

Board Meeting, 8 February 2004

Massachusetts Forensic League

February 21, 2004

1 Opening

1.1 Members Present

Beena Koshy, Will Crocker, Lisa Honeyman, Judy Crocker, Mark McNeil, Joyce Albert, Debbie Simon, Deanie Goodman, Chris Palmer, Dave Cohen, Paul Wexler. Tom Danko was present as an observer.

1.2 Remarks

Mark called the meeting to order. He noted that interest in the league appears to be suffering a slight decline. Attendance at tournaments is generally down, and there are tournament slots on the schedule that are staying open and available. He also notes a priority for this board being development of stable infrastructure, written rules and regulations and less reliance on personal memories and recall. Finally, a third goal is outreach and development of new programs and their interest in the activity. He also welcomes the new at-large members to the board, and introduces each at-large member.

2 League Tournaments

2.1 Hall of Fame

Mark: After much persuasive speaking, Marc Rischitelli has agreed that the Hall of Fame can come under the stewardship of the past-President as an ex officio officer of the MFL. The MFL board will be primarily responsible for the tournament itself and administrative tasks, but the past-President will take a special interest in raising the awareness and prestige of the Hall of Fame, and the tournament.

Debbie suggests putting the Hall of Fame criteria, ballot, and membership on the website.

2.2 Needham

Paul was anticipating a small tournament because it was assembled at a relatively late date, and intended to run it in Last Chance format, double flighted without finals and small rooms. Lisa notes that it may end up being larger than thought; her team was looking at it as a full tournament, as were others. Debbie notes that Last Chance traditionally has also meant that students who have already qualified for States do not enter in those categories they've qualified in. Upon further

discussion, Paul decided to run a normal-format tournament; three preliminary rounds and a final round.

2.3 State Speech

2.3.1 Online Registration

Debbie notes that Chris and she are going to attempt to put an online registration and paneling system in place in time to have States be the first run. After that, all League tournaments will be able to use online registration in the coming year.

2.3.2 Tournament Qualification

Lisa proposed a new system of state qualifications. She notes that the current system of limiting schools to two entries per event hurts students by not permitting them to compete in their best event, simply because they have talented teammates. She also notes that the bar for qualifying is low and often absurd depending on which tournaments are attending. She proposes a system which would award points for top finishes at local tournaments, and require two points in order to qualify for the state tournament, after researching the system used by a number of other state leagues.

Further discussion was inspired of the differences of divisions, encouraging smaller schools to compete without making the requirements arcane or arbitrary, and further goals of competition. In the past, the system required the top point-getter in each event. Will noted that this often meant students would not compete in their best event, as a school attempted to spread talented students throughout the events instead of permitting two strong students to both compete in the same event. Chris noted that if the league wishes to raise the caliber of States the league should encourage students to enter in their strongest event. The Board agreed to use a sweepstakes system based on a top number of point-getters irregardless of event.

The Board then, after some discussion, decided to add in final scores as well as preliminary scores into the final sweepstakes totals; any student making the final will have their final placement in the tournament count as if it were another rank; a first place finisher would receive 5 points, a 2nd place finish 4, and so on. A 7th place finalist will not receive sweepstakes points.

The Board then addressed the disparity between points in Congress and in the other speech events. The board through general consensus decided to cap the number of points a student may earn in Congress at 15, despite the system in theory permitting 17 points as a maximum. In Congress, the top six contestants in a super-session only will receive extra sweepstakes points.

The Board decided to permit any school to enter 2 wildcards wherever they wished; in theory a school could then enter 4 competitors in one event if desired.

The Board then discussed the merits of adding a small school division and large school division in sweepstakes, but decided that due to the limit on entries on all schools, the effect would be negligible.

Finally, the Board talked about how many students' scores to count towards sweepstakes Mark suggested adding up the top 13 point-getters' scores. Lisa moved for the top half (18) possible entries, stating that 13 seemed an arbitrary number. On a 6-5 vote, the Board decided to use the top 13 scores in sweepstakes calculations.

