

January 23, 2009

Dear Members of the MPA Ad Hoc Committee on Athletic Policy,

There has been much discussion of late regarding the MPA Ad Hoc Committee on Athletic Policy's proposal to withdraw from the Council of New England Secondary School Principals' Associations (CNESSPA) competitions. While I can find no real financial burden imposed upon the Yarmouth School Department through participation at the New England Championships in either cross country or track and field, the purpose of this letter is not to address the disconnect between withdrawal from New England and monetary savings. Rather, the purpose of this letter is to address the great intangible benefits to our state's many cross country and track and field athletes afforded by participation in the New England Championships.

Participation in the New England Championships is an incredible achievement for any individual or team who is fortunate enough to qualify. Because it is such an honor, it serves as a major goal that teams statewide seek to accomplish. It is the culmination of a successful season and a reward for hard work and dedication. Unlike a state championship in cross country, which is only awarded to six teams and six individuals, participation in the New England Championships is an honor bestowed upon more teams and individuals than just the state champions. In addition, it provides an opportunity for the best teams and individuals of all classes to compete against each other. Moreover, it is the only postseason, post-state championship opportunity available for teams. While the Footlocker Cross Country Championships serves this purpose for individuals—albeit on a much larger scale and with more stringent qualifying requirements—the New England Championships is a high-level athletic competition pitting the best individuals and teams in New England against each other.

The New England Championship is an important intermediate stepping stone, bridging the gap between the competition level at the Maine State Championships and the most elite tier of competition that many athletes are not ready for in their athletic development. The New England Championship is an integral part of athlete development. This is partly because the state cross country and track and field seasons are relatively short. Many athletes have put in a great deal of training and want to utilize their peak fitness in additional competitions. When I was in high school (Yarmouth High School Class of 1996), Maine did not participate in the New England Championships. With the state championship on Halloween and the Footlocker Northeast Regional on the Saturday after Thanksgiving, there was a very large gap between competitions. For our best athletes, this is a disadvantage. Other than New England, other states have Meets of Champions in which teams and individuals from all competition divisions can compete for statewide bragging rights (*see e.g.* New York state). As an athlete who might have benefited in my development from the New England Championships, it would be a shame to deprive athletes of this opportunity that has been enjoyed during the last decade.

Along similar lines, the New England Championships are important to the process of recruiting athletes for participation in college athletics. For those who qualify, it is a

precious chance to showcase their talents to college coaches who do not have time to attend all the various state championships, but will attend the New England Championships. As college admissions become exceedingly competitive, athletic achievement can be an important factor for many students' college admissions portfolio. Removing Maine's athletes from the New England competitions may not necessarily limit the visibility of our athletes, but it will certainly do nothing to increase our athletes chances of getting noticed by coaches and getting assistance, financial or admissions-wise, from college athletics programs.

Clearly, the MPA seeks to provide equal opportunity to all Maine high school athletes. It is also understandable that because of hard economic times, many Maine communities will find it difficult, as individual families and/or booster groups, to foot the bill for the New England Championships if their teams or individuals qualify. Providing our athletes with no opportunity to compete can certainly be termed "equal." However, the loss of opportunity carries far greater costs than should be bourn on the back of our student athletes. I would ask that you please reconsider your proposal and continue to allow the runners, jumpers, and throwers of Maine to compete at the New England Championships. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Matt Lane
Assistant Coach, Yarmouth High School
&
The Athletes of Yarmouth Cross Country and Track and Field