

# 2015 Director's Report

Good Morning! And again, welcome to the 120th Annual Meeting of the Wisconsin Interscholastic Athletic Association. To our members and to our guests—we appreciate your year-round and on-going efforts on behalf of Wisconsin High School's student athletes and we appreciate the culture of caring which brings you here today.

## Old Business

There are a number of topics and initiatives that engaged our membership, Board and staff in the months since our last Annual Meeting. Certainly, in the minds of some, there were none more important than the work of the Ad Hoc-Competitive Equity Committee. Your collective voice and votes earlier today responded in one way to their efforts. At this point, whether one "liked" or supported this committee's findings and recommendation—or not, I believe it is appropriate to acknowledge the good-faith effort and sacrifice—on the membership's behalf—of the 21 individuals who served on that committee. To all who volunteered, to the 21 who served, to Mr. Drew Howick who facilitated the discussions, to Joan Gralla and Julie Kage who reported and supported the committee's work, it is "right" that our gratitude is known.

For the first time this past fall, there were Association prescribed time limits to soccer and football practices as part of a uniform, statewide acclimatization emphasis. With the input of coaches and the WIAA's Sport Medicine Advisory Committee, a plan which reflects the current knowledge and science of early season conditioning, recovery and injury prevention was launched. This plan put these sports within the mainstream of accepted "best practices" as we see them being implemented across the country. In addition to limiting the length of practice, the football coaches and Medical Advisory went one step further and developed a plan to limit the amount of "live" or player-on-player full contact in practices. With an understanding and awareness of concussion and with an eye on the potential affects of accumulated impacts and injuries which may be associated with fatigue, the coaches developed a model which was as thoughtful and conservative as any in the country at the time. Their plan and vision has influenced the plans in other states which have come along since.

At last fall's Area Meetings, we made you aware of the WIAA's transition from RefRanking to Athletix as our provider for ranking sport officials. We also stated that this would be a temporary relationship as it was our desire to be able to cut our dependence upon outside providers to deliver and maintain this important piece of our over-all operations and service—and bring the ranking component back in-house.

We have made that objective a priority over the course of this past year, it is our expectation that our new program and system will be operational by this fall. This will bring all officials licensing, schedule creation, ranking and tournament availability back under the WIAA's direct control. While there will be some learning once again, we believe that in the long term, this is our best, most stable and efficient course and direction. As the system prepares to launch, we will be communicating with members and licensed officials to assist you in familiarizing yourself with this program.

In recent years we have heard increasing interest in expanding seeding across all levels of our tournaments. We brought this topic to Area Meetings last fall. We discussed what we are hearing from coaches and the public. We discussed why and how our current operational model came to be—with a focus on all the impacts of time, travel and costs which may be associated with expanded seeding. We have had this conversation with the Sports Advisory Committee, the Advisory Council and the Board of Control. The topic has also been shared at several CESA meetings throughout the past

year.

From all of those conversations, the staff and I are left with two impressions. First, while we did hear some expression of support in two Area Meetings, we heard no expressed support at any of the other five Area Meetings. We have heard little or no supportive comments from committees or in CESA conversations.

This leads us then to our second impression—which is that, this topic would benefit from more discussion and clarification at the local level. Coaches need to talk to their administrators. Administrators need to provide direction to their coaches on this topic. The WIAA executive staff is willing and capable of providing you the tournament structure you desire. We will continue to listen to all voices and perspectives on seeding and do our best to share them across the membership. But until we hear a unified administrative voice, I believe our stance must be a conservative one on this topic.

Midway through this year the Board of Control gave their support to an officials recruitment initiative which also serves as a small thank you to the men and women of the U.S. Armed Forces who wish to become WIAA licensed sports officials. The initiative received the support of WADA, the WCCA as well as the help and support of the Wisconsin Army National Guard and Reserve. With this initiative a current or former soldier is able to have all fees waived for two years when licensing for the first time. Our background check partner, InCheck, has waived the cost of their background search and Honig's has offered a 15% discount on uniforms and apparel. While still new and small in scope, we have licensed approximately 10 new officials under this program—which as far as we are aware may be the first of its kind in the country.

A few weeks back we celebrated 40 years of girls and 100 years of State Boys Basketball Championships here in Wisconsin. We hope and believe the 100th was a celebration you and our state could be proud of. Deb Hauser assembled and lead a team which included the WBCA, our basketball broadcast partner—Quincy News and the Madison Sport Commission to build an especially memorable experience. We thank all of you who participated, lent us your trophies and memorabilia or just came out and enjoyed this special event.

As we transition from an update of Old Business into New Business, there is one topic that has a place under both tents—Conference realignment. It is a topic that's been talked about extensively the past 18 months and a topic that continues to be current and of considerable interest to quite a number of members. Our hope in discussing it with you again today is to make you aware of the ever and rapidly changing demands, attitudes and expectations that come as a result of a carousel of changing coaches, ADs, principals and district administrators. Our hope is that from this we can plant the seeds for a more robust conversation on this topic throughout the year ahead.