The Board also noted that a lot of questions are being debated on hypotheticals; we don't actually know if a limit on the number of students being calculated into sweepstakes helps smaller schools compete more fairly at all, or if this is simply an illusory benefit. The Board resolved to use the data from this and past states as a fact-finding effort to answer those questions.

2.3.3 Improving States

Debbie notes that Texas tracks which students are top point-getters throughout their years in the TFA, and rewards each year a student in particular who both is outstanding competitively and also is a good citizen to the league with a scholarship. Mark also suggests having book awards for state champions. Chris offered to put up names of state champions on the website, and try to dig up records of state champions past to honor them as well.

2.4 State Debate

Mark noted that at one point Bill Porter of St John's in Danvers offered to host States; he will check with Bill to ensure that offer is still open. If it is not, Mark offered Sacred Heart as an emergency backup site. Paul will begin drafting an invitation for the State Debate. Beena offered to stand as official Tournament Director, backed up by Paul, Chris, and Dave. Chris will continue to work on an online registration that works for league Debates as well.

2.4.1 Debate and the MFL

Mark noted that the league should take this year's State Debate as an opportunity for outreach to the debate community, who are sometimes more cut off from the League than the speech schools. There are a number of communications tools and resources that are only being used by Speech schools that the debate schools should also enjoy. We should also encourage more growth and involvement in the MFL among debate schools.

3 Website

Further embarrassing praise for your secretary on the website and its effect on the League, which can stop already, thanks.

3.1 Communications

The League should be aware that the website automatically performs mail merges on messages, and addresses each mail to the member individually; the Board will try to be clearer about wording, but the emails you receive with [MFL] in the subject line are mass mailings.

3.2 Web Hosting

Chris has not found an ISP to host the website beyond his current arrangement, though admits this hasn't been a priority. He promises not to get hit by a bus; and will look at this once things settle down.

4 Treasury

4.1 Treasurer's Report

Judy submitted a treasurer's report. She notes that the list of schools having paid dues is very low. Chris and Judy will work together for another round of invoices that are hopefully more effective. Judy also noted that the league is now an officially incorporated entity, and is on its way towards receiving 501c(3) status as an official nonprofit.

4.2 Budget

Mark requested the whole board prepare ideas for a new budget for the next year so we can plan more responsibly and transparently. The budget consists of dues, together with receipts for the State Tournaments and the Hall of Fame Tournament. He asks for suggestions about responsible outlays, and notes that the League ought not sit on a large balance every year.

4.3 MFL Grants

Mark asks for proposals for a grant funding. He notes that the Board should attempt to help financially troubled programs and programs just starting in some way. Various ideas are contributed, quickly resulting in the need for further study. A Grants Committee is formed, of Judy (chair), Lisa and Joyce, to come up with a formal, stable process of applying for League grants.

4.4 Outside grants and donations

Mark asks the Board if anyone will volunteer to coordinate applying for outside grants and funding from corporate charities. Deanie offered to head this effort. Judy noted that we may have to complete the process of becoming a 501c(3) before many of these types of grants and donations become available to us.

4.5 League promotional materials

Debbie noted that new brochure and more clear materials on the league may be required for that effort; she currently has nothing short of the tournament handbook to hand to new schools and new programs, much less potential donors and school administrators. Lisa offered to look into the necessary lead time for a professionally designed brochure and other materials; she may have a source that will do the job at a discount. Chris also may have people interested in a pro-bono project. Debbie, Lisa and Chris will work together to produce a mockup by May 1st.

4.6 Corporate sponsorships

Mark repeats his question from the previous board meeting, now that all members are seated, if the Board is comfortable with the prospect of pursuing corporate sponsorships which may involve putting corporate logos and other indications of their sponsorship on League materials. Such displays would be tasteful and within reason. The Board assented to this pursuit.

5 Policy

5.1 Handbook Committee report

Lisa noted that the Handbook Committee is currently working on three fronts: 1. A Judge's Handbook for the league, 2. The Constitution of the MFL, and 3. The Tournament handbook.

