

Minutes of Liberty League Winter Meeting January 15, 2026 – National Harbor, Md. (NCAA Convention)

Present: Stefanie Carrington, Andy Salvatore (Bard); Laurel Kane, Ben Gaebel (Clarkson); Liz Dennison (Hobart and William Smith); Aaron Bouyea (Ithaca); Kristie Bowers (RPI); Kristine Shanley, Morgan Stout (Rochester); Jackie Nicholson, 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: Elizabeth Carleton (National SAAC, Rochester); Sandy Johnson (Senior Vice President – Student Affairs, RIT), Mike Levy (FloSports); Mahlia Slaiby (D3 Student Immersion Program, Bard); John Turner (FloSports).

I. Call to Order

Gail Cummings-Danson called the meeting to order at 1:31 p.m. Meeting attendees introduced themselves. Cummings-Danson was congratulated on her recent retirement announcement.

II. Review of Minutes

The minutes of the September 25, 2025, meeting were reviewed. No changes or corrections were noted.

Motion: A motion (Bowers, Nicholson) to approve the minutes from the September 25, 2025, meeting PASSED 10-0-0.

III. Financial Report

- A. FY26 Budget Report:** Current bank balance totals \$341,929.70 with all membership dues payments and NCAA grant revenues received (\$358,702.58). Current expenses total \$121,311.75 with a flat budget projected.

- B. Liberty League CD:** The Liberty League certificate of deposit (CD) was last renewed on August 28, 2025, in the amount of \$131,669.10 for a term of seven months at a rate of 3.92%. The CD matures on March 28, 2026, prior to the league's spring meeting. Options include renewing the full amount of the CD at maturity, renewing a portion of it, or adding it back to the league's checking account.

Motion: A motion (Nicholson, Cummings-Danson) to renew the full amount of the CD at maturity at the highest possible interest rate, PASSED 10-0-0.

IV. Commissioner's Report

- A. Liberty League Salary Survey:** Seven institutions submitted data for the Liberty League salary survey. Individual reports were emailed to the athletic directors of participating institutions on January 12. The purpose of the survey is to provide a salary range if an institution is conducting a search for an open position. The data should not include current salaries.
- B. RefQuest Update / Feedback:** All 11 institutions have signed up for RQ Pay to process payments for officials. As a result, the league is currently meeting the requirements of the NCAA officiating reform initiative, meaning that administrative fees will be absorbed by the NCAA and not charged to the schools. After institutions faced initial challenges with RQ Pay enrollment, feedback has been generally positive in terms of timely payments to officials and having RefQuest+ handle tax documents.
- C. Mental Health First Aid Training – Update:** Six league members have signed up to participate in the Division III Mental Health First Aid Training Program. Three institutions – Hobart and William Smith, Skidmore and Union – have completed the training. The program is time-consuming, but institutions who have completed the training have found it to be beneficial.
- D. Synergy Basketball Contract Proposal:** The league's current agreement with Synergy for video exchange and breakdown in men's and women's basketball expires after the current season. Synergy is offering a four-year extension with a license fee per team of \$2,500 per year, with no increase. The current fee is \$2,400 and has increased \$100 per year each of the past two years. The proposal will be reviewed with the basketball coaches at their end-of-season meeting. Pending a recommendation from the coaches, the proposal will be brought forward for a vote at the spring meeting.

V. NCAA / National Issues

- A. Management Council Update:** Division III Management Council representative Kristie Bowers provided an update on key issues.
- **Amplifying the Division III Brand:** Utilizing NCAA fan database to assist in brand development and promotion of championships.
 - **Athletic Staffing:** Support for athletic training and communications professionals to address shortfalls in these positions.
 - **Congressional Engagement:** Outreach to congressional representatives in support for the SCORE Act.

