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Could there be a 'legal option' to force LHSAA vote? A meeting is set to discuss it

BY ROBIN FAMBROUGH | Staff writer

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LHSAA Division III Select
Championship at Frasch Park in Sulphur, Louisiana on Friday, March 10, 2023. (Kirk Meche)

Kirk Meche

After two failed attempts to hold a special-called meeting regarding the LHSAA's revamped select/nonselect divisions, Neville High School principal Mickey McCarty sent member principals a letter announcing plans for a July 12 meeting at Tioga High School to discuss a "legal option."

The email sent out Tuesday to principals across Louisiana states that Baton Rouge attorney Brian Blackwell will be on hand to discuss "particulars" of a potential legal filing at the 1 p.m. meeting.

McCarty's letter notes: "I have been tasked with probing the interest of member principals who would like to hear more about a legal option that could be levied against the LHSAA relating to the decisions made and the association's process that put us in our current state of divisions, the definition of select schools, and current playoff structure.

"This effort is to simply have the voice and concerns of the member principals heard and examine the possibility of a vote of ratification or non-ratification of the tabled items from the January 2023 convention before our next annual meeting which would be in January of 2024."

LHSAA executive director Eddie Bonine declined comment and referred questions to attorney Mark Boyer.

"There's no official statement," Boyer said Wednesday. "I have not talked to any of the officers. We're just waiting. Hopefully some information comes out of (the Tioga meeting) and some good dialogue.

"We will see where it goes. The LHSAA rules state that you have to get more than 50% of principals on board to have a special-called meeting. That has happened."

While the meeting offers no guarantee of legal action, Boyer said the LHSAA's bylaws require schools that sue the organization pay all legal fees if they lose in court.

Bylaw 4.4.4, which allows the LHSAA executive committee to change rules in the interest of fair play, was used to revamp the select/nonselect playoffs system for 2022-23. A revised definition for select/nonselect schools balanced the number of schools on each side.

Schools were placed in enrollment-based select/nonselect divisions for the split sports of football, basketball, baseball and softball. Ramifications of the committee's use of 4.4.4 in the past and future use was noted as a concern in McCarty's letter.

A planned membership vote to approve/reject the revamped format in January at the LHSAA convention did not take place. A new interpretation of an existing bylaw by the LHSAA's parliamentarian prompted the change, which prevented a delay and other issues for the LHSAA's looming basketball playoffs.

A small group of principals met with LHSAA officers at the January convention to broker that compromise. A special meeting held in conjunction with the executive committee's June summer meeting was a point of discussion.

Under LHSAA bylaws, more than half of the member schools must request and attend any special-called meeting. The July 12 meeting does not have to meet those requirements.

“I plan to go to Tioga and listen to what is said,” Walker principal Jason St. Pierre said. “I was in that (January) meeting. The requirements to have a special meeting were not mentioned and were not communicated after that.”

“Communication is one big issue. I don’t necessarily have a problem with what the committee approved, it’s the process. This is a principals’ organization, but it seems like more and more, the committee makes decisions. Principals need to stand on the principles. Maybe not all people feel that way.”

The first request for a special meeting attracted responses from 135 of the LHSAA's 409 schools, below the threshold of 206. A second request for a meeting garnered 169 responses. The LHSAA membership consists of 191 select schools and 218 nonselect schools based on the revamped format.

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