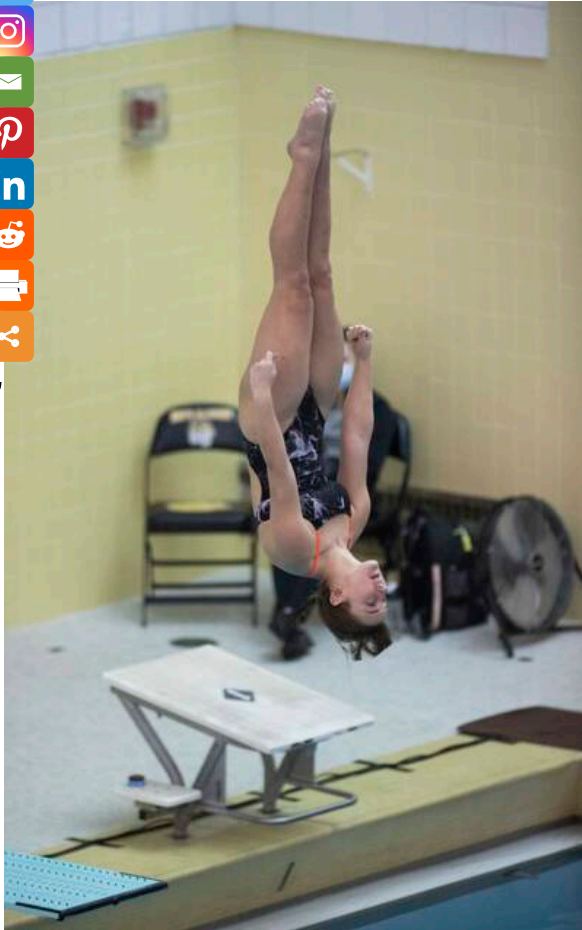


PIAA sparks controversy with changes to diving championships

By: [Chris Harlan](#)

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Tribune-Review file

Greater Latrobe's Hannah Polosky competes in the 2021 WPIAL diving championship at North Allegheny.



The PIAA fears high school diving is disappearing from many areas of the state, but changes meant to save the sport will force the WPIAL to revamp its championship format this winter.

That doesn't sit well with longtime [North Allegheny](#) diving coach Patti McClure, who oversees the WPIAL championship. The WPIAL and PIAA traditionally run 11-dive competitions, where athletes must attempt 11 different dives to win, but the PIAA is transitioning the state and district meets to a six-dive format more accessible for lesser-experienced athletes.

The PIAA board voted in October to make the change for one year as part of a pilot program approved by the National Federation of State High School Associations.

"If we don't try something and continue along the same path, we've already learned it's a downward spiral," PIAA executive director Bob Lombardi said. "So let's just try it for a year to see if we can stem the tide or come up with something. We might have found something."

The PIAA noted that high schools in Georgia and Michigan's Upper Peninsula use a six-dive format for championships.

McClure, [North Allegheny](#)'s coach for 23 years, compares the change to shrinking the distance between the pitcher's mound and home plate or lowering the rims on a basketball court because lesser-skilled athletes can't compete.

She agrees that some PIAA districts are struggling to sustain programs but believes that's largely caused by a lack of diving coaches and sees no reason to change the format favored by stronger districts like the WPIAL.

"The disappointing part about the whole thing is we were hoping that they would let the districts run their championships the way we see fit based on the talent level in our district," McClure said. "The PIAA doesn't dictate how we run the district championships in any other sport."

The issue was discussed again by the PIAA board Dec. 7, with WPIAL representatives questioning the change. The PIAA staff said the district championship meets need to also use a six-dive format this winter to provide consistent data to the NFHS for analytic purposes.

However, the PIAA has given districts permission to run two six-dive rounds, meaning 12 dives in total. The WPIAL is expected to take that route, McClure said, with an added stipulation that only one dive can be repeated.

The WPIAL diving championships are Feb. 25-26 at North Allegheny.

"With two flights, you can get your 11 dives plus one," Lombardi said. "You still can do what you want to do."

McClure said the WPIAL will make it work but hopes the PIAA is open to discussion once this one-year trial ends.

"We're hoping to be able to have that dialogue and maybe find some common ground that works for everybody," she said.

McClure is concerned the format change will cost the state's elite divers national recognition.

The National Interscholastic Swim Coaches Association publishes a 100-person All-American list each year for both boys and girls diving, but qualifying scores must be achieved in an 11-dive format. Nine PIAA athletes made the lists last season including North Allegheny senior Christina Shi, the reigning state champion in Class 3A girls.

McClure said she's heard of college coaches who value that list in recruiting.

"I don't really want to dog the PIAA. I just want them to do what's best for the divers in Pennsylvania," McClure said. "I had my state champion ask, 'Why is the PIAA more concerned about a diver that hasn't even started diving instead of me, who's been diving since I was 5?'"

"I couldn't answer her."

Athletes will have 11-dive scores from some regular-season meets, but McClure said most are training to post their best marks at WPIALs and states. Lombardi said criteria for awards from outside groups shouldn't influence PIAA decisions.

"I know there are other organizations that look at status with that," he said, "but that's never the reason we held our events. We really try to hit a broad brush of participation."

The biggest issue statewide is a lack of diving coaches, said McClure, a former college diver who has coached close to 35 years combined at North Allegheny and [Franklin Regional](#).

McClure said responsibility for the success of high school diving must rely more on people in the districts that are struggling, not the PIAA. She tweaks the WPIAL championship qualifying marks based on the previous season's scores. And if an athletic director in the WPIAL needs a diving coach, McClure said she starts asking around to find one.

"That is my job," she said, "to keep diving alive in District 7."

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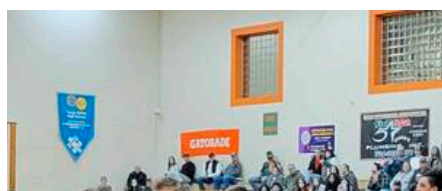
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