- **Championship Date Formula Process:** Ensuring that men's and women's sports have a similar experience (e.g., men's and women's lacrosse).
- **Eligibility and Academic Relationships:** Reviewing pilot study for graduate students to participate when there is a matriculation agreement between the undergraduate institution and institution where the individual is attending graduate school, such as a 3+2 program.
- **Federated Playing Rules Process:** As it relates to PROP and the process of Management Council voting on federating sport rules in Division III.
- **Name-Image-Likeness:** The impact of NIL on Division III institutions and potential steps the division can take to address growing concerns.
- **Sports Betting:** Reducing sports wagering penalties and utilizing harm reduction strategies for student-athletes who engage in sports betting.
- **Division III Budget:** The Division III budget is in a strong position and Management Council is taking steps to propose non-controversial legislation to waive membership dues for the upcoming year.
- **Championship Livestreaming:** Livestreaming for NCAA fall championships was successful with strong viewership numbers. Management Council is exploring ways to utilize budget surplus to enhance the Division III brand through enhanced livestream opportunities.
- **Permissive vs. Mandatory:** The Council discussed sport rules that are permissive during NCAA championships (e.g., video review) and how they trickle down to the conference and campus level.

B. Division III Analysis: The Division III governance staff is conducting an analysis, focused on identifying tension points within the division. A topic of discussion at the Division III Issues Forum, it was noted that there is a large disparity in the size of institutions, staffing and sport sponsorship within the division. Some institutions utilize athletics as an enrollment driver while others do not. Philosophical differences exist among Division III members. A committee will be formed that will examine different tension points.

C. National SAAC Update: Division III National SAAC representative Elizabeth Carleton updated the league on National SAAC initiatives and also shared the committee's position on the legislative proposals. National SAAC supports all proposals with the exception of the multiple AQ model (Proposal No. 5).

D. Discussion/Vote on 2026 NCAA Legislative Proposals: NCAA Legislative proposals were discussed and straw polls were taken to establish a league position for each proposal.

- **Proposal 1 – Establish a DIII Women's Wrestling Championship:** to establish a Division III women's wrestling championship in 2027-28 and a Division III Women's Wrestling Committee as specified (10-0-1, Support).
- **Proposal 2 – Only Competition Triggering Use of Season:** to specify that a student-athlete would be charged with a season of eligibility if the

student-athlete competes at any point during the traditional season (3-6-2, Oppose).

- **Proposal 3 – Resolution – Name, Image and Likeness:** whereas, the Division III membership affirmed in its philosophy statement that financial aid shall not be awarded on the basis of athletics ability; whereas, student-athletes should be able to benefit financially from their name, image and likeness (“NIL”); whereas, these benefits may not be a substitute for pay-for-play, or be a de facto athletic scholarship (11-0-0, Support).
- **Proposal 4 – Amend the In-Region Requirement:** to reduce the required minimum percentage of in-region competition for NCAA championships eligibility from 70% to 50% for all sports except golf, which would stay at 25%, and tennis, which would maintain its 50% requirement (11-0-1, Support).
- **Proposal 5 – Multiple AQ Model:** to develop a formula to provide multiple automatic qualifiers to multisport conferences that have 12 or more core members that sponsor a sport (0-11-0, Oppose).
- **Proposal 6 – Automatic Qualification – Participation by Core Member:** to require an institution that is a core member of a conference to participate in the conference’s automatic qualification (AQ) process for the sport(s) in which the institution sponsors (11-0-0, Support).
- **Proposal 7 – Automatic Qualification Waiting Period:** to reduce the wait time for a multisport conference to receive an automatic qualification from two years to one year (1-10-0, Oppose).
- **Proposal 8 – Adding a Mandatory Winter Break:** to establish a seven-consecutive-calendar-day-period between December 15 and December 28, in which student-athletes may not participate in any athletically related activities (no league vote taken as sponsors intend to withdraw proposal).
- **Proposal 9 – Required the Use of the NCAA Transfer Portal:** to specify that an institution must place a student-athlete’s written request for transfer into the NCAA Transfer Portal within seven-consecutive calendar days; to specify that a student-athlete must successfully complete an educational module before they are entered into the NCAA Transfer Portal (11-0-0, Support).
- **Proposal 10 – Meals on Unofficial Visits:** to amend the current legislation to allow institutions to provide meals in an on-campus dining facility for a prospective student-athlete and those individuals accompanying the prospective student-athlete (11-0-0, Support).
- **Proposal 11 – Eliminate Practice Location Rules:** to permit institutions to provide expenses for practice sessions at any location, provided the student-athlete is eligible and no class is missed (11-0-0, Support).
- **Proposal 12 – Remove Exact Dollar Amounts:** to remove the exact dollar amounts and references to the value of awards from the awards legislation (11-0-0, Support).
- **Proposal 13 – Expenses for Post-Eligibility Event:** to permit institutions to provide actual and necessary expenses for student-athletes to

participate in one collegiate all-star contest or similar post-eligibility competitive event (11-0-0, Support).

