

TASK FORCE ON MIDDLE SCHOOL INTERSCHOLASTIC ATHLETICS

Minutes of the 3rd Meeting of the 2012 Interim

September 17, 2012

Call to Order and Roll Call

The 3rd meeting of the Task Force on Middle School Interscholastic Athletics was held on Monday, September 17, 2012, at 1:00 PM, in Room 129 of the Capitol Annex. Representative Carl Rollins II, Chair, called the meeting to order, and the secretary called the roll.

Present were:

Members: Senator Mike Wilson, Co-Chair; Representative Carl Rollins II, Co-Chair; Senator Joe Bowen, Representatives Tom Burch, Keith Hall, and Joni L. Jenkins; Adam Lantman, Greg E. Mitchell, Rita Muratalla, Wilson Sears, Dan Seum, Jr., Julian Tackett, Dan Volpe, and Jerry Young.

Guests: Richard McWhirter, Assistant Executive Director, Tennessee Middle School Athletics Association (available via conference call). Steve Endsley, Executive Director, Illinois Elementary School Association.

LRC Staff: Janet Stevens, Bryce Amburgey, Greg Hager, and Stella Mountain.

Approval of the Minutes from August 20, 2012, Meeting

Upon motion made by Representative Burch and second by Senator Wilson, the minutes of the August 20, 2012, meeting were approved by voice vote, without objection.

Presentation: Current Practices Regarding the Oversight and Management of Middle School Athletics

Representative Rollins introduced Richard McWhirter, Assistant Executive Director, Tennessee Middle School Athletics Association (TMSAA), available via conference call. The online presentation, narrated by Mr. McWhirter's assistant, Lauren Lynch, was viewed. She said that the TMSAA was formed in 1995 with 69 member schools. Ronnie Carter selected the first TMSAA committee, which consisted of 6 middle school principals. The committee wanted middle schools to be affiliate members of the Tennessee Secondary School Athletics Association (TSSAA), to have a set of rules for everyone to follow, and to have the benefit of catastrophic insurance that membership would provide. The committee felt that the new middle school association should follow

the TSSAA bylaws as closely as possible; 14 to 15 exceptions were made, to be middle school specific.

The TMSAA is an affiliate of the TSSAA. All expenses associated with the formation and operation of the TMSAA are borne by the member schools. Failure to meet the financial obligations of the TMSAA will result in the immediate dissolution of the TMSAA.

Since the TMSAA is an affiliate of the TSSAA, the TSSAA Board of Control and Legislative Council oversee the TMSAA. An advisory committee for the TMSAA, known as the TMSAA Committee, has been put in place, which consists of 8 representatives, each being either a school principal or a school system administrator, with 2 or 3 representatives from each area of the state. The committee meets twice a year at the TSSAA State Office prior to Board of Control meetings, typically in November and February. The TMSAA Committee makes recommendations to the board regarding bylaws, regulations, and policies; serves as liaison to area schools; helps provide enrollment information and sets classifications; and helps organize and direct area and sectional tournaments.

TMSAA has 344 member middle schools divided into three sections: east, middle, and west. Each section is broken into multiple areas and then divided, based on the enrollment of the schools. These classifications are available on the web. Membership in TMSAA is limited to schools that terminate in the 6th, 7th, or 8th grades. All TSSAA member schools that contain 8th graders may become a TMSAA member at no additional fee. All other schools pay \$100 membership dues, \$200 for catastrophic insurance, \$40 per non-faculty coach to a maximum fee of \$100, and \$5 per football player for the catastrophic insurance assessment. The Middle School Membership Packet is available online. The main reason that many schools join is for the catastrophic insurance. Other services provided with membership are the TSSAA Directory, four TMSAA ID cards with the option to purchase four additional cards for \$25 each for access to regular season events, two TSSAA Championship event cards that allow free admission into all TSSAA sectional and state championship events, rulebooks for each sport, and a membership certificate.

TMSAA does not assess fines. In hindsight, this is probably not the best approach. The disciplinary actions that TMSAA can take without imposing fines do not prevent the same schools from committing the same violations repeatedly. As the association continues to grow, fines would be beneficial, but it is difficult to change the policy after many years without a fine structure. The TMSAA recommends setting a fine structure for the middle school association upon formation, but setting lower fines than those used for the high school association.