5.1.1 Judges' Handbook

Lisa and Chris together early in January worked on a draft of a League Judges' Handbook, based on the manual that Lisa provides to her own judges at Newton South. It is still a draft and hasn't been seen by Joyce, but drafts will be forthcoming soon for comment.

5.1.2 Constitution

In re-reading the tournament handbook, the Constitution also stuck out. While major league constitutional change is not within our exact mandate, we noted that there are several places where the Constitution is quite vague, including the section on how the Constitution is amended. It also has quite a few typos and grammatical errors. Chris passed out a copy of the Constitution with proposed changes highlighted in red, and asked Board members to read and consider the places marked purple which indicate places of vagueness and confusion. The Handbook committee asked for further commentary on this process.

5.1.3 Tournament Handbook

Lisa and Chris also read through the Tournament Handbook and made preliminary notes, but did not have anything to hand to the Board just yet. The whole Committee will attempt to meet soon and formalize some of the changes to the tournament Handbook.

5.1.4 Bylaws

Chris also noted that the league lacks bylaws; we have no league policies that lay between the Constitution and the tournament handbook; there are a number of regulations and policies that are handed down solely by word of mouth and memory. Changes made in meetings are recorded only in minutes and not in a central location. To increase transparency, the Board should also maintain bylaws which are procedures that belong in neither of the above three documents.

5.2 Student Advisory Board report

Chris reported on the two meetings of the SAB he has attended, and the combined items from the SAB from those two meetings.

5.2.1 Adding bills to packets

Per the SAB's request, Will has already added a fifth bill to each of the Congress packets for the tournaments remaining on the schedule.

5.2.2 Impromptu

The SAB was concerned that Impromptu rules are often amorphous and ill defined, because the event is not MFL sanctioned and therefore changes in nature from week to week. They requested that Impromptu be possibly added as an MFL event.

5.2.3 Extemp topic quality

The SAB was concerned about the variable level of quality of questions at tournaments. They wondered if tournament hosts who do not coach extemp or are familiar with it otherwise know how to write questions in Extemp that are topical, concise and answerable. Extemp as an event depends on good questions, and our league's extempers are improved by them as well. Chris suggested designating MFL Board members as a standing Extemp Topics committee. Chris, Lisa, and PJ will sit on this committee, and will offer to either write topics for MFL tournaments (given a month's notice) or review topics for tournaments ahead of time to ensure their quality. Chris also noted that posting extemp topics on the website after tournaments will help both educate students in extemp and lead to greater transparency.

5.2.4 Logo Contest

The Logo Contest sounded like a good idea to the SAB, and after some informal strawpolling Chris determined that an Apple iPod Mini would be a sufficiently desirable prize to encourage interest in the Logo Contest. He asked the Board for approval to purchase an iPod Mini, the Board assented. Judy offered to see if someone would donate one; Chris agreed to help her figure out who might. Chris will announce the Logo Contest and the format thereof.

5.3 Protest Tracking

Mark has a Protest Book to log protests, which has not yet been used, but it is available now to maintain a log of how decisions were made. Joyce noted a wider concern about there being an often-fuzzy line between issues that go to the Board for resolution and issues thrown on the tournament director. After discussion, the Board decided that the tournament director would have say in issues in consultation with any 3 members of the Board. If the Board then wishes to derive a league policy from that, they may do so.

5.4 Congress Committee

Will reports that the Congress Committee met once at Lincoln Sudbury to hammer out some issues, and that actions are still preliminary. Presiding officer elections are kind of working, kind of not; the Board discussed ways of ameliorating this without reaching conclusions. The students have asked for, and Debbie also suggested independently, a bill writing seminar for Congress competitors. Another possibility is novice sessions early in the schedule with more of a teaching and less of a competitive aspect to them. Chris suggests also formally dividing Congress between the House and

the Senate, along the lines of the NFL, to produce different levels of competition without formally dividing between Novices and Varsity competitors. After further discussion of possibilities, the Congress Committee decided to have formal proposals ready for the Mardi Gras tournament.

