

Pay increased for high school officials; private school classification vote sent to schools in latest OSSAA board meeting



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Joey Johnson, For the Tulsa World

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OKLAHOMA CITY — Mike Whaley called it a game changer.

Whaley, the Oklahoma Secondary Schools Activities Association's associate director, watched as vote after vote was cast during the OSSAA board of directors meeting Wednesday morning.

Among the scheduled items was a vote to approve or not approve increasing the pay for contest officials.

In a swift vote, it was approved unanimously with an 11-0 count by the board.

The move will be implemented across all sports and begin during the 2023-24 athletic calendar. The OSSAA didn't provide details on the pay increases, but the increase will be different for each sport depending on how much officials were previously paid in each competition.

With official shortages impacting the country, the move is intended to make Oklahoma's pay competitive compared to other states in the region. The OSSAA only pays officials during the postseason. An increase in pay for mileage was also approved to meet the national average.

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Unrelated to official pay, the board also unanimously passed a reimbursement package of \$1.3 million to be split among all member schools.

Rule 14 recommendations headed to member school vote

The latest chapter in the Rule 14 debates came Wednesday, when the OSSAA approved sending recommendations to member schools to vote on.

Rule 14, centered around competitive balance between private and public schools, garnered much attention over the past five months after several drastic changes were proposed.

Included among them, the idea to separate playoff brackets for private and public schools that resulted in a cease-and-desist letter from Oklahoma Attorney General Gentner Drummond in March. After tabling discussions the past couple meetings, the board saw movement Wednesday.

After a closed-door executive session, the OSSAA board of directors voted 6-5 to approve sending recommendations to member schools to vote on.

Some amendments are built around private schools bumping up classifications depending on success, such as private schools no longer being limited to jump one classification in all sports, excluding football.

In football, nonpublic programs can bump two classifications, but cannot exceed 6A-II, the new recommendation proposes. No movement was discussed on separate playoff brackets during Wednesday's open meeting.

All members school will be allowed to cast a vote.

Webster football to start independent

After shutting down the Webster High School football program in 2020, the school is steadily working toward revitalizing the program.

With Tulsa Public Schools athletic director Mick Wilson and Webster athletic director Kirk Baker in attendance Wednesday, the school's return to football will remain independent the first two years, the board approved.

One of the smallest TPS high schools, the current plan is for Webster to play at the junior varsity level this season, before transitioning to varsity games during the 2024-25 season, when the two years of independent football will begin.

"We are losing kids, we're losing kids to Memorial and Jenks," Baker said when addressing the room. "When they come from eighth to ninth, they're leaving because we don't have football right now."

In a similar situation to Webster, Guymon will remain independent for two years.

Other notes

— Bishop Kelley athletic director Lance Parks will serve the remainder of Darren Melton's term on the board. Melton, the former AD at Broken Arrow, stepped down after becoming Lincoln Christian's superintendent.

— No action was taken toward the board making a decision on a three-year agreement with USA Softball Hall of Fame Stadium for fast-pitch and slow-pitch softball state championships. Discussion on Wednesday centered around maneuvering a substantial increase in price to use the facility.

— The Academy of Classical Christian Studies in Oklahoma City was granted provisional membership to the OSSAA with a 7-4 vote.

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