The TMSAA sports calendar is less complex than the high school calendar and allows more flexibility for the schools. In Tennessee, at the middle school level, not all areas of the state play the same sports during the same seasons. The local education association determines in which season each sport is played, and the TMSAA sets the first practice date for each sport season rather than for each sport.

This is the second year that the TMSAA has its own handbook. The handbook contains the TSSAA Constitution and the TMSAA bylaws. The TMSAA bylaws correspond to the TSSAA bylaws, and exceptions and differences are clearly marked. Both handbooks are available online.

There are some major differences in the TMSAA Bylaws and the TSSAA Bylaws. Middle schools have three categories of coaches: full-time employees, retired educators, and non-faculty coaches. High schools, in addition to these three categories, also have classified employees. Both middle school and high school non-faculty or first year coaches must complete the free TMSAA or TSSAA online coaches' training session. Middle schools are allowed an unlimited number of non-faculty coaches. These coaches have five years to complete the ASEP Coaches Education Program, while high school non-faculty coaches only have two years to complete the training. This program costs \$250 and tests coaching principles and sports first aid. Middle school coaches are not required to attend State Rules Meetings; high school coaches are required to attend at least every other year.

TMSAA and TSSAA bylaws also differ regarding academic rules and eligibility. To be eligible, a middle school student must be academically promoted to the next higher grade. Any student repeating a grade is ineligible. A student may gain eligibility the second semester by passing five subjects, or the equivalent, the preceding semester, provided the student is not repeating the same grade. A student has six semesters to complete a possible four semesters of participation after entering the 7th grade. No student below the 6th grade may participate. If a student turns 15 on or before August 1, the student is not eligible. A student who repeats the 7th or 8th grade and participates in school athletics while repeating shall be ineligible to participate on a TSSAA team in the 9th grade. This rule helps identify students who attended a non-member school and repeated a year. An 8th grade student may participate on a TSSAA team if they are enrolled at the school. Participation as an 8th grader shall not reduce the number of semesters a student is allowed to participate after enrolling in the 9th grade. Students may only participate in either the middle school or high school division, not both at the same time.

Fines are not imposed at the middle school level for violations such as unsportsmanlike conduct, playing of ineligible athletes, eligibility lists, and schedule reports. Rules that do not apply to the TMSAA are tuition and financial aid, All Star games, and the 50 Percent Rule. The Independent Game Rule frequently is discussed to

be removed from the TMSAA bylaws, but currently still applies to both the TMSAA and the TSSAA.

Middle school sports regulations for football, girls' volleyball, pre-game warm-ups, spirit rules for cheerleaders during basketball games, basketball, wrestling, and baseball pitching rules are included in the handbook.

The biggest difference between the TMSAA and the TSSAA are the regulations and setup at the middle school tournaments. For the TMSAA, all tournaments must be held on consecutive days with no other regular season games being played during the tournament unless permission is granted by the executive director. A tournament is defined as a competition of three or more teams and three or more games, matches, etc., which progress to determine a winner. Tournaments shall count as two games or dates, notwithstanding the number of games or dates in which each team participates in a tournament. Postseason tournaments or bowl games may be played, provided the plan is approved by the state office annually. Any postseason tournament or play-off format that exceeds the number of regular season contests allowed must be approved by the state office.

Regulations specific to basketball tournaments are that 18 regular season games may be played, with all tournaments counting as two games, notwithstanding the number of games in which each team participates in a tournament. Also, the season ending TMSAA Area and Sectional Tournament series will count as one tournament, provided no other games are played between or after.

At the middle school level, each section coordinates its own Sectional Basketball Tournament. The TMSAA does not provide awards for these tournaments, but the schools may purchase sectional awards from the same company that supplies the high school awards. The winners of the Sectional Basketball Tournaments are presented during halftime of the high school state championship. Some areas and sections hold tournament series in other sports, but basketball is the only sport that has similar sectional tournaments statewide.