From our perspective the current model for realigning conferences if not broken, is at best unable to keep up with the demands and expectations that are being placed upon it. In every realignment, there are enough seeds of discontent, enough residue of hurt feelings to almost assure the next request for realignment is at best a couple short years away. In some instances, there isn't an available solution—short of disrupting 40, 50 or 80 other schools. I've asked Deb Hauser to share some observations and insights that are becoming more apparent as we attempt to fulfill this responsibility. We will be seeking your thoughts and guidance next fall to see if there can be better guidelines or a better way to address this topic.

## **New Business**

As we look at the year ahead:

The WIAA will be bringing a couple new faces into our family in July. With the retirement of Marcy Thurwachter, the Executive Staff is in the midst of a search to find the best replacement we can identify and recommend to the Board. Over two dozen applicants responded to the posting. Among them were veteran athletic directors from both in and outside Wisconsin. There were school administrators and sports administrators with collegiate backgrounds and two with law degrees. Staff has already pared that list down and expects to begin interviewing candidates over the next couple weeks and bring a recommendation to the Board at their May 15th meeting.

As soon as that search winds down, staff will be considering how best to fill a position that will come with the July retirement of our Bookkeeper of over 39 years—Debbie Tork. While Miss Kassie McGettigan is prepared to step into that role, other discussions and considerations need to identify remaining operational needs and directions and how best to meet them when filling this vacancy.

In recent months the Board has approved the development of a WIAA intern program. It will be launching this summer with a pair of interns with Wisconsin ties. Mr. Chad Strehlow originally from Suring, Wisconsin will be joining us from South Dakota State University. Also joining us for the summer will be Miss Stacy Marcum from Eastern Tennessee State University. Stacy is originally from Merrill, Wisconsin. We have begun reaching out to in-state universities and technical colleges to identify young people who might benefit from this type of experience as well as contribute specific skill sets to our growth efforts and membership service.

Over the course of this past year, we have been engaged in negotiations for the WIAA's tournament broadcast rights. Those efforts recently culminated with the Board's approval of new, six-year agreements with the Quincy News organization for our state basketball and state hockey championships and with Tim Eichorst's new production company, Rush Media. Rush Media will be producing our state football, volleyball, soccer, baseball and softball finals. At the end of the day, we believe we've been able to sustain the scope and quality of exposure our members and WIAA sports fans have come to expect and enjoy—and still work with production teams who know and respect the WIAA's interests.

Beginning with Area Meetings, we are going to seek your thoughts and input on a variety of other topics—some old, some new. Among the familiar topics—beside conference realignment—will be co-op teams and student eligibility.

For the past couple years girls hockey co-ops have been drawing criticism from some of the stand-alone, single-school, girls programs who believe the large multi-school co-ops hold a competitive advantage. We have also seen attempts to manipulate hockey co-op relationships to create opportunities for female hockey players to access boys teams.

But the co-op discussion needs to be broader than just hockey. As new charter schools emerge and seek membership, one of their key ambitions is to be able to say they offer WIAA sport opportunities. At times we register concern that some seeking membership desire the programming but lack the interest in committing to administrative engagement and ownership—which are essential to this organization.

As some of our smaller schools continue to see enrollments and budgets shrink, co-ops are becoming more important than ever to preserve opportunities for their students and communities. Given these and other co-op related concerns, we believe it's time for a comprehensive review and discussion of this topic. Please be prepared to share your thoughts and perspectives going forward.

With respect to student eligibility—as we see state legislatures pass laws limiting or eliminating transfer restrictions—as in California, or as in Florida where assembly legislation was passed, which if it gains support in the their state senate, will dissolve the state high school association—we believe we should be as proactive in our discussions of student eligibility and opportunity as we can be.

--Where and how can we be more inclusive without fracturing as a membership?

--Shall we reconsider nonvarsity eligibility for transfers?

--Is 365 days of ineligibility too long?

--Might students who transfer with no previous sport history at their former school be provided opportunities at their new school?

In recent years, we've brought forward ideas regarding non-school competition. What other thoughts and ideas might be worth examining more closely—while it is still within our authority to do so? Please be prepared to engage with this conversation in the coming year.

This past November 29, the Illinois High School Association (IHSA) was named as the defendant in what is being described as a class action suit by the attorney bringing the action. The suit was filed on behalf of a former IHSA high school football player. Though the suit is not seeking up-front compensation for damages, the scope of its demands are being described by some as threatening to signal the end of small school high school football.

Among the demands, the suit aims to require the IHSA to establish medical monitoring for all high school football players from the year 2000—onward, throughout their lives. The suit also seeks to require an M.D. or Athletic Trainer at every high school football practice and game and require baseline testing of all Illinois high school football players. The attorney in this case has stated that he intends to bring similar action in all 50 states.

