

Please note: Significant changes to league rules and event offerings were made or proposed at this meeting. They are highlighted in red. Please read carefully!

**Annual MFL League Meeting
Sunday, June 10, 2007
Milton Academy, Milton, MA**

The meeting was called to order at 12:17 pm, by the president, Chris Palmer.

2006-2007 Board Members present: Chris Palmer, Lisa Honeyman, Joyce Albert, Rob Croteau, Patrice Jean-Baptiste, Holly Loell, PJ Wexler, Jim Murphy, Wendy O'Neil.

The consent agenda was approved without objection.

The board gave approval to Chris Palmer to purchase a new printer for the MFL, The board authorized purchase up to \$400 limit.

Chris presented the idea of forming a non-Board development and outreach committee or board. He is looking for feedback. It was met with general approval. Patrice suggests we need to be clear to define its purpose. A great way to include people who are no longer active in the league but still care about it and would like to be involved, without having to go to tournaments. There was consensus to proceed.

Chris thanked the departing board members, Jim Murphy and Holly Loell for their service during the past 2 years.

Holly Loell motioned to adjourn the board portion of the meeting. 2nd by Joyce Albert. The Board meeting was adjourned at 12:22.

The Annual League Meeting was called to order at 12:22 pm. The minutes of last year's Annual meeting were accepted without objections.

STATE OF THE LEAGUE REPORT (Palmer)

- Number of entries up this year by about 60 since last year, and more individual students participated. Two new school hosted tournaments. Debate stepped back a bit.
- Tournament director's guide is still in the works.
- The New Coach manual has been well received. Lisa seeks ideas for revisions.

TREASURER'S REPORT (Croteau)

- We currently have about \$6500 in the bank. This is about \$3000 more than we had last year.
- How can we use this money constructively? Rob seeks ideas on how to best use our resources.
- Rob asks the league to deal with teams that do not pay their entry fees at MFL run tournaments. How do we handle this? We need clear policies.
- If tournament directors commit to entering amount received when schools register at tournaments, then the registration program can bring up a notice the next time that team registers for a tournament, reminding them that they owe money to a school or the MFL. If the balance remains unpaid for a while, then we need to figure out what the consequences will be. Chris will update the program to handle this. Rob will draft new guidelines over the summer. Of course, the league must be mindful of extreme/extenuating circumstances.

- General agreement that the MFL Board should stand behind individual tournament directors to help them deal with this issue when a school (or schools) do not meet their financial obligations.
- It would be a fair part of the policy that a school that has not met their financial obligations in the past to exclude them from a tournament.

Thank you to Silver Lake for a great hosting job for States this year.

CALENDAR FOR NEXT YEAR (Palmer)

- Chris put together a possible calendar which he handed out.
- At issue – No one has offered to host the Hall of Fame tournament. However, Dighton-Rehoboth would like to host a tournament in early October. We discussed the possibility of allowing D-R to host their own tournament (speech + debate events) and also honoring the HoF members at this time and agreed to allow them to do this for this year only. We are cautioned that we are breaking a league tradition and do not want this to set precedent. Perhaps we should run the HoF in the future later in the year, rather than first thing in the season.
- Is Milton considering hosting the novice tournament next year? They must apply for permission, but October 13 looks possible for them.
- States – not firm sites yet. Tufts University may be willing to host States for Speech. Tentative dates: Speech – April 5 and Debate – April 12. There was support for running debate and speech on different dates so that students who had qualified could compete in both events.
- Rob asked if it was an issue that we allowed triple entry at States. With the exception of the prep room, none were noted.
- Much discussion about a date for Silver Lake to host a tournament. Maybe Feb 2? This requires NFL Congress to shift or run at Silver Lake. Silver Lake does have 4 rooms they could give to NFL Quals. PJ notes that this would be a step away from avoiding conflicts between speech and debate tournaments. There doesn't seem to be any way around it.
- The proposed calendar was accepted without objection.