Tournament guidelines state that area and sectional administrators, athletic directors, and coaches must meet to select directors, dates, and sites for each tournament they conduct. They may have tournament series in any sport, and all specific details must be submitted to the state office. Basketball tournaments should be completed each year by the Saturday prior to the TSSAA high school district basketball tournaments. During tournament play, each area and section may decide to divide schools into classifications as membership in the area increases. TSSAA and TMSAA recognize any league that contains at least six member schools competing among themselves. Any member school may choose not to participate in the tournament series. A school team may enter only one tournament series to advance to the sectional tournament. Schools must participate in the

tournament series in their assigned area. They must submit a written request to the state office if they desire to move to a different area, but no school will be moved without a legitimate reason. The most important tournament guideline that is different for middle schools is that the TMSAA does not sanction any middle school state tournaments in any sport.

In response to questions from Mr. Sears, Mr. McWhirter said that the rule stating that a student who repeats the 7th or 8th grade and participates in school athletics while repeating shall be ineligible to participate on a TSSAA team in the 9th grade applies to students who attended a non-member school. This year a change was made to this rule to say “being held back” to catch students being held back on purpose to be able to play the following year. No information is available on students being held back in the 4th or 5th grade. He said schools ending in the 7th or 8th grade may have a team. Schools ending in the 6th grade can co-op with other schools to make a team. The high school bylaws allow an 8th grader to play on the high school team. The middle school bylaws state that a student cannot move back to play on a middle school team after he or she has played on a high school team.

In response to questions from Mr. Young, Mr. McWhirter said that not all sports end in season-ending contests. Middle schools choose their own calendar and seasons. Should they play in a season-ending basketball tournament, those games count towards their maximum of 18 games. Normally teams play fewer games than allowed. Basketball is the only sport with a sectional season-ending tournament because almost all schools play it. Baseball is strong in Eastern Tennessee, so that area has a sectional season-ending tournament.

In response to a question from Senator Wilson, Mr. McWhirter said that it is up to the schools whether they pay the \$5 fee per football player for catastrophic insurance or charge it to the students.

In response to questions from Representative Hall, Mr. McWhirter said that the association receives no appropriation from the state and no funds from local tournaments. Schools pay all expenses with the money collected, and revenue left over is divided among the schools. The schools are required to submit a financial report to the association. Dues go to the catastrophic insurance and paying for handbooks.

Representative Hall said that the TMSAA is running an excellent program and he likes the idea of a basketball state tournament.

In response to a question from Representative Rollins, Mr. McWhirter said that about half of the over 700 middle schools in Tennessee are members of the TMSAA. Middle schools in the Nashville area are not members because at the time that the TMSAA was formed they had their own insurance. Middle schools in the Knoxville area

dropped their membership a few years ago because they were in violation of the independent game rule in regards to soccer. The Knoxville middle schools wanted students to play independent games, but over 80 percent of member schools want to keep this rule. Private schools are not members because they have their own league. Member schools are those that want a governing body and rules.

In response to a question from Representative Rollins, Mr. McWhirter said that the association adheres to the Title IX rule. An equal number of sports are offered to boys and girls. It is a local decision as to what sports schools offer to their students.

In response to a question from Mr. Mitchell, Mr. McWhirter said that the coaches have up to 5 years to complete the ASEP training. The recommendation this year will be to require online training prior to coaching.

Steve Endsley, Executive Director, Illinois Elementary School Association, said that the Illinois Elementary School Association (IESA) is different from the rest of the country. It is similar to a high school association. Its governing body is completely separate from the state high school association. The IESA is not to be mistaken for the Southern Illinois Junior High School Athletic Association, which governs only athletics and has one employee and about 130 member schools.

The IESA is a governing body for junior high athletics and activities such as speech, music, and scholastic bowl. It has been in existence for 83 years. Membership is voluntary and it has 791 member schools. Of the more than 600 junior high schools in Chicago, only about 10 are members of the association. IESA has 8 full-time office staff and one part-time technology expert. The state is divided into 15 divisions, and one superintendent or principal from each division is elected to serve on the Board of Directors.

The association's mission statement is that the IESA provides the leadership and framework to ensure safe, equitable opportunities for students who are enriched through participation in education-based interscholastic activities. Mr. Endsley highlighted some of the belief statements: the IESA warrants a separate governing body; actively teach and promote good sportsmanship and ethical behavior; develop personal growth and self esteem; recognize excellence; and students deserve to be directed and/or coached by highly qualified personnel.

