

# State track coaches aim to take over MIAA tournaments

[Bob Hohler](#) April 18, 2019

A hotly disputed plan by the Massachusetts Interscholastic Athletic Association to shore up its slumping tournament income by trimming costs and assessing fees on so-called non-revenue sports has prompted a breakaway campaign by the Massachusetts State Track Coaches Association.

The MIAA scrapped its budget proposals after protests from coaches in track and other sports. But the episode laid bare such a deep rift between the MIAA and the MSTCA that the coaches group has informed schools across the state that it plans to take over the MIAA's track and cross-country tournaments, beginning this spring. The move could lead other sports to try to break away as well.

The MIAA has been responsible for managing high school tournaments for more than 40 years. Now comes a showdown: The MSTCA has scheduled the spring outdoor track and field tournaments for MIAA schools at Merrimack College on May 25 and June 1, the same dates the MIAA has scheduled its own tournaments.

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"The bottom line is, we are being disrespected by the MIAA," said Frank Mooney, executive director of the MSTCA, who has coached cross-country and track and field at Seekonk High School since 1967.

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"They picked on our sport and thought we would look the other way," Mooney said. "The kids in our schools deserve better."

Tara Bennett, the MIAA's communications director, said the track coaches have not followed the proper protocols to stage their alternative events.

"Coming in and trying to take over outdoor track would be in violation of the governance of the tournament process," she said.

The stakes could be high because MIAA rules state that schools participating in unapproved tournaments may be banned from "all multi-school events in any and all sports for one year."

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The dispute began last fall after the MIAA announced plans to decrease its tournament spending this year by 6.5 percent and begin charging \$100 tournament entry fees next year for boys' and girls' teams in the so-called non-revenue sports: cross-country, golf, gymnastics, skiing, swimming, tennis, track, and wrestling.

The MIAA attributed a drop in its tournament income in part to losing a combined \$156,000 last year on its cross-country and track events.

To the contrary, the cross-country and track coaches said, the MIAA actually came out ahead last year because it collected \$196,000 in fees it charged schools to field teams in those sports.

What's more, the coaches asserted, they could run the state meets more efficiently than the MIAA. The coaches said, for example, that the MIAA rescinded its tournament cuts last year only after reductions contributed to problems such as a shortage of portable toilets at the state cross-country meet in Westfield that prompted many spectators to relieve themselves in the woods.

"I don't know where the money is going, but I know the MIAA is spending thousands of dollars more than we would need to run better meets," Mooney said.

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More high school students in Massachusetts participate in the running sports — cross-country and track — than any other sports in MIAA schools, about 60,000 of the total 230,000.

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The MIAA governs interscholastic competition for 378 member schools in 33 sports. It reported spending \$201,000 to run the boys' and girls' indoor and outdoor track tournaments last spring and taking in only \$109,000, a \$92,000 deficit.

Executive director William Gaine Jr. has pushed back against any suggestion that MIAA tournaments have been run inefficiently. He has described the conflict over the proposed budget changes as the product of miscommunication and has assailed the MSTCA as an outside group disseminating propaganda.

Earlier this week, Mike Miller, chairman of the MSTCA's outdoor track

committee and head coach of the Weymouth High School girls' outdoor track and cross-country teams, sent an open letter to the state's track and field athletes, coaches, and parents, encouraging them to support the MSTCA tournaments.

"Some may claim that MSTCA is trying to take over the divisional meets as a 'money grab' or that we have some anti-establishment agenda or an ax to grind. We don't," Miller wrote. "We simply have an undying belief that, by staying in touch with the coaches and athletes of the best sport in the state, we know best how to serve their needs in a championship event."

Mooney said it was too soon to estimate how many schools would choose to compete for championships in MSTCA rather than MIAA tournaments.

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