

MHSLA - Lacrosse

Meeting Minutes

Objective: Monthly Meeting

Date: 11/12/2024

Gionete, Desarae Detling, Pat Marron, Chris

Time: 7:30 PM

McLaughlin, Brad Koon, JR Wright

Facilitator: Todd Thesing

Members Present: Steve Crass, Nathan Nachtsheim, Eric Sutherland, Todd Thesing, Jeremy Comstock, Tori Hederman, Rob Leder, Steve Amish, Dan Carroll, TJ

Discussion Items

1. Registration timing for all clubs

- Beartooth registration is open at a reduced rate
- Butte is not open yet
- Great Falls is open
- Spartans are planning to open by Dec 1
- Sheridan is going with new platform and plans to open in next couple days
- Northwest is open and closes at end of November
- Jackson is not open yet.
- Wild opens on November 21
 - Wild had a new election
- Helena is open registration and never closes
- Cody is planning to open before end of month

2. Reports:

- Treasurer:
 - Will send overpayment out
- Secretary
 - Have all coach information with the exception of Rimrock
 - Need a couple of email corrections for Brynn Schwarz and Barb Vaughn
- President
 - Talked to Dave Madera in Jackson
 - Working with Chris Mac on scheduling
 - Look at boys, girls, and youth to get some continuity

3. Exhibit A includes the 2025 coach information.

- Please review and let Brad Koon know of any changes.

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4. Youth board situation and season involvement

- Todd's thought is to work with a couple people at youth to help them this season
- Doesn't make sense to disband
- Help them with scheduling
 - Todd and Chris Mac have started on this
- Todd has started working with Eric to help with finance portion
- Don't think we should take it over because priorities of the organizations are different
- Help them restructure over the next few months
- Following is input from everyone on how to help youth:
 - Nathan
 1. Youth and High School boards are separate.
 2. Helena has a separate youth board. High school works closely with youth.
 3. Work together on scheduling
 4. Youth has difficulty with state leadership
 5. Nathan thinks there is no state board helping youth.
 - a. There is a board, but not overwhelmingly positive.
 6. We can't have high school without youth, so yes, help them out.
 - Jeremy
 1. Yes, we High School should help them out.
 2. Youth and high school are same board.
 - Rob
 1. Separate boards
 2. Need to help them out
 - Tori
 1. One board
 2. Yes, help out the youth.
 3. Never plays at home
 4. Youth plays jamboree style w/ tournaments
 5. Only way to have a youth program
 6. Lots of driving/hotels/commitment
 7. Has 1 home weekend
 8. Has a strong youth program
 - Steve Crass
 1. Missoula youth is under Wild
 2. High school state board is not functioning well and needs to be fixed
 - a. Hard to help others when need to help yourself.
 3. Get high school in order, then help others

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- Steve Amish
 1. Wild board will be youth and boys high school
 2. Girls will be Spartans
 3. Very recent change
 4. Plan to have a D1 and D2
 5. Steve thinks we need to help the youth, but set up in a way they can assume scheduling to keep everything going. Harder situation is how to patch things up between youth leagues.
- Dan Carroll
 1. HS has no contact with new youth board
 2. Not an issue with helping, but don't bite off more than what this board can handle. More of a guidance than taking over.
- Desarae
 1. Rimrock, Beartooth, and Scorpions are all separate
 - a. Rimrock Girls HS
 - b. Beartooth Boys HS
 - c. Scorpions Youth
 2. Currently mending relationships
 - a. Having members from other boards attend
 3. On fence with taking over youth.
 - a. Hard to re-format this board and youth at same time. Need to be careful doing this.
 4. Worked with Scorpions in mid October.
 - a. Learn to play
 - b. Had 12 HS kids show up
 - c. Definitely different needs
 - d. Very good experienced
 - i. Brought out leadership skills
 - ii. Good to see interacting
- Chris McLaughlin
 1. Has had a lot of experience with youth
 2. Has been hard for some teams to write a schedule for youth when there are very few teams in some cases.
 3. Tournament model is what youth is trying to go to
 - a. 14-15 games for the season
 - b. Worry about cost of tournaments
 4. Help support with High School Kids
 - a. Cohesiveness
 - b. Leadership
 5. Fix this board before putting too much effort into other teams.
 6. Hard part from NW is distance to travel, similar to Billings
 7. Would like to see them with a cohesive board of directors
 8. Put together a committee to help them gain more players.

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- TJ Gionet
 1. One board in Cody.
 - a. Played together in past to help build relationships.
 - b. Put in grant with USA Lacrosse
 - i. Received ~60 sticks which was huge for the club
 - ii. Recommends for other small clubs
 - c. Travel is the big issue in Cody
 2. JR Wright
 - a. Vertical model
 - b. Travel is biggest issue plaguing mostly youth
 - c. One board
 - d. All youth below 7/8 is done through house program
 - e. All short sighted in house lacrosse
 - f. JR sees efficiencies with one board for both
 - i. JR is president for both so continuity
 - g. Approach is to simply limit travel
 - h. Soccer switching to lacrosse because limiting travel
 - i. Put kids together based on elementary school
 - j. Registration is \$75 including all equipment
 - k. JR agrees that HS has own issues to settle before putting too much effort elsewhere.
 - l. JR likes the idea to do Jamboree style with youth, girls, etc. all in one location.
 - m. Scheduling committee to keep clubs together
 - n. If one thing changes in MT Lacrosse, keep clubs together

5. All clubs fill out schedule form

- Boys
- Girls

Chris McLaughlin is getting forms from everyone and will send out email with those who have not responded.