Mr. Endsley pointed out some of the IESA bylaws. The key eligibility bylaw is the weekly bylaw, which states that a student has to pass all subjects each week to be able to participate in activities the following week. Passing is determined by the local school district, and the bylaw applies to athletics and activities. Ineligibility applies for one calendar week before the possibility of becoming eligible again. If a 7th grader is retained,

that student cannot participate as a 7th grader. The student can participate again once he or she has passed to the 8th grade.

The independent team bylaw, stating that if a student is a member of a non-school team, he or she may not participate in a school team at the same time, was removed effective July 1, 2012, and is now a local school decision. It was violated repeatedly, mostly in wrestling, basketball, and volleyball, and only honest schools were being penalized.

Another important bylaw is that school teams are only allowed to compete against other school teams. They may compete against schools that are not members of IESA, but they may not compete against club or non-school teams.

IESA does not offer football or soccer as a state series. Soccer is a huge club sport; some schools play interscholastic soccer and some play football, but most schools do not. IESA has girls softball, baseball, cross country, girls and boys basketball, girls volleyball, wrestling, and boys and girls track and field, with different classes for each of these. Class structure is based on enrollments. IESA used to have lightweight and heavyweight classes, but now has a 7th grade division and an 8th grade division. A regular season precedes a state tournament series. The association follows national federation playing rules with some exceptions instituted for the age level of the students. Member schools must use officials registered by the Illinois High School Association. Some schools play sports at different seasons to the IESA and therefore cannot participate in the state series.

IESA offers activities such as cheerleading, speech, music, and scholastic bowl. Mr. Endsley showed his medal he won as a 7th grader in the speech contest to illustrate how important these activities are to students. The association started a chess competition in 2011, and recently added bowling and golf.

Mr. Endsley shared information on various activities the IESA offers. Most member schools participate in cross-country. Cheerleading was started 12 years ago, and 75 schools participate in 3 divisions based on squad size, not school size, with a cheer category and a routine category, conducted in accordance with the National Federation of State High School Association (NFHS) guidelines. Softball and baseball are played in opposite seasons to that of high schools, using the same coaches and officials for both. Wrestling has 19 weight classes, starting at 65 pounds up to 275 pounds; 141 schools participate, and body fat testing is not conducted. Students are limited to 5 matches per day and 37 matches in a season. For baseball, the diamond is 80 feet between bases and the pitching distance is 54 feet, with limits on innings. For volleyball, the net height is 7 feet, the libero is not used, and 2 out of 3 games to 25 points are played. Scholastic bowl is an academic competition; 374 schools participate.

IESA writes its own rule book and case book, and it conducts a state workshop for coaches each fall. IESA has girls and boys basketball, and each school is allowed to play 22 games per season prior to entering the state series. Individual players are limited to 5 quarters per night and 8 quarters per regular season tournament, and they play 6 minute quarters. For track and field, individuals are limited to any 4 events, but if they run two relays, one of them has to be the 4 x 400 relay. The IESA uses a smaller shot and a smaller discus. Speech is performed as an individual or as a duet, reciting memorized pieces in front of a judge. A music state contest is offered once a year. All activities are listed on the IESA website, including useful information such as host brackets and entry centers.

Certified teachers are automatically eligible to coach. Anyone who is not a teacher but wants to coach has to complete an online coaching education course and score 100 percent in the test prior to the season. IESA also accepts a person who has met the high school coaching requirements. IESA allows high school students and student teachers to assist under the direct supervision of a coach who meets the coaching requirements.

The sportsmanship bylaws state that any player or coach ejected for unsportsmanlike conduct shall be ineligible for the next interscholastic contest at that level of competition. Any school that receives two ejections in a school year shall be required to communicate in writing to the Sportsmanship Review Panel on the steps it is taking to address the issue.

The IESA is completely separate from the state high school association and receives no state funds. All funds are generated through the association in four main ways. Schools pay \$75 annual membership dues and a \$50 entry fee for each sport they enter. This generates a total of approximately \$389,000 each year. Admission is charged at tournaments, and the association and the host school each receive a share. The total amount of revenue generated for the IESA from the tournament admissions is approximately \$546,000. The total amount of revenue generated from t-shirt and sweatshirt sales at state events is \$280,000. The total amount of revenue generated from corporate support is approximately \$63,000.

