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## **ASAA Board of Directors' Meetings Public Comments February 24, 2020**

- Brian Lux called in to speak about the how the ASAA player ejection policy as it pertains to soccer should be reviewed. Currently a second “yellow card” causes the student to have to sit out the rest of that game and the next. He believes the Board needs to review this as the rules use to allow for multiple “yellow cards” but now a player is removed for a second “yellow card” which may not have been for a serious offense, such as accidentally touching the ball with a hand.
  
- Craig McConnell called in representing the Northwest Arctic Borough School District. “They support the classification proposals for basketball. They believe 3A urban schools have big advantages over rural school areas and want fairness. The current classification system is roughly 35 years old and times have changed so much in how school operate. The issue is how many more potential students the urban schools have to draw from, in relation to rural communities. Having a good team with a fair chance to succeed is important to school climate. We feel all our schools should believe that by working hard they have a chance. Realistically we can say this for our 1A and 2A teams but not our 3A’s. I believe the primary difference is the 1A’s and 2A’s still play teams that have similar student access and resources, in 3A we are asking schools with “student pools” of let’s say 200, to play schools with “student pools” of 2000, 3000, 4000 or even 10,000. If you look at the history of 3A basketball, you’ll see it has been dominated by the urban schools for the most part. I agree they have outstanding coaches, but the reality is they have so many advantages due to their location that our schools cannot realistically compete. This is unfair and contrary to the purpose of having a classification system.”
  
- Kyle McFall and Tony Graham from Soldotna High School called to oppose the moving of Soldotna High School into the DI football conference. While they supported Wasilla moving down, they opposed Soldotna moving up. This is based on the concern of player safety. While Soldotna often plays against DI teams, they have noted great injuries during those games.
  
- Julie Boerger, Parent, Coach’s Wife, and Grace Christian School Business Manager— "As a parent of children who will be directly affected by the recent reclassification proposal presented by ASAA, I wanted to write a letter to express my concerns. I have indirectly been a part of high school basketball in Nome, Cordova, and Anchorage. I have also had connections to Seward. I fully understand the excitement that is generated in communities when their school sports teams make it to the state tournament.

My understanding is that some people believe there is an urban advantage for those schools located in Anchorage and Fairbanks but I would argue that there are also rural advantages. Many times rural athletes grow up playing with each other from a very young age. This provides the opportunity for players to really know each other and connect. Alaskan high school athletes living in urban locations do have access to many workout opportunities, but they also have many more options for how to spend their time. There are year-round comp soccer teams, Midnight Sun volleyball, comp baseball, and comp hockey as well as gymnastics and other choices. All of this availability limits the number of athletes who wish to focus on basketball, so it does not create an advantage over rural schools. The most important factor for success is desire of the athlete and the opportunity to get in the gym. This can easily be provided in a rural setting just as well as it can in an urban setting.

Grace Christian is currently a school of 180 high school students. Since coming to Anchorage and joining the Grace Christian school community in 2013, our boys' teams have typically had 18-20 players come out for the program. Our girls' teams have had significantly lower participation numbers with only 11 players this year. Last year, we were not even able to field a JV squad for the girls. Forcing our school to play at the 4A level with these participation numbers seems very unfair, especially considering the fact that our girls' program has not been highly successful based on the criteria of state appearances and places.

This current proposal appears to be punishing schools for having programs that work hard – particularly boys' programs. While I know that a waiver option is included in this proposal and I've been told that it's designed for a situation such as ours so that our girls could still play at the 3A level, it is logistically and financially unrealistic. The additional scheduling burdens and financial costs would be extremely prohibitive. Plus, many families such as myself would be stuck choosing which child's game to attend since they would no longer be in the same place.

Athletics provides many life lessons and participation in it is much more important than the temporary glory of qualifying for the state tournament. If this proposal is passed, I know that GCS will continue to work hard to run the best programs we are capable of offering but I also believe that this proposal will not be teaching any of Alaska's student athletes the lessons that we want them to learn. This proposal appears to follow the "participation trophy for everyone" theory that is currently popular today. It appears designed to lower the level of competition in 3A basketball by removing the teams that have most recently been successful.

While there are teams who have not had a lot of success in 3A basketball, I would argue that every sport has teams who have not had tremendous success. Departing from logical classification guidelines based on school enrollment and focusing on perceived "urban advantage" will not improve the athletic experiences for Alaska's athletes. It will lower the level of play in 3A basketball, cause conflict over which urban schools get a waiver and which ones don't, and potentially force small urban schools to have to split their boys

and girls into different conferences. There may be other changes needed to address parity in basketball, but a reclassification based on urban advantage is not the right one.