6. High School Rules Discussion

- Rule Alterations submitted by Helena, Sheridan, Bozeman, and Steve Crass with questions by other clubs are included in the following exhibits:
 - **Exhibit B** includes Last Chance Lacrosse Proposed Rule Changes
 - **Exhibit C** includes the article sent by Sheridan from Washington
 - **Exhibit D** Comments on LC Proposal
 - **Exhibit E** includes the email provided by President Thesing
 - **Exhibit F** includes Sheridan Proposed Rule Changes

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- Todd noted that we don't have to make changes.
- Todd spoke with Bozeman high school Superintendent about sanctioning
 - It was on board to vote 2 or 3 years ago.
 - Not expected to happen within 5 years or more
- Problems we are seeing is something high schools will see
- Steve Amish asked if there needs to be a certain number of teams behind it to push it forward
 - Todd said to look at Montana High School Association website
 - They are trying to do baseball right now.
 - Go to schools and identify how many kids there will be for next many years.
- Think about how rule changes may affect youth.
- Todd spoke with Lynn today
 - How does a rule change affect all programs.
 - What does this look like in 3-5 years if numbers are declining
- Look at youth numbers to understand what rule changes may mean.
- Just because we had a rule doesn't mean we need it again
- Successful season last year
- Talk about how rule changes may affect our club:
 - Steve Crass
 - Goal of everyone on this call is to get the sport sanctioned because this is not sustainable.
 - Counting on people coming in behind but it is not happening.
 - Club model is declining because no volunteers
 - Used to be our goal
 - Reason we started getting in trouble was because we were trying to accommodate certain teams and certain towns.
 - May never happen
 - Nathan Nachtsheim
 - Been around this sport a long time
 - Kids haven't played for past 5 years
 - Helena has put 18 kids to next level – scholarship kids
 - When rules were changed, there was a decline
 - Need to look at what changes to rules caused
 - Everyone should be given the opportunity to play
 - Take brand new kids and let them play
 - Something that anyone can play. Might not be best, but everyone should be given opportunity.
 - Have not lost a single freshman
 - All freshmen who move up play the sport
 - Still have numbers coming up through youth programs
 - Jeremy Comstock
 - Smaller club
 - Want to grow sport in Montana
 - Purpose is to make more robust D1
 - Steps to make sure smaller teams aren't disadvantaged

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- 2 teams is better than 1 to grow sport
- Look at something that encourages Cities to have more than one team if have numbers
- Helena has best model. One club governs both teams.
 - Could sustain changes into the future.
- Steve Amish
 - Re-instituting a boundary document
 - Can keep the boundary document and those kids can't play.
 - Changed the boundary document so kids could play
 - There was no rime or reason
 - Want to see as many kids play as possible
 - Couldn't recruit kids to play on D1 team
 - Wanted to have a developmental team to give new players chance to play at appropriate level.
 - Now don't have numbers to sustain 2 boys teams this year
 - When numbers started going down for youth, no one stepped in time and it was too late.
 - If previous boundary document was adopted, may not have enough kids.
 - Nathan said that you don't need to split until you have the numbers.
 - Nathan asked what happened to the kids
 - Steve doesn't know what happened
 - Youth board wasn't run well and removed coaches and had trouble keeping kids.
 - Lots of competition with other sports now.
 - JR Wright
 - JR thinks something needs to happen this year
 - Agrees we need to keep our clubs together
 - Can't do this for another year
 - Youth program issues
 - Travel
 - Not a legitimate league to grow into
 - This league is not legitimate at this point.
 - Article from Washington stated having a legitimate league was solution.
 - JR disagrees that Washington is different to MT
 - Vertical model works and data shows it would work in MT
 - JR says Kalispell and Bozeman are not thriving based on data
 - Conglomerate teams across the league have low percentages of lacrosse players per school population
 - Bozeman 2.6%
 - Kalispell 2%
 - Missoula 2.1%
 - Helena 3% kids playing
 - Jackson 5.8%

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- Cody and Sheridan 3.8%
- Numbers don't lie. Vertical structure is much more successful.
- JR says Bozeman and Kalispell should split up by Kalispell as soon as possible
- Todd thinks there is a misconception about Bozeman and Gallatin
 - It is very off-sided
 - Bozeman couldn't support a team on its own
- JR said the reason for the lack of numbers in Bozeman is because of structure
- Todd said he is trying to understand if Bozeman split and had 2 Bozeman teams, there would not be enough players for Bozeman, just Gallatin because all growth is in Gallatin.
- JR wants to return to original structure
 - Language in 16, 17, and 18 caused a lot of problems
- Once the boundary document was muddled, there were a bunch of waiver documents and board got sick of dealing with it.
- It was very clear before.
- The vertical model is a proven growth model that has worked year after year.
- Todd stated that numbers have been on an incline since 2019.
- Desarae Detling
 - Doesn't have the historical background, but will provide Billings perspective
 - Problem is starting young
 - Working with youth board to get numbers back up so they can keep high school.
 - Similar to other towns, there are a lot of sports options.
 - If you don't recruit kids right away, they are moving on
 - Travel is an issue, kids find sports with less travel.
 - Difficult that baseball is now sanctioned
 - Sanctioning is not likely going to happen based on how long it took for baseball.
 - Rule changes
 - Don't care about D1/D2 or JV/Varsity
 - Stat changes is a personnel issue
 - Changing 2 hours between games is hard no for safety
 - Travel has been number 1 complaint from families
 - Tried to offset with less travel on a Friday
 - Pushing boys to get into officiating
 - Desarae had to ask if rule changes are just to attack Bozeman?
 - Look at areas where numbers are going up.
 - There are going to be different circumstances in each community which can be a challenge.
 - Desarae asked about comment on scheduling games during the week.
 - This would be difficult
 - Beartooth travelled 2 or less hours on weeknights last year and it worked well.
- Chris Mac