In response to this action, the WIAA Board of Control authorized our joining along with the NFHS and approximately 40 other state associations, in signing onto a “common defense agreement” document. Along with a show of support for the IHSA, the agreement provides for the two-way flow of legal information and ideas relative to the case. Without question, this is an important case for all state associations, for all high schools that offer sport programming and for all youth sport providers—as its scope and implications will impact upon more sports than just football and upon more youth sport providers than just high schools. We will continue to keep you informed as this important case unfolds.

One of the topics WIAA staff have been discussing received considerable attention at the recent NFHS Legal Meeting—the topic was “Drones” or UAV’s (Unmanned ariel vehicles). We are aware of a growing interest and use of Drones outside the military by recreational users, by coaches for scouting and filming purposes, by sport and news organizations, by sales, advertising and marketing agencies. Most of you have likely heard of Amazon’s hopes for the use of drones for small package delivery.

The reason for mentioning this topic is two-fold: First, the WIAA will be developing a position and policy regarding their use at WIAA member tournaments. Second, to advise members it is a topic you should be prepared to have a local position on.

The challenges in responding to the use of UAV’s in and around schools and school sporting events is in-part due to the fact that most are looking to the FAA for guidance which as of yet has not taken place. Additionally, many are pointing to privacy related concerns, concerns for operator licensing and training, proof of insurance, and for injury liability.

The Kentucky High School Association is perhaps the first state association to take an official position on their use—simply banning their use in and around all Kentucky high school events. The WIAA is going to continue research and information gathering a while longer before bringing a policy recommendation forward to the Board, but wanted members to be aware of the issue and be discussing it locally now.

The last topic under New Business is about member dues and fees. As our president Mr. Beighley has shared, the Board took action at their meeting yesterday, to suspend for two years—all member dues and fees. This action is within their constitutional authority for providing temporary relief and was acted upon for a couple of reasons.

First, this action will save each member school a few dollars. Individually that may be only several hundred or at most a couple thousand dollars. But collectively, it will be a membership savings of more than \$400,000 dollars annually. The Board believes that regardless of the amount, they are dollars that can be used locally to directly impact kids and school programs.

Along with the straight-forward, savings dimension of this action, the Board recognizes, as have most neighboring state associations—like Illinois, Iowa, Indiana, Michigan and Missouri that there is a potential strategic benefit for taking such action, realized when the State Association must defend itself or a position, in front of the state legislature for receiving public tax dollars and when identified as a state actor in a court action. We believe, as do the other states who have taken this step several years ago, that this is a good direction for the WIAA at this time and in this legal and political climate.

The WIAA's financial position is presently strong and stable. The executive staff have continuously sought ways to spend wisely and expand relationships to increase royalties and grow revenue. I will add that there are no predetermined ticket price increases built into this action. We expect to be able to sustain operations and services without diminishing them in any way. Of course, the Board's duty is to monitor closely and should the financial health of the Association require adjustment or attention, the Board will act accordingly.

The Board is authorized to provide temporary relief—only. If after two years the membership wishes to make this action permanent, it must be approved by vote at the 2017 Annual Meeting. The new membership agreement forms will be edited to reflect this change and will be on their way to you soon.

### **Director's Comments**

In closing this report, I want to ask each of you to ask yourself the question—which was asked of me—many years ago by a wise and much respected graduate school advisor—he asked me—“David, why are sports in schools?”

Quite frankly, as a 25 year old that question took me aback. I don't believe I had ever really given much thought or considered why sports were in schools. They just were. And in my short life to that point in time—always had been—and I assumed—always would be. They just were—

The years and experiences since then make it clear that school sport isn't just there because it is. One hundred and twenty years ago Wisconsin school leaders recognized a need for the coordination of sport between schools and recognized a potential benefit for their students who took part in school sports. And in every year since, men and women just like all of us here today have continued to pour time, energy, passion and resources into preserving education based athletics for the good they can provide children, schools and communities.

While some may take for granted—like I did as a naïve 25 year old—or choose to view school sport as their personal service and entitlement—for the rest of us, as educators, we must continue to lead, to educate, to protect and preserve school sport for what it was and is intended to be.

Our predecessors recognized that sport and competition were not an end unto themselves. They recognized participation was “good for kids” —connecting kids to school based programs was “good for kids”— for all the reasons every piece of research has time and again verified. Sport is the vehicle, -- an incredibly economical lesson and experience delivery system, and alternative learning opportunity—I hope you will give the question of why are sports in schools some serious thought as you travel home today. Drill down. And then please don’t ever allow anyone to discourage children from engaging in your school’s sport and activity programs. Participation in them is as “good for kids” today as it was 120 years ago--

Thank you for being here today.

That concludes my Director’s Report.