

TASK FORCE ON MIDDLE SCHOOL INTERSCHOLASTIC ATHLETICS

Minutes of the 2nd Meeting of the 2012 Interim

August 20, 2012

Call to Order and Roll Call

The 2nd meeting of the Task Force on Middle School Interscholastic Athletics was held on Monday, August 20, 2012, at 1:00 PM, in Room 129 of the Capitol Annex. Senator Mike Wilson, 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, and Joni L. Jenkins; Kevin Brown, Adam Lantman, Barry Lee, Elizabeth Miles, Greg E. Mitchell, Rita Muratalla, Wilson Sears, Dan Seum, Jr., Julian Tackett, and Jerry Young.

Legislative Guest: Senator Dan Seum.

Guests: Tom Bower, Sports Director, Kentucky Basketball Academy. Joel Taylor, Head Coach, Bowling Green Junior High School. Brent Jackson, Head Coach, Corbin Middle School. Craig Foley, Head Coach, Frankfort High School. Dan Volpe, future Task Force member.

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

Approval of the Minutes from July 16, 2012 Meeting

Upon motion made by Representative Burch and second by Senator Bowen, the minutes of the July 16, 2012 meeting were approved by voice vote, without objection.

Presentation: Creating Opportunities for Middle School Athletes To Improve Their Performance

Tom Bower, Sports Director at the Kentucky Basketball Academy (KBA), said the academy is a 50,000 square foot facility with five indoor basketball courts. It is home to one of the largest youth basketball and volleyball leagues and clinics in Kentucky and hosts many of the largest youth basketball tournaments in Kentucky and the region. The academy offers basketball and volleyball opportunities to individuals from ages 3 and up through leagues, camps, and tournaments. Scholarships are available to youth who are unable to afford entry fees.

The KBA Middle School State Tournaments are open to school teams in Kentucky at no cost with no qualifying needed. Tournaments are held for boys and girls in grades 6 to 8. Teams must be official school teams, ensuring that each player has passed the physical examination required by schools to play interscholastic sports. The tournaments are scheduled on dates that allow for all teams who choose to participate. KBA also provides leagues for students who do not make the school team.

In response to questions from Senator Bowen, Mr. Bower said KBA is open to persons from 3 years through adults. He said that the KBA leagues are similar to those offered by local parks and recreation programs.

In response to questions from Representative Rollins, Mr. Bower said KBA does not have restrictions on practice times or length of seasons; it only provides the venue for tournaments. The teams have to be official school teams and an official school coach has to be present.

In response to questions from Mr. Sears, Mr. Bower said that league play rarely overlaps school leagues. Most players are those who did not make it onto the school team or play other sports. It is possible that players play in the KBA league and the school league, but KBA does not monitor that. KBA tries to schedule play to avoid overlap with other school tournaments.

In response to questions from Mr. Seum, Mr. Bower said that KBA sets the dates for middle school tournaments. KBA employs two certified security personnel and in case of any medical emergency, the ambulance service is located 3 minutes from its facility.

In response to questions from Mr. Tackett, Mr. Bower said that KBA sets the dates for the KBA State Tournaments and teams sign up if they wish to participate. These middle school tournaments are separate from other leagues KBA offers throughout the year for ages 3 through adults.

In response to a question from Senator Wilson, Mr. Bower said that the number of school teams participating in the tournaments varies.

In response to a question from Mr. Volpe, Mr. Bower said that the KBA employees have no safety training; they are only trained to call the ambulance service in case of an emergency.

In response to questions from Representative Jenkins, Mr. Bower said that both public and private schools participate in KBA events. No Catholic schools from Jefferson County participate, and there is not much participation from other schools in that county.

In response to a question from Senator Bowen, Mr. Bower said that KBA and the Kentucky High School Athletic Association (KHSAA) have no partnership.

In response to a question from Mr. Sears, Mr. Bower said that KBA will not contact schools about bad behavior by coaches or teams. KBA would respond should it be contacted by a school. Nothing out of the ordinary has occurred.

In response to questions from Senator Wilson, Mr. Bower said that KBA follows KHSAA guidelines. KBA does not require proof of insurance for players. By only allowing official school teams to participate, KBA is assured that all participating athletes have passed the Pre-Participation Physical Exam (PPE).

Presentation: Kentucky Middle School Football – Perspective of the Kentucky Middle School Football Association (KYMSFA) and the KYMSFA Recommended Options for the Creation of Best Practice Guidelines and Support to Non-Profit Organizations to Improve Middle School Athletics

Greg Mitchell, KYMSFA President, said that, in 2007, several middle school football coaches recognized a void in the governance and regulatory structure of middle school athletics in Kentucky and formed the KYMSFA. Amendments created by the 1993-1994 Commission on Interscholastic Athletics revised the KHSAA Constitution to state that the KHSAA is composed of the public schools in grades 6-12, rather than the previous range of grades 9-12. The inclusion of grades 6-8 to the KHSAA was designed to regulate middle school students who played high school interscholastic athletics, not to regulate middle school athletics.

Middle school football at the time had no uniform regulatory structure, including no age limitations, no unified season, no standard game time, no standard requirements for coach training, no organized opportunities for coach training, and no standard rules of play. KYMSFA was formed to provide an organization for middle school football coaches, parents, and school administrators to work together. KYMSFA provides rules for the conduct of the sport, provides a forum of communication, offers training and educational opportunities, coordinates a championship playoff structure, and provides other benefits requested by the membership. KYMSFA is made up of member middle school football programs across the state. KYMSFA is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, is member represented with board representation from across the state, holds annual meetings, has a professionalism committee, and offers training/safety sessions. KYMSFA is made up of volunteers.