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- Scheduling can be figured
- D1/D2 doesn't matter
- Feel there should be a championship D1 and D2.
 - Will bring more kids
- Boundary
 - Grew up in one of the Washington high schools where the article was written.
 - Doesn't see how to initiate a boundary document when not associate with any high school in the state.
 - Worry is that some kids won't play anymore if boundary reinstated.
 - Not for boundary unless there is a boundary document for state.
 - Don't see reason for changing to just beat Bozeman
 - Jealous of Bozeman youth program
 - Disagree with splitting...let teams do what they wan to do.
 - Reward teams with D1
 - Maybe more home games if you have D1
 - Don't see vertical model working if not boundaries on state level.
- Dan Carroll
 - Butte's goal is not the most popular.
 - Not a goal to be sanctioned.
 - Dan hasn't had a kid playing for many years
 - Goal is to make enjoyable for kids
 - Love to win games, but not top priority
 - Don't have youth program
 - Don't have luxury of numbers
 - Expensive sport
 - Can afford to keep replacing gear
 - Every kid is going to play regardless
 - Kids are always happy, even when losing
 - D1/D2 doesn't matter.
 - Don't agree with removing recognition for D2
 - Seeing a drop in numbers
 - TJ Gionet
 - Board is split on D1/D2
 - Looking at how to grow youth program
 - Boundary is a big one
 - All for moving up to D1 to make it more competitive.
 - Need to break up bigger conglomerate leagues so the ones that move up are still competitive.
 - Rob Leder
 - Not from Bozeman – from NE

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- He does see what is going on
- Don't want to dumb down competition
- Will eventually get to the point of beating Bozeman
- Bozeman can barely field a D1 team
- Many parents don't want freshman kids playing on varsity team due to size.
- Not a lacrosse parent, played soccer
- Bozeman fields are run by the City
 - If break up Bozeman/Gallatin, won't be able to get fields
 - Won't be able to field 2 boards
- State tournament – D1 and D2 Tournament
- Out of conference games
 - Think the Boise game is important
- Asked JR to send data
- Seems like trying to cut Bozeman at knees to bring down
 - Tori Hederman
 - Don't care about JV/Varsity
 - Liked the D2 championship
 - D2 shouldn't get all state awards
 - Don't have a comment on boundaries because only on girls side.
 - Jackson is growing and Teton Valley is also growing
 - Believe in fun and mental health and not as much about winning
 - Have great coaches
 - Lots of change happening about win win win
 - Lacrosse program is not that way. Build kid before building winning team.
- Todd said he is not impartial to Bozeman or about winning. He loves the sport and wants to grow the sport.
- Todd went through teams for each town
 - Same as last year except wild will lose D2
 - Cheyenne not sure yet
- How did D2 teams feel about level of play?
 - Jeremy thought D2 was great – had 6 competitive teams
 - Would consider moving to D1
 - Don't have option of not playing D1 as freshmen
 - Nathan said let's talk about Helena D2 team
 - This team got beat up
 - Doesn't think D2 as developmental last year
 - Nathan is west coach and Jeremy is East
 - West is Capital
 - East side is Helena High, Boulder, MT City, East Helena, Townsend
 - Todd confirmed that no kids are being cut
 - Deserae said everyone is going to fluctuate from year to year
 - Last year Helena West had 8 seniors. This year 1 senior.

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- Bozeman graduated 16 seniors last year.
 - Sheridan will have enough for D1 and D2 teams if they can all play in same location.
 - Max of 2 games per day for boys
- Boise created own league and excluded some of the outlying teams.
- Cheyene, Jackson Hole, Amen, and Teton maybe next year part of MT lacrosse.
- Everyone seems interested in adding these teams if logistics can be worked out.
- Might make scheduling a little easier
- JR thinks limiting travel for clubs is critical.
 - If we can divide into divisional format and lessen travel, add teams.
 - Makes sense to add teams if we can divide into a division.
 - Smart strategy while filling clubs in between
 - Not an attack on Bozeman or specific club
 - For the greater good of the game, if we fill out the teams, with less distance, it will only get better. More teams in other towns are important, but also need to increase density of teams in the area we have.
 - The fear of breaking Bozeman up into 2 teams.
 - Not concerned about a step back because more kids playing at a higher level is better.
 - Matched up well with similar size clubs
 - Mismatch when bigger teams are pulling from huge demographic.
 - Only had 7 competitive games going into state.
 - Not concerned about taking a step back now to improve quality later on.
 - Sheridan and Cody looking at D1 and D2 teams if can play in same location.
 - Take this information and think about it.
 - Rules committee come back to board with items to vote on.
 - By-laws say supposed to be an in-person meeting in November
 - General members vote on this
 - Executive board doesn't get to vote on this
 - Todd asked JR about games with both of Bozeman D2 teams last year
 - Said matchup was pretty good
 - Sheridan beat red by quite a bit
 - Sheridan lost to white team by 1
 - Bozeman D2 teams finished 2nd and 4th in division.
 - Very close to a competitive 10 team league.
 - If Bozeman is forced to split, Bozeman HS won't have enough kids
 - What do you do?
 - Nathan said make one of the teams a conglomerate to draw kids from other areas.
 - It was noted that there would be more kids playing by percentage if there was a team for every high school.
 - JR said it doesn't happen immediately, it will take time, but be better in long term.
 - Todd said the same thing happened in Missoula and Billings

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- If Helena joined the 2 teams, what would happen?
 - JR said most would quit
 - Nathan said if we went back to 1 varsity team, we would lose players.
 - Competition between the teams is so great they wouldn't play together.
 - D2 team combining East and West didn't get along well
 - Rules used to include boundaries, and Bozeman removed the requirement
 - Others followed suit.
 - Helena West numbers grow every year because pick up numbers from Capital High School each year.
- Deserae said part of the issue was boundary
- Some kids would rather walk away from the game than play
- Family drama caused big problems
- Are we going to be a club sport and build the sport or create a rec sport?
- TJ asked how elite player liked the idea of building the sport with lower level of play.
 - Answer was that he did not like it at all.
 - Steve Crass said this board's duty is to set up the structure and stick with it.
 - Todd said it doesn't work that way because teams want to do things their own way.
- JR asked how Todd recommends going forward.
 - Todd said we did this years ago and it didn't work
 - Todd said he supports a pyramid
 - Kids work to get to varsity from JV
- Jeremy does not like the triangle model because it get smaller going up.
 - Kids self select when they know they can't compete at top level. We will lose players in this model.