- **Proposal 14 – Professional Sports Tickets:** to clarify that institutions may provide reasonable entertainment during the playing season; further that reasonable entertainment could include providing professional sports tickets (10-1-0, Support).
- **Proposal 15 – Women’s Flag Football as an Emerging Sport:** to add women’s flag football as an emerging sport for women and establish legislation related to playing and practice seasons and membership (11-0-0, Support).
- **Proposal 16 – National Collegiate Championship – Acrobatics & Tumbling:** In women’s acrobatics and tumbling, to establish a National Collegiate Championship and to establish a women’s acrobatics and tumbling committee (10-0-1, Support).
- **Proposal 17 – National Collegiate Championship – Stunt:** In women’s stunt, to establish a National Collegiate Championship and to establish a women’s stunt committee (10-0-1, Support).

VI. League Championships / Scheduling / Sport Issues

- A. **FloSports Proposal:** FloSports has made a five-year, \$2.325 million media rights proposal to the Liberty League to acquire the rights to broadcast games behind a paywall. Mike Levy and John Turner from FloSports met with the league to answer questions regarding the proposal and specific requirements. Five Division III conferences have signed on with FloSports – most recently the ODAC and UAA. League members expressed concerns regarding specific facility challenges and providing announcers for broadcasts. While each school would receive approximately \$42,000 annually in revenue, it was unclear whether the added revenue would offset the costs of providing enhanced broadcasts. To address concerns with technology and facilities, King will inquire with FloSports about potentially meeting with athletic departments individually and providing audits of existing facilities and game video. Since there is interest in additional discussion, a virtual meeting will be arranged within the next two weeks to outline next steps.
- B. **Liberty League Basketball / Soccer Committees:** League committees in basketball and soccer are particularly large with 20 total coaches (10 men’s coaches and 10 women’s coaches). Discussions during these meetings have often been dominated by a few outspoken coaches. King proposed separating the basketball and soccer committees into separate men’s and women’s groups to facilitate better participation and discussion. It was recommended that the individuals currently serving as liaisons for those sports (Brian Miller for basketball; Katie Paradise for soccer) continue to serve as liaisons for both committees.

Motion: A motion (Nicholson/McLaughlin) to establish separate men's and women's sport committees in the sports of basketball and soccer with the same individual serving as liaison for the respective sports, PASSED 10-0-1.

- C. **Baseball Associate Membership Consideration:** An institution has reached out to the league to gauge interest in associate membership in baseball. It was agreed that the institution should submit a formal letter of interest and a time should be arranged for the institutional representatives to meet with the league to answer specific questions regarding the program and facilities. Athletic directors will solicit opinions from their respective coaches prior to a follow-up meeting.
- D. **Coaches Association Membership Requirement:** Nicholson noted that when coaches are not part of their respective coaches associations, they are not able to nominate or vote for Liberty League athletes for all-region and All-America recognition. Institutions should consider financial support for their coaches to join professional organizations to benefit the league and its student-athletes.

VII. Other Business

- A. **ABCA Proposal:** Bowers shared that the American Baseball Coaches Association (ABCA) has drafted a proposal that would allow schools to move spring exhibition games to the fall. A concern schools have is the support and staffing of contests during the nontraditional season.
- B. **Neutral Site League Weekends:** Dennison raised the concept of having league weekends – either single contests or festival-style events – at neutral sites such as New York City or other locations to enhance the student-athlete experience and connect with alumni. There was general support for exploring future opportunities.

VIII. Future Meeting Dates

- A. **Spring Meeting:** The spring meeting is May 27-28, 2026, at The Landing Hotel (Schenectady, N.Y.)

IX. Adjournment

Meeting adjourned at 4:55 p.m.