Thank you for your time and consideration.”

- Jason Boerger-Grace coach & parent—“There is talk of urban advantage but there is also a rural advantage. Having a set pool of kids to draw from and develop is a great opportunity. The pride of representing a tight knit community in rural Alaska is a special privilege. There are also less activities in the smaller towns to take players away from the ever specializing push in sports that is so common in the urban areas. Meaning we may have 90 boys who attend our school - but will never get 50 kids to try out for basketball like Homer did. If there is an urban advantage why do other urban schools like Hutchinson in Fairbanks also not regularly dominate?

Many of the so-called urban schools included in this proposal have had NO significant success over rural schools. It leads one to deduce that there is really no inherent urban advantage. In fact it appears just a way to target three Christian schools in urban areas with a history of success in a way that is, at surface, less inflammatory.

If there is a system in place for these Christian schools to stay on top... why is that system not advantageous to our girls program? I assure you at Grace we'd love to see them have more success. They are also working hard and hope to win more games down the road but it's challenging because many of our girls play other sports like Midnight Sun volleyball.

If there are practices that individual schools are using that might create an unfair (perceived or real) playing field - then address those.

\*Grace only gives financial based scholarships... if there was a school promising something based on sport participation.... active sport recruitment by a coach - consider enforcement on that.

\*Consider full time homeschool students participate in sports at private schools ... only if they attend part of the day at that school?

\*As mentioned we could look at giving the 3rd berth back to the SC conference. Or realign the conferences.

There are other options that seem much more logical than the current proposal.”

- Tommie Pidduck Grace parent & coach— “I think we can all agree something should and could be done to create more opportunity to make it to the State Tournament. However penalizing programs that put in the time and energy is not the route. This mentality is the very problem our society suffers from. When someone cannot achieve something, instead of working harder and turning a perceived or real disadvantage into an advantage, they demand the rules are changed to accommodate the perceived or real

disadvantaged. I don't think anybody voting on this matter while a youth in school would have been alright with this proposal if they went to one of the private school's targeted by this proposed reclassification while adhering to all rules.

So the teams who support this proposal are going to feel great about their success because most of the schools with superior program's and cultures who were in the way previously have been removed? It sounds pretty empty to me. I pray for the teams in our conference to do better so that we all get better and feel better about winning. It is what makes competition so special and a platform to learn about one's self. If the teams are in need of State appearances so badly to feel great about themselves maybe they should drop down a classification until they get the unearned success they so badly need.

The unintended consequences for this proposed reclassification are bad. The prime example and the one that concerns me most is that I have a daughter in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade who attends Grace Christian and loves basketball. It's no secret that the Grace Girls program has experienced minimal success at best in the last 5 years. If the proposal is passed it will be unfeasible for them to remain in 3A and the boys move up to 4A, it's too tough to schedule, too expensive, and too tough on parents who have a student on each team. Therefore the girls at the 4A level would more than likely play most games with a running clock in the 2<sup>nd</sup> half. I highly doubt that we would have a girls program for long. My daughter is tough but at some point she would do something else. In the end voting for this proposed reclassification would eliminate girls basketball at a few of the targeted schools, I know I wouldn't want that on my hands just to give some schools and easy path to the State Tournament.

I think that there are more viable solutions to debate. An additional birth for the South Central Conference, realignment, or maybe allowing schools that don't want to compete and or try to can move down a class. If "recruiting" is the issue than maybe policing this apparent problem would be a clever response in lieu of the proposed to remove the better teams."

Randy Karlberg-Superintendent. Grace Christian-- As a former member of the Region I ASAA Board, I first want to thank you for your service to our state of Alaska and our schools. I fully understand that you wrestle with issues that no other state activities association has to deal with because of the size, climate, and diversity of our state! My four years as Athletic Director and ASAA Region I Board Member taught me a great deal about the challenges that you face with decisions that make sense, but also create the most fair opportunities for all of our students.

Over the past 34 years I have had the honor to coach basketball at the 1A, 2A, 3A, and 4A levels in our state. These coaching experiences have been in both rural Alaska and urban Alaska. I have had the privilege of spending time in every region of our state and had numerous wonderful experiences. I also have a son that coached high school basketball at Galena Interior Learning Academy. Due to my involvement at various levels over the years and in various capacities, I have a pretty good understanding of high school athletics and specifically high school basketball in Alaska.