7. Winter referee recruitment

- Mike head of refs is doing this alone.
- Looking for others to get involved.
- Mike will need help.

8. Schedule

- Chris McLaughlin is working on skeleton schedule to get things moving.

9. State Tournament

- Discussion on always having in Helena
- Nathan said he will go to his board and ask
- Steve likes the idea of getting proposals

10. Action Items

- **Check in with Rimrock**
- **Set up a meeting to vote on rule changes**

11. Next Scheduled Meeting: December 10, 2024 @ 7:30 PM

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Exhibit A 2025 Coach Information

MHSLA 2025
Coach Contact Information
Updated 11/12/2024

Club/Team	Boys D1 Coach	Boys D1 Coach Email	Boys D1 Coach Phone	Boys D2 Coach	Boys D2 Coach Email	Boys D2 Coach Phone	Girls D1 Coach	Girls D1 Coach Email	Girls D1 Coach Phone	Girls D2 Coach	Girls D2 Coach Email	Girls D2 Coach Phone
Sheridan				JR Wright	mavericks@sheridanlacrosse.com	307-763-1001						
Billings Beartooth	Kevin Bakel	coachbakel@gmail.com	812-483-6832									
Billings Rimrock				Howard Ruzick								
Bozeman	Co HC - Casey Rose CO HC - Lars Bidstrup	caseyroset@gmail.com lbidstrup8@gmail.com	801-703-3801 978-518-6226	Red - Alex Ide White Evan Merritt	Alexanderide@gmail.com emerritt91@gmail.com	406-595-0167 707-889-4496	Molly Pickall	molly.pickall@gmail.com	406-600-1867	Kalbie Grasset	kmgrasset@gmail.com	603-5624340
Cody				TJ Gionet	warriorslacrossehc@gmail.com	425-315-2817						
Jackson							Maddie Johnson	madeleinejohnson@gmail.com		Lizzy Reis	lsabeldreis1@gmail.com	
Last Chance	East - Jeremy Swenson West - Nathan Natsheim	jeremy.swenson@stryker.com bss1af2@gmail.com	406-580-0729 406-459-9001	Noah Braden	noahbraden27@gmail.com	406-438-2648	Karina Fredrick	karinafred2001@gmail.com	406-459-4093			
Butte				Hunter Carroll	guunterflaagen@gmail.com	406-498-1553						
Great Falls				Kahner George	kahner_george@af.us.mil	706-338-4727						
Missoula Wild	Ryan Hanavan	ryanphanavan@gmail.com	406-360-6842									
Missoula Spartans Northwest Avalanche	Dom Alfieri	dom2710@gmail.com	512-663-5031				Liz Phillips	laphillips1447@gmail.com	719-337-7741	Brianna Scholl	briannascholl20@gmail.com	616-826-7798
							Joni Petro	nwmmtlax@gmail.com	513-324-7773	Janie Toren	djkm5@gmail.com	406-471-2274

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Exhibit B

Last Chance Proposed Rule Changes

October 30, 2024

Hello all-

My name is Reid Christensen and I am president of Last Chance Lacrosse Club. At the last two MHSLA board meetings held September 10th and October 8th our state representative, Nathan Nachtsheim presented a few rules changes we would like to see voted on by the MHSLA during the next board meeting on Tuesday November 4th.

If you go back and review the minutes from the meeting which are attached, you will see where all the proposals have been mentioned. We wanted to share this with all of you since it was not sent out in the proposals that were distributed to all the clubs.

Discussions during MHSLA board meetings and among clubs in the league have been positive, with strong support for the rule changes proposed by Last Chance Lacrosse Club.

We hope you support these changes as our club feels they support the mission of the MHSLA "to organize, develop and promote high school lacrosse in Montana". Below are the proposed rule changes.

New Programs

New Programs may apply for provisional membership providing they meet all the criteria in Article H.b of the MHSLA By-laws.

New Programs must define boundaries and submit to MHSLA for approval. As per section 7.2, MHSLA reserves the right to approve and/or realign Program boundaries with the desire that cities/towns maintain only one Program, even if the city/town has multiple teams.

Program Requirements

Programs must have at least one (1) official registered with MT-LOA per team. The official must not hold the position of head coach and must be available to officiate games.

Games during the season that are not MHSLA.

Originally the blackout dates were only for school related activities, such as Prom. Last Chance Lacrosse Club is proposing an additional rule regarding out-of-conference play to make league scheduling easier.

Out-of-conference games are not allowed during conference play.

Structure of Division 1 and Division 2 teams

The original intention of Division 2 was to make it a developmental program for the Division 1, however we feel that this philosophy has been lost. Last year there were more D2 teams (9) than D1 teams (6). Division 2 teams in the league have seen significant growth in both strength and enrollment. The Last Chance Lacrosse Club is suggesting new rules to establish clearer eligibility criteria for Division 1 and Division 2 teams. These changes as outlined below aim to create a more equitable playing field for contests between both divisions, ultimately enhancing the development and promotion of high school lacrosse in Montana.

1. New programs may register teams at the D2 level for two seasons to allow for growth of the program, regardless of the number or age of registrants. New Programs may also register teams at the D1 level in the first two seasons.
2. **After** two seasons of a new program
 - **If** the number of registrants exceeds 18 players, **then** the Program must register the team at the D1 level.
 - **If** the number of registrants exceeds 26 players, **then** the Program must register at least one team at the D1 level and can register one team at the D2 level.
 - Each Program may register teams at D1 and D2 levels, but the number of D2 teams may not exceed the number of D1 teams in the program.

