

MFL Board Meeting
Catholic Memorial High School
30 November 2009

The meeting was called to order at 6:43 pm by the president, Joyce Albert.

Present: Joyce Albert, Paul Wexler, Greg Cunningham, Nancy Gahagan, Sarah Donnelly, Susan Marianelli, Rob Croteau, Sarah Sanchez, Lisa Honeyman, Chris Palmer & Dan Sapir.

Because the meeting is on a weeknight and the agenda is long, we discussed ways to get through the extensive list without being here all night.

Motion: Cunningham

Limit discussion for each agenda item to 10 minutes. Vote to extend discussion if necessary.

Cunningham will keep time.

2nd: Marianelli

Unanimously accepted.

Donnelly – Moved that we accept the minutes of the previous meeting.

Cunningham 2nd. Approved without objection.

1. DEFINE NOVICE BETWEEN SPEECH & DEBATE AS WELL AS MIDDLE/HIGH SCHOOL

This came up because if a student has done speech for a year, s/he can be considered a novice in debate, but it's not true the other way around.

- Need some consistency.
- Is this causing a problem?
- Now that PFD is offered at more speech tournaments, we're struggling with a number of issues.

- Should extemp be treated the same as other speech events?
- Should we divide by grade level rather than year in speech?
- Is this something we should publicize and revisit later in the year at the League Meeting?

Maybe we should send out a reminder e-mail to coaches about what a novice is?

We agreed to table this until later in the meeting when we will discuss other debate issues that are on the agenda.

2. STATES – REVIEW OF MULTIPLE

Cunningham sponsor: If we're going to advance 6 finalists in every other event, then we should do that with multiple, too. He argued that "it takes too long" is not a legitimate reason against it. Also, we have many "low entry" events, so this one shouldn't be discriminated against for that reason alone.

Regarding time issues:

- Lots of kids to organize, they're not all there at the same time.
- It takes 5-10 minutes between multiples instead of 2-3 minutes in other events.
- Multiples run up to 12 minutes, not 7 or 10 so a final round with 6 multiples would take longer than any other event to run, even if everyone were there, ready to go at the start of the round.
- Finals in multiple cannot start until everything else is posted due to the large amount of double/triple entry at States.

On the other hand:

- This is States and we shouldn't cut the tournament short for time issues.
- By the time States rolls around, the kids have worked hard and these and deserve to have 6 in finals.

- If the concern is largely logistic, should we try it at a few locals before we do it at States?
- Could we consider 2 rounds and a break? Or some other sort of creative solution?
- Eliminate the triple-entry option for multiple, this may help address some of the craziness? It may discourage some less-prepared folks from entering.

Cunningham Moves: We run multiple at States with 6 advancing in the final round, like all other events. If the break is tied under MFL rules, we will not break beyond 6.

Croteau: 2nd

10 For; 1 Abstain

3. FINAL TOPIC AREA FOR STATES IN EXTEMP

Should we use "Massachusetts Issues" every year as the final round topic in Extemp or leave it up to the Speech Chair? We decided to decide year by year.

4. JUDGES FOR STATES

Should we strengthen the language around qualifications of judges that are brought to States? For example, state in the invitation that any judge without the appropriate experience will not count towards the judging quota?

Dan Sapir asked if we could move another proposal forward in the agenda since it is about judging. He brought up 4 incidents of egregious judge behavior that his students reported from the previous tournament. It's very frustrating! We've been running training sessions and people either aren't attending or they aren't listening.

We need to go to the coaches who are responsible for the judges that are making these mistakes. We need to tell our students to come to us during the day while there is time to deal with issues. And, we need to let coaches know that they can bring issues to TAB during the day, too.

There is a great deal of pressure on coaches to bring judges. They don't always have a choice about the judges they bring. We don't want to leave kids home, so we take the judge we can get.

We need to be sensitive to the fact that these judges are volunteers and we depend upon the generosity of these people. We need to foster better quality judging, not punish people or make them feel unwelcome or unappreciated.