It is with that background in mind that I look at the current proposal to change the classifications of high school basketball. I know that there are advantages and challenges that each of our schools face in regards to athletics. For example, I vividly remember traveling to Chevak with five players for a weekend series. I know what it is like to run into the referee from last night's game in the grocery store. I know how difficult it is to keep students motivated and provide opportunities for them to compete and improve at their craft. There is no easy solution to make things equitable for every community in the state. However, shifting the classifications as proposed will not accomplish the goal that you intend. I have always been a firm believer in building an athletic program through player development from the youth level through high school as the best way to make a team competitive. Player development demands a long term investment mindset which is what we have tried to do at Grace Christian School. Our best players over the years are the fruit of this philosophy as opposed to the other perceptions about how we have achieved excellence.

Throughout the years, there have been a variety of programs that had cycles of success. I remember the program the Nikiski Girls had in the 1990's and 2000's. They were extremely competitive for twenty years in a medium sized community. Since 2004 both the Barrow boys and girls have had more state appearances than any other 3A school even though they are a rural school. 3A and smaller schools go through cycles of having larger numbers of boys or girls, athletes and non-athletes. We have seen the Unalakleet boys and girls and also the Point Hope boys and girls have periods of dominance that these cycles directly affect.

With regards to the current situation I can only speak to Grace Christian School's circumstances. I have gone to several Region III meetings over the years and I have heard all of the concerns. I want to be perfectly clear. Grace Christian School has not recruited students for athletics, and does not, and will not give any scholarships based on athletic participation. The vast majority of our students begin in elementary school, and they stay in the same school through high school. This is similar to rural schools. To attend Grace Christian School a student and their family must agree to a distinctively Christian Education. This is not a good fit for every student, and we are very clear about it during the admissions process. Families pay ten thousand dollars each year per student in tuition so that we can pay for the operation of our school. We don't have state funding for any of our education, nor do we expect any. However we are a fully recognized member of ASAA and we expect to be treated as such by ASAA. I appreciate the frustration that some rural schools have. I understand the challenges that are faced, but this proposal is not the answer that we are all looking for. It is clear that this proposal is designed to move recently successful private schools into the 4A classification. This will totally decimate our girls basketball program that has been to state two times in 39 years. I also know you can appreciate the financial and logistical challenges that separating out the boys and the girls programs into different schedules would bring. It is problematic and not just for Grace, but for all the schools we schedule our seasons with.

Other schools such as GILA and Mount Edgumbe are allowed to recruit students from all over the state. If they are allowed to remain at the 3A level, this is obvious discrimination that I would be shocked if ASAA would entertain. It saddens me that this proposal is being entertained and that Region leadership does not see the difficulties that this proposal brings compared with the hopeful outcomes. I am convinced that if this proposal goes forward there will be new issues faced that make it clear that this path was not the correct one. ASAA is about the students. Yes and yes! What lessons will this proposal teach our students and at what cost? These are the questions that you must answer for our entire state.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

- Jeff Lentfer- Grace parent & asst. coach—“If there is such an urban advantage, why doesn't it correlate to the girls program? Our girls program has struggled to compete in 3A and only success has been when we had a Coach Romans transferred from Nikiski (where he was successful) – demonstrating the culture and commitment do mater. We are not asking to move to 2A, rather understand as of late the girls at Grace are more committed to other sports and the result is a challenge for the basketball program.

This re-classification would likely decimate or eliminate our girls program. Moving the girls to 4A would likely mean many more mercy rule games for the team. After a season or 2 of that, girls would move to other sports or simply not participate. Is this a very likely unintended outcome.

It is financially and logistically unrealistic to expect a boys program in 4A and girls in 3A. So while some may offer that as a solution, it simply isn't practical.

What criteria is used to determine if a program is to move from 3A to 4A? How much losing is too much losing and how much winning is too much winning? Is 3 or 4 years finishing at or near the bottom of 4A qualify you to move back down to 3A? Then how long can a program win before being told to move up again? Is it after 1 state title or appearance? Or 2? Who decides how much winning or losing is acceptable?

There are both urban advantages and disadvantages. One must acknowledge that.

Private urban schools seemingly have a larger population base, however that is offset by admission requirements and tuition.

Private urban schools also compete with many other activities for athletes time

Private urban schools do not have unlimited gym time – there are many activities that take up the gym time.

Private urban schools' students can be fairly transient with many opportunities to go to school at other places

Rural communities have an opportunity to develop youth from a youth program that allows many of them to grow up playing together with one system and philosophy.

Rural communities could have a focus on a sport if they wanted to which would allow great development without a lot of other club sport opportunities to compete against.

Schools with similar class sizes have a similar situation with many athletes competing in multiple sports. This means athletes are less likely to have year round dedicated athletes like are common in 4A programs.