State Tournament

We would like to see that at the state tournament the only games that are bracketed are the Division 1 games. This is the only sport that has a championship for Division 2 or the developmental league.

We still want to see the D2 included in the State Tournament in a jamboree format, but without a championship being awarded. Each team would be guaranteed 3 games.

All State awards

We would like to have Division 1 only be awarded all state recognition. Again, this is the only sport that recognizes a developmental team for All State recognition.

Please consider these proposals to help with the development of the athletes within the MHSLA.

Respectfully,

Reid Christensen

President of Last Chance Lacrosse Club

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Exhibit C

Washington Article

On the Way Up: The Rise of the WHSBLA

WASHINGTON
SCHOOL BOYS'
LACROSSE
ASSOCIATION

High school lacrosse has existed in some form in Washington since 1979. The early days consisted of very few teams, spearheaded by a small group of coaches that would meet periodically at the Lakeside School (Bill Gates' alma mater). By the early 90's, just over a dozen programs played under the loose organization of the Washington Lacrosse Council. One member of that council was Vern Smith, an Illinois native who played lacrosse on the Johns Hopkins freshman team, and over the years had helped form multiple programs in the greater Seattle area.

Brandon Fortier, who first picked up a stick through the Bellevue Boys & Girls Club and later played college lacrosse at Whittier, returned to his hometown in 2000 and immediately devoted his time to growing the game. In 2002, he linked with Smith and others from the Council in efforts to truly legitimize high school lacrosse in Washington. The result was the creation of by-laws and the first board of the Washington High School Boys' Lacrosse Association (WHSBLA), a 501c3 non-profit organization that oversees boys high school lacrosse to this day.

For lacrosse to continue its growth in the state, the WHSBLA needed to recruit more coaches that were passionate about the game. With the influx of Microsoft employees in Seattle, and other east coast transplants, more former lacrosse players made the move to Washington and felt the same pull that got Smith, Fortier and others to join the effort. Add in names like New Jersey native Dejon Hush and former UAlbany player Ian O'Hearn, whom each helped inject energy and stability into the coaching ranks, and things began to truly take off. O'Hearn also joined the WHSBLA Board, and along with Fortier, has served for nearly 20 years.

"One of the things we established as young board members was the idea of legitimizing everything," Fortier said. "We need rules, we need boundaries in place. We brought that intensity to the WHSBLA, and that resulted in the board and the league being more disciplined and structured and going after the real athletes in the state."

The WHSBLA continued to add a handful of programs each year, and by 2011 the number of high school teams in Washington had reached 50. In 2019 alone, a total of 12 new programs began their first year of boys' lacrosse. This exponential growth began in 2003 — going from 19 high school programs to a record-high 94 programs in 2021, before the COVID-19 pandemic temporarily saw a decline.

The next task was spreading the word about the "Vertical Model" — a system designed to develop youth programs based on school district boundaries and build a pipeline that directly feeds into each respective high school. The ultimate goal is for every high school lacrosse program in the state to have its own specific feeder program, drawing athletes from their respective elementary and middle schools. This system does not rely on finding children that already play lacrosse, rather drawing kids with no experience and developing them into lacrosse players over time. The true definition of growth.

Thanks to this growth strategy, the WHSBLA has helped spark the formation of countless youth programs across the state, which in turn has developed sustainable models that allow for more high school lacrosse teams to blossom in Washington. The exponential growth has not been by accident, and it has made an impact both in the Seattle suburbs and beyond.

"The key to our success has been how we pushed for this. We fought hard to shift from a conglomerate mentality to a vertical model. It was this transition that triggered the phenomenal growth," Smith said. "At

Tahoma for example, within two years we had a 7th-8th grade program. Then, we got it down into fifth and sixth grades, and then third and fourth grades. Eventually, we were able to play at the kindergarten level. These kids all transition perfectly into our high school program.”

As a result, Washington has surpassed states like Colorado and Oregon on the list of western lacrosse powerhouses (all states west of the Mississippi), trailing just California and Texas for overall number of boys' high school lacrosse programs — two states with populations significantly higher than the Evergreen State.

The WHSBLA continues to work with the five boys' youth lacrosse organizations (CWLL, GELL, SSL, NSYL, SMYLA) to encourage this vertical model mindset. WHSBLA Board members help lead this charge, offering to drive hours across the state to help interested programs learn how to create an infrastructure for success.

“We didn't recreate the wheel,” said Richland head coach J. Chad Mitchell. “Brandon [Fortier] was happy to answer any questions we had and walk us through how they built their program. If you want to grow the sport, the vertical model is the only way to go. If you have that program, you know where you need to spend time building that pipeline.”

For programs like Richland, the vertical model created an environment that allowed teams to play locally. In the early 2010s, a 3.5-hour trip through the Cascade Mountains was essential for finding competitive lacrosse programs in Washington.

Nearly a decade after adopting the vertical model, Mitchell, whose six children played lacrosse, is witnessing a culture shift in the Tri-Cities of Eastern Washington (Kennewick, Pasco, Richland). Now up to five teams in the region, Mitchell is excited for the future of the game and grateful for the progress made.

As he built his Richland program, he envisioned it playing games at Fran Rish Stadium in the heart of town. The school received a bond in 2018 to install a new turf field — one in which Mitchell and his team fought to feature lacrosse lines. He'd walk his team onto the field and allow his players to dream of a brighter future.

“Guys, this is what we're building,” he said while his team kneeled collectively. “One day, we're going to play on Fran Rich Stadium.”

Mitchell and the Richland boys' lacrosse program got their wish. This year, they got the chance to scrimmage on the new turf field — fully equipped with lacrosse lines.

“We've always wanted to see lacrosse lines on that field,” Mitchell said. “People on the East Coast are going to think it's not a big deal, but when you've been working on growing lacrosse in the Tri-Cities and see the day when the Richland Bombers can step onto Fran Rish, under the lights, that's a huge deal.”

Mitchell's vision and success in Richland is one of many stories of inspiring growth in Washington.