IN ROUND COMMUNICATION (Honeyman)

- Proposed addition to rules:

“No one may communicate with competitors while they are competing, with the exception of judges or official time keepers designated by a judge or a tournament official, except as officially allowed by the rules of the event.”

The proposed addition was accepted without objection.

- How do we enforce this and other similar rules? What would the penalty be?
- We need to go through our rules and decide how to handle such things -- define what are TAB room issues? What is a disqualifying event? What is to be left to the discretion of the judges? Joyce will work on this over the summer.

LEGALITY OF MATERIAL (Palmer)

- Proposed addition to rules:

“No material that was not obtained in a lawful manner may be used as evidence, scripts, source material or otherwise, in any event.”

The proposed addition was accepted without objection.

- Chris notes that we should not allow students to behave in an illegal manner, even if what they are doing does not actually break MFL rules.
- Jim Murphy notes that this is trickier with debate evidence. Citations are perfectly legal. The only way evidence could be unlawfully obtained is if you broke into someone's office and stole something.
- "Lawful manner" will be defined as "Acceptable under the laws of Massachusetts and the United States."

REVISIONS TO COACHES' MANUAL

- Adjust rules to reflect changes made today.
- Expand section about where to get legal material.
- Nothing else suggested – Lisa asks for people to e-mail additional suggestions to her.

TOURNAMENT LENGTH (Cavet/Jean-Baptiste)

Places where we lose time:

1. Judges Meeting

- It is too long and maybe even counter-productive.
- General agreement to restrict judge meeting to very basics of running a round and then refer questions to individuals at TAB table. This means every tournament MUST have judge manuals available. It must absolutely be a requirement.
- Maybe we could add some Do's/Do Not's to the judges handbook.

Joyce lists some other reasons why tournaments run so long:

2. Computers

Sometimes are an issue - benefits to running on a computer far outweigh problems that can happen early in the day.

3. Adds/Changes that take place on the morning of the tournament

It seems to be the same schools over and over and over again. This adds at least 30 minutes.

4. Missing judges.

It's the same schools over and over. They say they will bring them but don't give names at registration and then don't show up with the required number.

5. Very poorly trained judges.

Many judges coming to tournaments have not been prepared by their coaches. Ballots are not being filled out properly so it takes time when they are handing in the ballots to make corrections. Many don't understand what their obligation is and have attitude about it – sometimes refusing to judge rounds or just disappearing. They don't understand that they need to stay for the final round and give the TAB room a hard time. We don't have all sorts of extra judges around. They are never where they should be where you need them. Often this holds up final rounds, which can hold up the tournament significantly.

6. Judges listen to students who shouldn't be in the round

We have unbalanced sections – some much too large – and then that delays the tournament as that judge and the students in that room are all late for the next round. (And it causes imbalanced sections – another problem.)

7. Coaches in the morning are not giving out the code numbers to the judges and the students so the first round doesn't start on time.

8. **Varsity Extemp Cross-Ex**

Adds time to the end of the day. Is it worth it? Maybe we should take that out so that the rest of the league doesn't have to wait for it. (Discussion about this follows after #11).

9. **People are not calling in on time in the morning**

so we can't get changes started soon enough.

Wendy comments that in California tournaments are much longer than here (she coached there before moving to MA) by about 4 hours. Since we have switched over to the computer we've shaved off 1-2 hours per tournament in the past 6 years. She wonders why this is coming up as an issue. The length of the tournaments seems manageable.

Rob – Coaches do all of the things that were brought up because they can get away with it. Why do we allow adds at all? Why don't we confront coaches that are not calling in on time? We need consequences so that the coaches who are consistently doing this stop.

Joyce – But it is the kids who pay the price. How do we tell a kid who comes that they have to sit in the cafeteria all day because their coach forgot to register him and he's there.

Jim – We can't control everything, but we can have incentives and disincentives. If it means a kid suffers because a coach isn't able to 'sneak him in' then coaches won't bring kids that they won't be able to add. One way to limit this would be to impose nuisance fees for last minute changes. Take judge cell phone numbers to call them when they disappear. (Won't they shut off their cell phones?) Give TAB room number to call if there is an issue in a round, too. Charge for missing judge.