Is the ballot part of the problem? In debate, judges are not asked to coach students on the ballot, we simply ask them for the "reason for decision." Should we change speech ballots to ask for "reason for decision" rather than asking judges to tell the students how to improve?

In NY, there is a person who is responsible for new judges. That way, if a new judge has a question, then they know who to ask.

At the college level, novice judges are assigned a mentor. Is that possible here? (Probably not.)

How do we do out reach to newer coaches to help them prepare their judges?

The new judges are not showing up by 8:30 am for the meetings. How do we get them there?

Can we designate a judge liaison for each tournament who is seated at a desk at the front of the school. Put up a judge master with the names of the Debate, Speech and Congress judges at the start of the tournament. If judges knew that there was an information spot in the morning, then we might be able to handle some of these issues. Can an at-large board member take this on as an assignment? Or, is this something that should be done on a tournament by tournament basis? There was general agreement that this is not an MFL board responsibility; the hosting school should provide this service.

Motion by Cunningham for language with State Judges to reword invitation section as follows:

Schools must provide one judge for every five Speech and Congress entries, or fraction thereof. Schools **must bring judges who have judged or competed at a minimum of one speech tournament.**

Palmer – 2nd
Passed unanimously.

5. PARTIAL VOTE ON DROPS DUE TO FLU

Do we want to make recommendation to tournaments that they not assess fees for drops due to flu? General discussion lead to consensus that we should leave this up to tournament directors. We dropped this issue.

6. DEBATE ISSUES again.

How many kids are there that move between speech and debate? Mostly, it seems that students go between extemp and debate. Does the rule as it exists bother anyone? (No one seemed to be particularly bothered by it.)

We talked about alternative criteria for novice status. For example, a total round requirement instead of a season requirement.

We agreed to come back with proposals at a later date.

7. DEBATE BALLOTS AND RULES

BALLOTS

When we use the TRPC software to run a tournament, the ballots are printed from the program. If we're not using the TRPC, what should we use for ballots? We don't have MFL ballots for debate. Should we make some?

Maybe we can have a description of all 3 debate events (PFD, LD and Policy) on the MFL website and a copy of a sample ballot for each event. Then link rules to the NFL.

Sarah & Chris will pull together sample ballots to put on the website and will also put together descriptions of all 3 debate types to send out to the board for approval before posting them online.

RULES

Also, our current PFD rules are tied to NFL rules. When they change, ours change. It was noted that the NFL and NCFL are not using the same rules for PFD.

Various questions were raised:

- Should we write our own rules?
- What happens when the other leagues change their rules?
- Is it EVER a good idea for the MFL debate rules to differ from the National rules?

Across the country there is no local variation at all in debate. Everyone uses NFL rules except for the NCFL. If we don't stick with the NFL rules, we may bifurcate our league because local teams that host national tournaments will have to give up MFL sanctioning in order to keep the national draw. The only league that differs is the NCFL.

If the MFL writes our own rules, how would we ever keep our rules modified to keep up with whatever the other leagues are doing given how infrequently we meet?

DEBATE BIDS

At the moment, in order to get a bid in debate, a student (or pair) must place in the top 8 or top 30%. Students/teams only need one.

- Should change the system so that a student/team needs a winning record instead?
- Should non-MFL tournaments count towards state qualifications so students who don't get bids locally can compete at States?
- Isn't that what wild-cards are for?
- If we allow non-MFL tournaments to count towards state quals in debate, do we need to do the same in speech?
- What if we do away with qualifications in Policy entirely.

Moved by Honeyman: For Policy Debate, remove the qualification for States for the 2009-2010 season. Seconded by Palmer. Passed unanimously.