In addition to the vertical model, the WHSBLA pushed for top high school coaches from eastern lacrosse hotbeds (i.e. West Genesee, Ward Melville, Garden City, Manhasset, McDonough, Boys Latin, St. Paul's, Haverford, Lincoln-Sudbury, etc.) to travel west and develop new coaches in Washington. The new wave of interested coaches needed top-level instruction, and the WHSBLA created a professional experience to speed up the process.

"The professionalization of the coaching staff has been a remarkable change," Smith said. "It's what's elevated our lacrosse to a competitive level."

Collegiate players from the state of Washington are making an impact in Division I, II and III programs. In any given year, there are 100+ young men from Washington playing on NCAA lacrosse teams, in addition to others playing on MCLA teams. High school teams from Washington are competing with some of the best of the Eastern Seaboard — something hard to imagine 20 years prior. As the single largest lacrosse organization in the Pacific Northwest, the WHSBLA has been instrumental in producing and developing these high level high school programs, and future college lacrosse players.

Every spring, dozens of Washington high school teams travel around the country over their spring breaks to compete against some of the best programs in the country (i.e. NY, MD, PA, MA, NJ, FL, TX, etc.). There has also been a sharp increase in high school teams traveling in the summer and fall for college recruitment tournaments and preparation for their spring seasons.

Lacrosse in the state of Washington is skyrocketing, and the WHSBLA has led the charge. As it heads into its 20th season as a sanctioned sport, lacrosse is continuing to rise in popularity across the state.

"We've grown a lot, and fast, and it's not an accident," Fortier said. "It's not the luck of the draw. We've done very specific things to create that growth, and it's working."

Story by Matt Hamilton - Baltimore, MD

MHSLA - Lacrosse

Exhibit D

Comments on LC Proposal

Brad Koon

Subject: FW: Chris Mac response

Here are our comments on the handbook so.

1. If we mandate the sudden cardiac arrest "info sheet" is signed by all players and parents, we should include this form for all the clubs to use. Same with the concussion ideally.
2. Stats- need to include face-off wins/losses and also add caused turn overs as well
3. We are fine with eliminating D1 and D2 and moving to JV and Varsity
4. We do not think a D2 player should be included in D1 All State. There is a massive difference in competition, we don't see how we could even compare the stats.

Here are our comments on the proposed rules letter sent from Helena.

New Programs

New Programs may apply for provisional membership providing they meet all the criteria in Article H.b of the MHSLA By-laws.

New Programs must define boundaries and submit to MHSLA for approval. As per section 7.2, MHSLA reserves the right to approve and/or realign Program boundaries with the desire that cities/towns maintain only one Program, even if the city/town has multiple teams.

Program Requirements

Programs must have at least one (1) official registered with MT-LOA per team. The official must not hold the position of head coach and must be available to officiate games. **Good. Does it matter if they are girls or boys ref?**

Games during the season that are not MHSLA.

Originally the blackout dates were only for school related activities, such as Prom. Last Chance Lacrosse Club is proposing an additional rule regarding out-of-conference play to make league scheduling easier.

Out-of-conference games are not allowed during conference play.- **We can see the importance of limiting these, but having "1 weekend" should be allowed. Geographically we are so spread out and some clubs should have the ability to play outside competition that sometimes is closer than most MHSLA teams. Some clubs have had a long history at their youth programs with other outside teams.**

Structure of Division 1 and Division 2 teams

The original intention of Division 2 was to make it a developmental program for the Division I, however we feel that this philosophy has been lost. Last year there were more D2 teams (9) than D1 teams (6). Division 2 teams in the league have seen significant growth in both strength and enrollment. The Last Chance Lacrosse Club is suggesting new rules to establish clearer eligibility criteria for Division 1 and Division 2 teams. These

changes as outlined below aim to create a more equitable playing field for contests between both divisions, ultimately enhancing the development and promotion of high school lacrosse in Montana. From what I understand, we did drop two D2 teams last year (Great Falls and Billings) then Missoula is also dropping their D2 team this year.

1. New programs may register teams at the D2 level for two seasons to allow for growth of the program, regardless of the number or age of registrants. New Programs may also register teams at the D1 level in the first two seasons.
2. **After** two seasons of a new program
 - If the number of registrants exceeds 18 players, **then** the Program must register the team at the D1 level. Needs to be some method to have a program be waived and able to play at the D2 level. For example, Butte at this point should not have a Varsity team. This would be for very limited circumstances and not for teams like Missoula.
 - If the number of registrants exceeds 26 players, **then** the Program must register at least one team at the D1 level and can register one team at the D2 level.
 - Each Program may register teams at D1 and D2 levels, but the number of D2 teams may not exceed the number of D1 teams in the program.- This could lead to programs limiting registration and making cuts. I know Boz discussed potentially having try-outs. This will do the opposite of growing the player numbers and again goes against what we are trying to do to elevate the sport. Bringing down the competition is not the way to do it.

State Tournament

We would like to see that at the state tournament the only games that are bracketed are the Division 1 games. This is the only sport that has a championship for Division 2 or the developmental league.

We still want to see the D2 included in the State Tournament in a jamboree format, but without a championship being awarded. Each team would be guaranteed 3 games. We do not agree with this, having a championship is fun, taking that away defeats the "mission statement" of the league. Being different from other sports is just fine. Sets us apart from them and could help with bringing players in. A spring sport that we compete with is Baseball where they have state/league titles at these levels. Football is understandable since the costs are so high for another tournament, that should not hold us back from our intended goal to promote the game. At the youth level where most of these players are coming from, we see growth with the tournament model much more than the league model with no championship. At the very least we could make two different "pods" to bracket the teams and have them play for a state title.

All State awards

We would like to have Division 1 only be awarded all state recognition. Again, this is the only sport that recognizes a developmental team for All State recognition. We could agree with this, if no D2 player would be eligible for any D1 award. The competition is so drastically different and there would be a massive difference in comparison of stats. That should help with clubs incentive to play up to the D1 level.