Mr. Mitchell shared some history on KYMSFA. In 2008, its first year of existence, KYMSFA had 58 members. The 7th and 8th grade playoff system was based on the conference system and independents, and the semi-finals and championship games were played in one day. The association initiated basic rules of play, created a verified roster system, and initiated the first middle school 7-on-7 tournament at the University of

Kentucky. In 2009, the playoff system increased to two divisions for the 8th grade, the points system was added, the semi-finals and championship games were played on consecutive days due to feedback received from participating superintendents, and the East-West All-Star Classic was introduced. KYMSFA requested but was not granted participation on the legislative task force on sports safety. In its third year, KYMSFA membership continued to grow and the Jefferson County Public Schools joined. KYMSFA initiated the State Cheer Championship, the basic rules of play and forms were improved, and participation in project RIO, a sport safety training program, was urged. KYMSFA has had very few sport injuries. The association has no insurance. In 2011, the KYMSFA membership increased to 157 members and a third division for the 8th grade was added to the playoff system.

Mr. Mitchell referred to information included in the handout. Some changes have been made to the rules, and this is the first year that coach training is required. A few more additions are needed to avoid confusion. He said that he does not want middle school athletics to be overregulated.

Mr. Mitchell showed a slide with details about the 2010 state playoffs involving teams from across Kentucky. He briefed the committee on awards ceremonies, the Middle School Cheer Competition, game broadcasts, and volunteer teamwork. He gave feedback on this year's State Championship Tournament and mentioned what a great experience it was for coaches and athletes.

Mr. Joel Taylor, head coach of the Bowling Green Junior High football team, said his team has benefited from being a member of KYMSFA. The level of middle school football has improved, and the players and coaches are more motivated. Players are enjoying exposure to other teams in Kentucky, and some players have been fortunate to play on a national level at the Eastbay Youth All-American Bowl football game in Texas. Players realize the importance of education, understand the opportunities that are available to them at the college level, and want to play well.

Mr. Brent Jackson, head coach, Corbin Middle School, said that the camaraderie among coaches has improved since KYMSFA was formed. The number of students playing football has increased at his school since it joined KYMSFA. Students are excited and want to be part of something special. The players are enthusiastic, and he as their coach is excited to see the positive effect football and being part of KYMSFA has on them; it has re-energized his coaching experience.

Mr. Craig Foley, head coach, Frankfort High School, said the KYMSFA playoffs give students something to strive for and student athletes have more incentive to maintain good grades. Being part of KYMSFA has provided more opportunities for students to make friends at other schools. Since the formation of the association, the team is taking more safety precautions.

Senator Wilson and Senator Bowen commended KYMSFA officials for what they have done.

In response to a question from Senator Bowen, Mr. Mitchell said that KYMSFA administration members are all volunteers. Senator Bowen commented that volunteer participation can be cyclical, which can harm continuity. Mr. Mitchell said that the KYMSFA is conscious of this. The board has expanded to 9 members, and for the past 2 years, one paid staff member handles all the forms.

In response to questions from Mr. Lee, Mr. Mitchell said that a survey revealed little negative feedback. KYMSFA has little participation from Northern Kentucky and the Catholic schools in Jefferson County. For the first 4 years of KYMSFA's existence, membership dues were \$50 per year and the association received 20 percent of gate fees from playoffs. In the following year, teams participating in the playoffs had to pay \$500 obtained from sponsorships from local businesses, but this generated criticism. Now membership dues are \$250 per team, no playoff fees are required, and additional funds are generated through t-shirt sales.

Representative Rollins mentioned that a 300-pound middle school student in Texas was not allowed to play middle school football. In response to questions from Representative Rollins, Mr. Mitchell said that KYMSFA does not set the schedule. Member teams generally do not play teams that are not members of KYMSFA to ensure that everybody adheres to the same standard rules. Generally, the season runs from the second week in July to the first week in November. KYMSFA has a game limitation. Teams need to play a minimum of 8 games in a regular season to qualify for playoffs. Teams qualify for the playoffs through conference championships.

In response to questions from Representative Rollins, Mr. Mitchell said that it is more advantageous to have an association for each sport instead of one larger organization for all sports. Associations for each sport are more cost efficient. Keeping members and having them renew their memberships each year is an incentive for the association to do a good job. Sports each have distinct characteristics and coaches know if issues need to be addressed.

In response to questions from Mr. Sears, Mr. Mitchell said that a 7th grader can play up if his team has been eliminated. There is no issue with scheduling three games per week, but a team may not play two games in one day. A middle school team may play a maximum of 15 games per year but there can be exceptions.

In response to questions from Mr. Tackett, Mr. Mitchell said that the board has discussed the issue of multiple contact practices on consecutive days. The board has looked at safety research but there is a lack of relevant data available. Requirements for

coaches fall under the purview of the schools. To encourage participation, KYMSFA allows multi-school teams as long as the middle schools agree. Mr. Mitchell agreed with Mr. Tackett that there should be minimal guidance by the legislature for middle school athletics.

In response to questions from Mr. Lantman, Mr. Mitchell said that the insurance premium for the KHSAA Catastrophic Policy for the high schools is approximately \$200,000. It would cost substantially more for middle schools. A governing body providing a basic framework and institutional oversight for all sports could be helpful.

Senator Seum said that the Farnsley Middle School football program mandated that players have a higher GPA than the school system required. Tutors were arranged to help the players achieve that. He said that many minority students are in the program; many come from fatherless homes, and they are hungry for adult supervision. He thanked Mr. Mitchell and KYMSFA volunteers for a tremendous program. He expressed his concern about liability.

Adjournment

Senator Wilson announced that the next meeting will be held on September 17. The meeting was adjourned at 2:45 PM.