5.5 Quality of Competition Tiebreaking Proposal

Lisa put a proposal before the Board, attached at the end of these minutes, to introduce Quality of Competition as an additional tiebreaker, when tiebreakers are used, after Reciprocals and before Quality Points. She emphasized that QoC might not be perfectly fair, but it is more fair than arbitrary quality points. The Board decided to use the system at the Heartbreaker as a test, and evaluate it for league policy thereafter. Chris will attend the Heartbreaker so someone who has used this system before (at Yale) will be available.

5.6 Group Discussion

Lisa put a proposal to the Board to eliminate Group Discussion as a League required event (attached). Discussion on this issue was vast. Judy noted that originally Congress was added as a full event with the intention of eliminating Group when and if Congress achieved strength as a full event. Dave points out that Group serves for many as the only avenue Debate oriented schools have for entering speech tournaments. There is further concern about schools that primarily or only offer competition in Group Discussion. He also notes that without League sanction, Group might become amorphous as Impromptu currently is. He states that novices respond favorably to Group Discussion who might be intimidated by other events in public speaking and debate. Will notes that this periodic debate is a sign perhaps of the event's inherent weakness. Chris admits the value to encouraging discussion but fears the format is not suited to quantitative judging and competition that the League provides.

Chris asks Beena about the Minnesota discussion event; Beena describes it as having a year-long topic voted on by the Minnesota schools, which is then covered throughout the year by the Group Discussion. She says that while it is not quite on a par with the events offered at Nationals, it seems to be more respected with better competition in Minnesota. Dave offers to form a Group Discussion committee to look at the issues in Group; Beena also will sit on this committee. They will sit in on a few rounds of Group in the coming tournaments and explore ways of possibly improving the event. At any rate, the Board agreed that taking action on this proposal without discussion from the League membership is premature, and tabled it for further discussion.

5.7 Mission Statement

Mark offers a proposed Mission Statement to the Board for reading and commentary at a future meeting. He also asks the Board members each to enumerate three goals for the remaining tenure of the Board. Please send them via email to Mark.

5.8 Parliamentarian's List

Will will have a list of certified Parliamentarians for the next MFL board meeting.

6 Promotion

6.1 Video

Debbie is waiting for the judges' manual and tournament handbook to use as the script, and then will assemble an instructional video for the league as a whole, with the especial purpose of playing it in the Judge's Lounge for tournaments. It was suggested that State Champions in each event be asked to contribute. Debbie aims to have something ready by the end of the academic year for use starting next September.

6.2 Stopwatches

Judy passed out a number of stopwatches to select between for a League fundraiser selling stopwatches at tournaments to judges. These should be ready soon, after an 11-0 board vote on "the baby ones."

6.3 T-shirts

Mark asks if an ad for the T-shirts can be placed on the website; Chris just needs a copy of the image, and will do so.

7 Service

7.1 Simon Award

We need to establish criteria for the Debbie Simon service award for former Board members and officers. Joyce is appointed chair of a committee to set those guidelines, together with Dave and Deanie.

7.2 Camp Scholarships

A second committee for people to set up rules and procedures for awarding camp scholarships with the monies from selling T-shirts and the like is needed. Given constraints of time, a formal panel was not put in place; a lot of board members also have connections to one camp or another and therefore need to be recused.

8 Middle School

Deanie reported about her continuing efforts in establishing a Middle School mailing list, and meeting with Middle School coaches about programs. She is attempting to provide the Middle School programs with more consistency and uniformity. There is not a universal sense among Middle School coaches that greater uniformity and a formal League is required. However, as the Middle School circuit grows, more organization may be required to manage that growth; questions of policy are already emerging

Chris offers to send notice to the entire League asking who may be interested in joining a Middle School mailing list. He also offers use of the league's communication tools for the middle school

programs.

Deanie reports that there will be a Middle School Coaches' Meeting at the Foley Invitational Tournament at Milton Academy on May 2nd; she hopes this may launch a meeting which she hosts to hash out the issues facing middle school programs and competition, as well as permitting them to set a schedule with better coordination with the MFL schedule. The Middle School programs are still at a beginning level, but eventually Deanie hopes to have a handbook and other materials available.

There being no further business on the agenda, the meeting adjourned.