Smaller class sizes mean smaller number of athletes in a program. There is typically a much smaller development (C/JV) program in 3A schools due to limited class sizes and the loss of 1 athlete due to transfer or injury has greater impact than a 4A program that has 2- 3 times as many kids in the school.

There may be other ways to address this situation:

Change the rules for home school kids to make sure they are enrolled in some classes at school, or require them to play at the school they'd be zoned in.

Address/enforce/eliminate any athletic scholarships to make sure students athletes are students first

Change the formula for who goes to state to have 3 teams from the largest conference get to go and avoid 50% from another"

- Amanda Anguak- "Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to come before the board and share my concerns about moving Monroe High School Basketball to 4A. My concerns are similar to those voiced by the Grace Christian community and administration and I would recommend the board NOT support the reclassification. I myself grew up in Southeast Alaska and I was a 3A sized school playing 4A...I know it can be done, but I know the challenges that come with it; ferrying, flying, overnights in schools, etc. I've seen it all from a player's perspective and now as an administrator I see the many challenges in terms of scheduling and cost that can be incurred.

Presently, Monroe Catholic has an enrollment of 99 students, soon to be 98 after a military family is reassigned in March. Moving to 4A would be a huge disservice for our school community. As a small school we have many students that are multi-sport athletes just so programs can exist. One example is a senior who has played football, basketball, Hockey (as a goalie...he never played until last year!) and will also run track and play soccer. He is not the only student who does that. Some folks may think that being in an "urban setting" allows more advantages to us in terms of drawing from a broader pool of students. That is not the case with Monroe Catholic, as we are a faith based school (the pool of interest shrinks) where families are expected to pay tuition (the pool of interest shrinks even more.) Our "urban advantage" is not comparable to a school who is not faith-based or not requiring tuition.

We only have one gymnasium shared amongst our PK-12 student population. We have limited practice space because of junior high programs and/or PE programs. Other 4A programs have more gym access, field access etc. and this is a greater advantage to them.

I also have concerns about the prospect of having our Boys Basketball team being classified as 4A and our girls being classified as 3A. This would be harmful to our school financially, and to the cohesiveness of our sports programs en total. Running

separate schedules for games, trips, travel...it would be a logistical and financial disaster for us, truly. And I really think the board should consider the optics of it all...it doesn't bode well for having the girls program classified differently than the boys, and vice versa.

Finally, Catholic Schools of Fairbanks does NOT offer scholarships for athletes or scholarships for any other non-athletic activities. Since our Jesuit mission calls us to educate kids of all socioeconomic backgrounds, not just those who are economically affluent, we have a Fair Share sliding scale based on Adjusted Gross Income. This allows us to more fully live out our mission as a Jesuit School and provide opportunity to more students. Our Fair Share tuition model is posted on our website. Please note: we are not the only Jesuit school in the US using this tuition model.

The considerations are many when looking at this and I know the board has a difficult decision ahead. Thank you for your time in allowing me to share concerns today.”

- Paul Salima- Grace AD & parent—“As a Grace Parent for 15 years and an AD at Grace for 4 years, I'm here to state my opposition to this re-classification proposal and offer my support to our parents, coaches, and administrators here. In addition to my comments my emails to Billy should also be referenced and considered.

I want to read what the Classification Committees task was for this proposal:

" Basketball Classification Committee Recommendation: Basketball classifications were first created using brick and mortar school enrollment. Now with alternative schools, home schools, and open enrollment schools, access to students for schools has changed significantly. Additionally, the gap has widened between urban and rural basketball opportunities. These opportunities have created an unbalanced level of competition in our basketball schools, regardless of enrollment."

-Why isn't the Peninsula not included.

-If there is such an unfair advantage, then why has Grace Christians Girls Basketball team have not been competitive at all. We struggle to field a Varsity team every year. The only time our Girls team made it to State two years in a row is when we had a Coach by the name of Ward Romans coach our girls. He coached at Nikiski High School and took them to 11 State Championships.

-I believe it's the culture that schools need to work on for a winning program. There is no consensus in our Region on this but I can tell you that sometimes the Coaches that you have coaching your program is the answer or problem. Example Palmer HS Boys program.

-Board really needs to look at the unfair advantage of the Southcentral Conference with 8 teams and only 2 berths. Board needs to make this equitable and consider only the Aurora and Southcentral Conferences for the at-large Berth



-Strongly ask the Board to not accept this proposal and continue to work on another proposal. Grace does not have an unfair advantage compare to other schools. As the Valley kids can pretty much go to any school they want because there are loopholes, and probably the same here in Anchorage.”

- Brain Ross- Principal at Lumen Christi School- spoke in support of the co-op with ASD schools