting:** The question was raised as to whether the NCAA should consider deregulating professional sports betting. The NCAA could shift to a harm-reduction strategy to address gambling addiction.
- **NCAA Fan Databases:** The two purposes of the database are to generate increased revenue and to increase fan attendance at championship events. In the future, the database may be accessible to institutions.
- **Five Years of Eligibility:** Rather than issuing waivers for lost seasons, Division I is considering providing student-athletes with five years of eligibility. The issue will likely filter down to Divisions II and III.
- **Strategic Direction of Division III:** How can Division III better tell its story? Could funding be utilized to compile institutional advertisements or promotional videos to run during championship broadcasts?
- **Transgender and Title IX:** A patchwork of legislation currently exists across states regarding transgender participation. Federal guidance is needed on this issue.
- **Mental Health First Aid:** Division III is looking to provide resources for schools to assist their staff members in becoming certified as mental health first aid responders. A 'train-the-trainer' model is being considered.
- **Division III Reserve Spending:** Division III currently has a healthy financial reserve. What are potential initiatives for which reserve funds could be utilized? League suggestions included officiating development programs, championship per diem and host per diem increases.
- **Soccer Championship Date Proposal:** The proposal to move the Division III soccer championship start date back a week was denied. Management Council asked the Championships Committee to conduct a holistic review of all seasons, including start dates and championship date formulas.

D. NCAA Officiating Reform Initiative / RefQuest+: Representatives from RefQuest+ joined the meeting to share information and answer questions on the NCAA Officiating Reform Initiative. In order for conferences to participate in and receive the benefits of the initiative, all sports would have to be assigned through RQ+ and all schools would have to utilize RQ Pay to pay officials. The Liberty League currently has four schools utilizing RQ Pay. After discussion of the benefits of RQ+, it was agreed that a demo would be set up for league members to learn more about the software and solutions.

VI. League Championships / Scheduling / Sport Issues

- A. Liberty League Standing Committee Proposal:** As a follow-up to the fall meeting, several potential standing committees were considered to improve efficiency and better vet proposals. The league has utilized an ad hoc awards committee, which has been beneficial in reviewing awards proposals brought forward by sport groups. As technology continues to evolve, the consensus was that it would also be beneficial to have a standing committee to review technology related products and services. It was suggested that each standing committee could include 4-5 members with the purpose of making recommendations to the full group of administrators.

Motion: A motion (Bowers, Cummings-Danson) to implement Liberty League standing committees for Awards and Technology PASSED 11-0-0.

- B. Officiating Contract Proposals:** Contracts for officiating fees in baseball, men's lacrosse, women's lacrosse and soccer are expiring after the current academic year. The Liberty League, Empire 8 and SUNYAC have utilized the same coordinators and fee structures in those sports. The officiating coordinators have provided fee proposals for the next three years. The commissioners met and felt the proposed fee increases were reasonable and are seeking feedback and approval from their conferences. The administrators supported the proposed officiating contracts for baseball, women's lacrosse and soccer. A proposed contract for men's lacrosse will be discussed with the officiating coordinator and will be presented in the spring.

- C. Proposed Updates – Baseball Guidelines:** The baseball coaches met virtually on December 5 to review, revise and propose updates to the sport guidelines. While the meeting was intended to address areas of ambiguity in the guidelines, the coaches also recommended changing the schedule of the crossover divisional series and adding a third umpire to all league games. Proposed updates and changes were reviewed. Four proposals were identified for a vote:

Motion: A motion to add a third umpire to all Liberty League regular-season games FAILED 0-11-0.

Motion: A motion to change the schedule for the Liberty League Crossover Division Series to Friday (single game) and Saturday (doubleheader, if necessary) to mirror a regular-season weekend series PASSED 10-1-0.

Motion: A motion to add a third umpire to all Liberty League Crossover Division Series games FAILED 0-11-0.

Motion: A motion to change the format of the season-ending series for the teams that do not qualify for the Liberty League Crossover Division Series from a best-of-three series to a doubleheader PASSED 11-0-0.

- D. Liberty League Ejection Policy / Expectations:** When a player is ejected from a contest, it can be unclear to home game management what the player should do and/or where the player should go. Officials have had different interpretations of what they consider to be “removal from the facility.” It was agreed that the league should research language utilized for NCAA championships in addition to sport rule books and make a recommendation for the spring meeting. While uniformity across sports would be preferred, different facility configurations, including on-campus and off-campus venues, may make a single uniform policy infeasible.

VII. Future Meeting Dates

- A. Spring Meeting:** The spring meeting is scheduled for May 28-29, 2025, at The Landing Hotel in Schenectady, N.Y.

VIII. Adjournment

Meeting adjourned at 4:26 p.m.