Thank you,

Chris Mac
Northwest Lacrosse
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From: Tori Hederman <torihederman@gmail.com>
Sent: Thursday, October 31, 2024 6:58 AM
To: Rob Leder <staterep.bhslax@gmail.com>
Cc: Sheridan Mavericks <mavericks@sheridanlacrosse.com>; Reid Christensen <reidbruin@gmail.com>; Montana Lacrosse <mhslapresident@gmail.com>; mhslavicepresident@gmail.com <mhslavicepresident@gmail.com>; Lynette Thompson <mhslatreasurer@gmail.com>; MHS LA Secretary <mhslasecretary@gmail.com>; kristi Brown <brownkj5@gmail.com>; Rimrocklacrosse@gmail.com <Rimrocklacrosse@gmail.com>; president.bhslax@gmail.com <president.bhslax@gmail.com>; scott4online@gmail.com <scott4online@gmail.com>; dave@jacksonholelacrosse.com <dave@jacksonholelacrosse.com>; Last Chance Lacrosse <lastchancelacrosseclub@gmail.com>; Buttelax@gmail.com <Buttelax@gmail.com>; Matt Stevens <mattstevens01@hotmail.com>; hanavan.amy@gmail.com <hanavan.amy@gmail.com>; no1packerfan29@yahoo.com <no1packerfan29@yahoo.com>; Ryan Robinson <nwlaxprez@gmail.com>; Stefanie Connors <stef.connors@gmail.com>; brynn.schwarz@beartoothlax.com <brynn.schwarz@beartoothlax.com>; treasurer.bhslax@gmail.com <treasurer.bhslax@gmail.com>; snowflake.bb31@gmail.com <snowflake.bb31@gmail.com>; laura.r.johnson@ctt.com <laura.r.johnson@ctt.com>; Jessica Sirs <jessica.sirs@gmail.com>; robinchecota@gmail.com <robinchecota@gmail.com>; schreckendgust@icloud.com <schreckendgust@icloud.com>; desdetling@gmail.com <desdetling@gmail.com>; TJ Gionet <cgionet14@gmail.com>; Nathan Nachtsheim <bss1af2@gmail.com>; comstock40@gmail.com <comstock40@gmail.com>; stephen.amish@mso.umt.edu <stephen.amish@mso.umt.edu>; Chris McLaughlin <nwlaxcoachdirector@gmail.com>
Subject: Re: Purposed Rules

I also asked about rule changes that were not addressed and they were similar to what Last Chance is ask for.

I think their rule changes about Varsity and JV make a lot of sense.

I know on the girls side we do have teams play a weekend of “out of conference games” and it has not made much of a difference when making the schedule. We have less teams

Thanks and the article was great
Tori

MHSLA - Lacrosse

Exhibit E

President Thesing Email

Brad Koon

Subject: FW: Purposed Rules

MHSLA Reps and Board members,

In endeavoring to update MHSLA rules there are some simple updates/adds/edits to streamline our programs and others which are much more complex, having historical precedent and contention. Before we dig too deep on these I'd like to be sure we are all considering the past and future when proposing complex changes as well as transparency to the intent of the change. As the majority of us were present in Helena to discuss the youth situation, which is troubling, this is a consideration which should be analyzed as we consider the updates.

Before we create rules dictating how each locality should divide teams or at which level the team should play we should understand the numbers of athletes in the near term youth to forecast what the future of each club at the HS level might look like. Moreover most of these changes seem more directed at the boys programs than the girls?

So for instance, has Helena, Sheridan, Missoula or others examined their youth numbers to determine if they will be able to successfully field two varsity squads in the next 3-5 years. This past season Missoula was only able to field one varsity team and are suggesting that this season they would only have a JV squad, I think? Missoula had 3 varsity teams in the last 8 years and are now down to one JV? Billings had 2 varsity teams in the last 5 years and are now down to 1 varsity. Bozeman and Kalispell have each had a varsity team in this timeframe and fluctuated on JV teams every few years. They arguably have the strongest programs in the state at the youth and high school levels, why is this? Does the triangle model of a large developmental base feeding to higher levels of play as the kids get to high school seem appropriate? This is certainly the case with most sports throughout the country; soccer, football, basketball, etc.

I'm curious if Helena East and West will be able to sustain 2 varsity teams moving forward? Helena only had one JV team last year and if the youth numbers have been reviewed to see how that will affect the future of each of these teams? What happens if this arrangement is not sustainable in the next 3-5 years as youth numbers decline? Has Helena considered combining their top tier players to have one varsity team similarly to how they did at the JV level this past season? If so wouldn't they likely be a contender to take down Bozeman and Glacier?

As I understand the rules being suggested it would also mandate that Sheridan, Cody, Great Falls, Missoula, and possibly Butte would ALL have to register as varsity teams? If this is the case the MHSLA would have 10 varsity teams and 4-5 JV teams or something near this? Is it realistic that these teams are truly playing the game at the highest level in our state? Do these teams want to play at the varsity level? Based on how they fared at the JV level last season would it seem appropriate?

I do not think calling the Teams Varsity or JV versus the current D1 and D2 really matters, that seems more like semantics?

The State tournament last year in Helena seemed like a really good event, the amount of passionate lacrosse people was real. It could be even better in '25 with the use of Carroll College, whose stadium is now redone, and the possible inclusion of 7th/8th youth? The D1 and D2 kids all had a lot of fun, its was competitive for the majority of the games and many levels of play for both boys and girls. There were many athletes recognized for their efforts which likely encourages the values were are trying to instill. It would seem we stuck to our Mission Statement: to organize, develop, promote, oversee and govern high school lacrosse in Montana, and to honor the game by instilling the values of scholastic achievement, sportsmanship, and individual development. Nowhere does it say that we only award kids at the highest level of the game? In handing the kids their awards the enthusiasm was truly palpable, I actually didn't think it was worthwhile prior to being personally involved.