The IESA requires that all students have a current physical issued within the past 395 days by a licensed physician prior to try out, practice, or participation in a contest.

Mr. Endsley showed a clip from the IESA state track meet in which approximately 2,500 students participated, with 6,000 to 7,000 spectators.

In response to a question from Mr. Tackett, Mr. Endsley said that the Illinois High School Association does not allow students below the 9th grade to participate on high school teams. Middle schools allow students from the 5th to the 8th grade to participate. The state series activities are only at the 7th and 8th grade level.

Representative Hall commented that he would like to see dance being added to the activities. Mr. Endsley said that the high school association has started dance this year.

In response to a question from Representative Hall, Mr. Endsley said that the t-shirt vendor contract was a bid process when it switched to the current vendor, and it was renewed for another five years without rebidding. Of the \$280,000 that the association receives, \$155,000 is guaranteed for sale of merchandise at the state final. The rest of the money comes from sales at the sectional level, where the association gets a per piece amount.

In response to a question from Mr. Lantman, Mr. Endsley said that the individual schools decide their own passing grade for the academic criterion.

In response to questions from Mr. Lantman, Mr. Endsley said that all wrestling club teams in Illinois are non-school teams. The last change made to the classes, based on a members' survey, was the addition of a class between 185 and 275 pounds. Students are limited to 37 matches. He said that, as the wrestling administrator, he does not like the change in the independent team rule, especially in wrestling. He is concerned that there will be more injuries, fatigue, burn-out, and diseases.

Mr. Sears said that he is very impressed with the way the IESA is encouraging participation. In response to questions from Mr. Sears, Mr. Endsley said that, for tournaments, multiple basketball games can be played in one day, which avoids an extra travel day, and athletes are allowed to play 8 quarters per day.

In response to a question from Mr. Tackett, Mr. Endsley said that the board of directors has final authority in setting rules. IESA has advisory committees for each sport that can make recommendations to change rules. The IESA Board of Directors is made up of principals or school administrators, whereas the board for the Southern Illinois association consists of coaches.

In response to questions from Mr. Young, Mr. Endsley said that the IESA allows cooperative arrangements where there is a lack of participating students in a school. This can be across districts. Students are only allowed to play for the school they attend. If schools team up, they have to sign up as a team for two years.

In response to questions from Mr. Seum, Mr. Endsley said that the training course for coaches is a general overview of middle school programs. The focus is more on the handbook and not safety. This course has been in place for four years, and he would like to add more on safety education. Sports trainers are not required to attend regular season events, but they are required to be present at state final events.

In response to questions from Mr. Mitchell, Mr. Endsley said that there are fundamental differences between the Illinois high school and middle school associations. Almost every high school in Illinois is a member of the Illinois High School Association; not every middle school is a member of the IESA. The high schools have the same seasons for sports, which is not the case for the middle schools. The attendance/transfer policies are different at the middle school level. The middle school level does not get as much publicity as the high school level does. The IESA does not license its own officials, but all member schools have to use licensed officials registered in Illinois.

Mr. Mitchell said that they looked at Illinois and other states when they started the Kentucky Middle School Football Association. He said minimum regulations are needed. He likes the enthusiasm and the inclusion of other activities in the Illinois association. In response to a question from Mr. Mitchell, Mr. Endsley said that football is not played in the schools and very few schools play interscholastic football. The same is true for soccer; it is a huge club sport. Close to 50 percent of member schools charge their own participation fee to be able to offer sports, rather than eliminating that activity.

In response to a question from Mr. Lantman, Mr. Endsley said that, in order to get more schools to participate, they should focus on the handbook, stress the rules, and stress the state series.

In response to a question from Representative Rollins, Mr. Endsley said that IESA does not offer catastrophic insurance; the teams are covered through their schools.

Representative Rollins said that Mr. Tackett's presentation will be postponed to the next meeting.

Staff distributed a memo requesting recommendations from members for the final report to be submitted by the task force.

Mr. Lantman made an announcement about the Kentucky State Wrestling Association Fall Meeting.

Adjournment

Representative Rollins announced that the November 19 meeting has been moved to November 26. The meeting was adjourned at 3:30 PM.