PJ – Maybe take adds if we can accommodate them, but charge \$50 on the spot. Make the fine hurt.

Chris – Half of the things on the list have to do with registration. The others to do with judges. Maybe we need more consistency in the mornings with who does what. Every tournament has its own director so it is not handled by the same people every week.

Wendy – Unreported drops are another huge headache. But, it's the same schools every time. Patterns are issues. The coaches are calling in saying everyone is coming but they don't actually know what is going on with their team.

Joyce – These coaching issues are primarily with teams that don't really have coaches. These are the programs that need support. We can't just keep hitting them with penalties. They actually need our help. The board needs to identify teams having problems and appoint a liaison for them. Be sure their judges have been trained, and they know what their responsibilities are.

Patrice – It sounds like we know which schools are causing the problem. We give them a limited time to get their acts together. Don't keep 'understanding' all year long.

Holly – Affirms idea of assigning mentor and giving help to schools that are struggling.

Wendy – Programs that are not struggling and are established need to start following the rules.

Patrice – There should be no adds allowed on the morning of the tournament. Period. If drops are not called in by 8:00 am a larger fine should be charged.

Chris – We have some penalties that we never apply. Let's start applying them. Also, if we notice this happening, we need to both levy the fine AND help the team. Not, just levy fine and call it a day.

Wendy – There needs to be some discretion on the part of the tournament director when a coach makes a mistake. This needs to be up to the individual tournament director.

Chris: Are we for or against saying that there will be absolutely no adds on the morning of the tournament? Is this a league rule or guideline? We discussed this extensively. Are we better off increasing charges? Some say, if you can afford it, you'll just pay for it. What about coaches who know each other? Will some get preferential treatment over a coach that doesn't know anyone because they are new to the league?

Chris – Draft guidelines that clearly delineate rules. (Joyce will do this). Try them out next year and try to get everyone on the same page. This is too hard to do in a committee meeting with 20 people. This can go in the tournament manual.

Chris – Issue of Judge Training

- Wendy will run a judge training at the Novice tournament in October. We will try to tape this. She will also offer more judge trainings during the year. She will even go to the schools to help run a judge training.
- In TAB we will keep track of which team's judges are struggling the most and notify the head coach that they need to do a better job training their judges.
- Joyce notes that this is mostly a problem from teams that have rules that every parent must judge at 2 tournaments so their child can participate. The head coaches of these teams need to take ultimate responsibility for training these folks. We need to take instant action to make the coaches aware that their judges are having problems.

Patrice – We need a stand-by place for judges. This could be a judges' lounge or even the cafeteria. We just need to know where to find people.

Lisa – Finals is a huge issue. When a judge doesn't show up to pick up a ballot, we can't find them or anyone to replace them because everyone just disappears. They go to watch a final round – get coffee – leave. They need to know to wait until there is an "All Clear."

PJ – Can we create a list of stand-by judges? This would let people know that they have a place they should go and that they may be used.

Wendy – If a judge picks up a ballot that someone else drops, can we pay them?

Chris notes that at Yale, if a judge doesn't show up there is a fine assessed and it is given to the judge who picks up the round. Maybe we could do something like that?

10. Award Ceremonies

We lose a lot of time there – raffles, thank-you's etc. Can we start those things while the tournament is still being tabulated?

What about SAB? When could we do this? Could we do it between round 3 and finals? For some students this is dead time but not for others.

Lisa – Is it important enough to carve off 30 minutes if students lose their voice?

Rob – The day is 13 hours long. We need to cut this down. Students won't participate if the day is too long.

Joyce – The mornings are more of an issue. Some kids are up at 5:30 am and sometimes don't start competition until 10:00 am. We need to cut this down.

Much discussions about length of awards ceremony. Can we ask tournaments to keep raffles out of awards ceremonies?

Lisa – Let's focus on the things that the league can control and not take away from what is special about individual tournaments.

11. Reading Breaks

Don't announce them – just post. That definitely saves some time.

