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LHSAA executive director defends select/nonselect changes at LHSCA meeting

BY ROBIN FAMBROUGH | STAFF WRITER
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LHSAA executive director Eddie Bonine speaks during the announcement of a five-year partnership with Ochsner Health System in 2021, at the LHSAA office in Baton Rouge.



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LHSAA executive director Eddie Bonine went on the offensive at the LHSCA general assembly meeting Wednesday.

When no coach or administrator asked a question, Bonine chose to address the select/nonselect changes the LHSAA's executive committee approved last month directly.

The exchange was a pivotal moment on the final day of the two-day LHSCA Convention held at the Crowne Plaza in Baton Rouge.

“That’s the elephant in the room right now, I get it, that’s why I’ll address it,” Bonine said. “We have 25 parishes and/or superintendents that represent about 75 to 80 schools that are not happy with the decision we made.

“They have appeals in September ... we’ll load up appeals on that first day, Sept. 7. The executive committee will make the decisions on those (appeals). And of course, that can all be changed in January. But those changes would not become effective until 2023-24.”

The LHSAA executive committee approved a new definition for what constitutes a select school at its annual summer meeting in June. Questions about a previous definition included in a LHSAA glossary arose last fall, prompting the move.

All charter schools, schools in parishes with open enrollment, and schools with magnet or special programs were moved to the select side through the definition change. That leaves nearly a 50-50 division of select/nonselect schools, with select schools holding a slim majority among the LHSAA 400-plus schools membership.

As he asked for questions after that statement, Bonine added, "We'll get through this, but this is not me or my staff trying to bring everybody back together again to eliminate the split."

“This is about making sure the playoffs mean something and so that schools are not drug into the postseason who should not be in there.”

That select/nonselect change – along with a decision to bring select schools back into the LHSAA’s championship events fold for football, basketball, baseball and softball – was made through bylaw 4.4.4, and Bonine defended that decision.

“It (4.4.4) was put there as a means to take care of business during the school year and summer. Then you bring it to the full membership in January and put it to a vote,” Bonine said. “Some people may think we overstepped our bounds by doing this. I don’t believe we have abused it (4.4.4), and legal counsel does not believe we have abused it.”

Bonine told the group that every school has representation on the executive committee, based on classification. He said the 30-member committee includes five members from select schools, coaches, officials and other groups, including legislators and state education officials.

“I think we’ve got the state covered,” Bonine said. “We’ve got to make sure we are going in the right direction for the students/athletes we represent.”

By the numbers

LHSCA director Eric Held said the convention attracted more than 1,000 coaches – 200 more than in 2021, the first convention held after the pandemic.

“It was a great turnout, especially a week after July Fourth and a week earlier than we usually have it,” Held said. “We appreciate the coaches and the athletic administrators coming out to hear our speakers. They did a phenomenal job representing their schools and our state.”

Held also told the general assembly meeting that the LHSCA budget is just \$500,000 and the convention costs

\$85,000 to host.

Dates for the 2023 convention are July 18-19 at the Crowne Plaza in Baton Rouge.

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