I am impartial to the All State awards but it seems like our job is to recognize players and programs at all levels if development and growth are truly the goal? We do not have to do what the sanctioned sports are doing...

On that note, I spoke to Dan Mills, Principal of Bozeman High and executive board member of MHSA representing AA sports, who has a kid in the youth lacrosse program. Dan voted to explore the sanctioning of lacrosse at the HS level two years ago, the vote did not pass. His perspective was it would be a few years before it would be considered again as the state is working thru the addition of baseball. Once considered it would likely take a few years to raise the money (typically 6 figures), do the studies required for Title IX, and then time to build and initiate the program into the schools.

I want us to be cautious to study "the why" behind what we are doing?

One consideration in thinking about truly growing the game would be to have each town have one varsity team, as many developmental teams as make sense based on the pipeline of youth, coaches, refs, parent volunteers etc. Working now to invite Jackson WY, Cheyenne, Teton Valley, Twin Falls, Ammon Warriors and other teams to join MHSLA as they have been somewhat duped by Boise, Utah and Colorado. This would add 2-4 varsity teams, and some JV teams...this to me is growing the game... For the new programs: apply for membership, pay the dues, fees for MLOA and bring a ref...these seem like simple and attainable barriers to entry?

The rule changes for the girls game seemed quite reasonable. Time between games, games per day and stats updates were the main points.

JR thanks for passing along the article. I reached out to the Washington program to discuss the vertical approach in Montana, I haven't heard back yet.

I believe our biggest barrier to growth are distances and weather. In most places the farthest games are 30-40 minutes away...conservatively our closest games are 1.5 hours away with 2.5 to 3 being "normal" for most programs. Maybe we need to think about how we gather to play games, maybe if we travel that far we play for 2 days, maybe more games in a weekend? Our circumstances are different so trying to mimic other programs might not be a one sized approach?

As you visit with your stakeholders and boards please consider "the why"...

Appreciate the group and know we will work together to make this program better then we found it.

Sincerely,
Todd Thesing

Exhibit F

Sheridan Proposed Rule Changes

November 3, 2024

MHSLA Board Representatives,

In recent weeks I have had the opportunity to meet with many of you, to discuss in great detail some of the issues plaguing the growth and sustainability of lacrosse in our region today. I have also been able to connect with coaches and program leaders from past years to gain a better understanding of the history of this league and the youth programs feeding into it.

Issues such as- competing sports, travel costs, lack of schedule coordination within clubs, funding and accessibility were common talking points but the cessation of the league's Boundary Document stood out as the single biggest policy change affecting lacrosse in Montana today. Objectively, the league has experienced a steep decline in programs, teams and players since.

After reviewing several past MTLL and MHSLA rulebooks it was obvious that the increasingly nuanced language and boundary leniency over the years lead to the removal altogether. One can easily overly the USAL and Sports Engine registration data to see the affects of those changes year over year.

Below, I have for consideration a rule change proposal to reinstate the original Boundary Document language that facilitated up-to 14 boys varsity teams and 9 girls teams. Rule 7 in it's current form is in black font with some omissions visible. The original MTLL language (verbatim) is in blue with subtle changes in red.

7. ADMISSION OF NEW TEAMS

7.1. New teams may apply for provisional membership providing they meet all the criteria in Article H.b of the MHSLA By-laws.

7.2. When forming, a new program must establish and name itself around a single high school unless they are requesting to be a conglomerate in which case.

- A new program may not apply as a conglomerate program if there is already a conglomerate program, the new program would be pulling from is part of the league.
- Once boundaries are determined, the MHSLA boundary documents will be updated accordingly.

7.3. New teams must have at least one (1) new official(s) register with MT-LOA. The official must not hold the position of head coach and must be available to officiate games.

7.4. Program Boundaries

7.4.1. In cities with more than one program, parents and players can choose which program they want to play for.

8. Conglomerate Programs (CPs) and Splitting of Teams

8.1. A conglomerate program is a program that pulls players from multiple schools.

8.2. Conglomerate programs will be restricted by the League Boundary Document outlined in the BOUNDARY DOCUMENT addendum

8.3. The Boundary Documents will be created by the Board using existing registration numbers, school proximity, school enrollment numbers, and program requests to create:

- Player pools designed to attract and develop and attract new athletes to the sport of lacrosse.
- A more level playing field by creating similar player pools using school enrollment.
- Reasonable travel times to practices for players coming from non-Primary schools.

8.4. A program must split their teams, or create a new program, when their program consists of at least 36 players for a boy's program, 18 of which represent a single school, and at least 18 players representing one or more schools; or 40 players for a girl's program, 20 of which represent a single school, and at least 20 players representing one or more schools.

- Upcoming 8th graders of the feeder program will be used in determining if a team must split. 50% of 8th graders will be the sum used to determine the number of players moving up but do not count towards the 34 or 40 player counts.

8.5. Conglomerate programs may not set a roster size, prohibit registration from certain schools, hold cuts, or otherwise artificially limit the number of players registering.

Teams Splitting

8.6. Programs will be notified by the league they will be required to split based on returning players and upcoming players for the upcoming season as outlined by the master calendar in order provide them enough time for the program to evaluate all their options and prepare to either split their program into two or to keep one program with two teams.

8.7. Any program that does not split their team or program when mandated will have their team's ineligible for post-season play and all players will not be eligible for All-State recognition.

8.8. When a new team forms, all players attending schools deemed within that new team's designated boundaries must play for the new team.

8.9. When a team splits and a new team is formed seniors will not be grandfathered into the old team. Juniors, sophomores, freshmen, and new players (including new seniors) must play with the new team.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'JR Wright', with a stylized flourish at the end.

JR Wright
Director, Boys Head Coach
Sheridan Lacrosse Club