8. DEBATE AT SPEECH TOURNAMENTS – BECOMING AN ISSUE

The large number of participating schools that do not have adults who can run the debate side of the tournaments are straining our ability to TAB the debate tournaments. We offer the opportunity for students to compete, but we're not getting the necessary support from the debate community. Can speech tournaments continue to offer PFD if we don't have people to run/TAB the event? Offering debate causes room issues and staffing issues. Folks that used to be able to help with speech TAB are being pulled into helping with PFD. This has had a negative impact upon the past 3 tournaments and we're worried the problems will persist during the rest of the season.

Most seem in favor of continuing to offer PFD at speech tournaments. We want to provide the opportunities, but we need to support the schools that offer them. This is also an issue in congress. **Schools that do these events need to train their adults to be parliamentarians and TAB room staff in order to run the tournaments. If they want these events to be offered, they need to take more responsibility for making it possible to run them.**

Chris offers to train some folks to TAB PFD at a tournament in the near future. Let's empower some of these folks to learn how to work in TAB and to be a parliamentarian in congress, especially those from schools that send PFD and Congress entries in large numbers. We can do this at Lexington and at Manchester-Essex, both in January.

What are we going to do about PFD at LS and NS?

Sarah will bring the network computers and pluggie things to the LS tournament for both speech & debate.

9. WEBSITE

Beginning of the year issues were discussed, including problems with program glitches, particularly when it came to communication. There is general frustration among the people who rely on the MFL website (not the tournament software). How do we improve that?

On the day of a tournament if there's an issue, what do we do? We need to be able to depend upon the system we are using. We also need a back-up plan for the situations during tournaments where we can't get the program to do what we want it to do. What would that be?

Other issues – with the redesign we can't figure out how to do things. Joyce listed a few of the problems she has encountered recently. She is being bombarded with questions that she cannot handle and is feeling overwhelmed.

Chris told us that the way to get help with the program is to send an e-mail to one of the following addresses, depending upon the nature of the issue:

bugs@tabroom.com - e-mail to the bug tracking data-base. - for "Oh my gosh, it broke!" situations.

requests@tabroom.com - "Wouldn't it be nice if, . . ." situations.

We need to train some folks who can help with website maintenance. The entire league cannot depend upon a single person. There is a manual that is partially written that Chris can send the board.

The MFL needs some way to handle the MFL face of the program. How do we do this?

10. DP vs. DI/HI

This is a conversation for next spring. The rules change is in effect for the entire 2009-2010 season and will not be discussed until the Annual League Meeting in April.

11. SEMI-FINALS at TOURNAMENTS

Croteau presents concerns about semi-finals: Holding semi-finals is great in concept, but the additional round adds to the length of the day. He questions the appropriateness of holding a semi-final in novice reading given that it's a non-State event? He asks that we consider when and why we hold semi-finals. Also, he points out that if semi-finals are going to be held, we need to know at the start of the tournament. It shouldn't be a last-minute surprise.

One tournament director said she felt forced into holding semi-finals in events that had more than 40 entries since other tournaments were doing it, even though she would have preferred not to.

Reasons for holding semi-finals:

- At the Holly, the most major complaint is that it's too hard to break because the events are too big. But, they don't have the time or space to run semi-finals. There have been cases where people with 1-1-1 or 1-1-2 have not broken to finals. That's certainly not ideal.

- In events with 45 entries, a student who is in 3 sections with 6 competitors in each would compete against, at most, 15 other competitors in prelims. This is only 1/3 of the field. The reality is that we usually run rounds of 5, not 6 and it is rare that a student never competes against at least one other person more than once. So, they generally compete against fewer than 1/3 of the others. Luck plays too big a role in the determination of who advances to finals. The semi-final round helps assure that the "best" people are the ones to advance.

Note: Whether or not to hold semifinals is not something we (as a board) can legislate. The only tournament the board can control is States.

Even though we had not completed the agenda, it is now 9:30, the time we agreed we would stop.

Motion to adjourn by Donnelly: 9:30 pm
Second by Palmer.

Respectfully Submitted,

Lisa Honeyman

VP/Secretary