Back to Extemp Cross-Ex

- Students really enjoy it and find it helpful. Adds another level. Holds students accountable.
- From a TAB perspective it is problematic – we don't always have judges capable of running the round. It means we have a very small judges pool because the limited pool has to judge week after week after week.
- Would an extemp final-round point-person help speed things up?
- Susan notes that in the prep room it is not an issue. We need an official timer in the room to take that away from the judges. That lets the 3 judges listen and write.
- Last year there was a lot of confusion about timing and how to run the round. We need to clarify this for the judges. The kids know how it works, but not the judges.
- The judges need to know that they cannot fill out their ballots and make someone wait while they do that.

General agreement that we will try to make this work next year, with a point person to run the final varsity extemp round and a timer to handle that part so the judges can concentrate on writing comments and what the students are saying in their speeches and in cross-ex.

12. Special Events

- The league can't mandate that special events cannot be offered. That's a tournament choice, not an MFL league choice.
- Are special events really causing tournaments to run slowly? Most say it is not the events themselves – it's the ability to double and in some cases triple-enter that causes delays.

13. Triple entry

Usually allowed only in the case of multiple. By requiring that multiple run 3 times rather than once, it adds time. Multiple is a constant issue. Many value because it is a "team" event. Good teaching moments – and creative. If you are going to run it 3 times – maybe don't allow triple entry? (This discussion just sort of ended without any resolution.)

Board Member Position to assign

- "Project Manager" to work with tournament hosts to try to streamline tournaments.

14. Finals

We discussed the possibility of forgoing final rounds and having a 4th prelim instead. Other states do this and it works for them.

Reasons to continue running Finals

- Educational value of sending kids who don't break to watch finals
- Pushes kids to strive to do better to break
- Not all programs travel to tournaments where final rounds are offered, so this gives the opportunity to smaller, newer programs to compete in such an event.

Reasons to switch to no finals and 4th round

- Educational value to having students compete in every round so that no one is just sitting around.
- Cuts down time of tournament.
- Kids see more students compete.
- On deck can still be called ahead – just call numbers – so it doesn't lengthen the awards ceremony much.

The middle school league runs two prelim rounds with 2 judges each instead of 3 rounds, drops lowest rank and then breaks to finals. Judging requirement is still 1 for 5 entries. Would this work in the high school level? It would certainly cut the time down. Middle school league has as many students involved – but only offers 8 events. It would limit how much of the competition each student would see since they would only see 9 other kids instead of 14 or 15. High school kids want to see the competition.

Joyce says that maybe the Gracia can try offering 4 rounds instead of 3 and no finals to see how it goes.

Could do this for the beginning of the season and then at some point switch over to running finals.

Consensus of room – Try it out at D-R in October and the Gracia in November and offer it as a suggestion to future tournament directors.

EVENTS (Jean-Baptiste)

- Group Discussion
 - This is a huge event. Does it serve the league to eliminate an event that is popular?
 - Is it valuable to have this discussion again (to eliminate or modify group)? We have it every few years.
 - Would it make sense to make it novice only? It doesn't force kids to speak. And it is a speech tournament. It was noted that kids don't actually have to speak in congress, either.
 - In the past, one argument for keeping Group is that is a place for students who will eventually do debate and congress to get started. Are there enough other opportunities for students to get started in debate now that PFD and impromptu are offered at more tournaments?
 - This event does not teach kids the delivery skills that are required in every other event. They don't have to stand up, gesture, make eye contact, articulate etc. What does it teach?
 - Group is a dishonest event. "I'm going to 'win' by being more courteous to you than you are to me."
 - There are more judges that react negatively to Group than any other event we offer.

- Group discussion can be seen as a feeder event. The negotiation skills learned are the same ones needed in congress. The ‘thinking off the top of your head’ skills are transferable to impromptu and extemp. These skills should be developed so that students can feed into other categories.
- Instead, should we raise the bar? Follow the lead of the Holly – assign books to discuss? Or assign the editorial page from some date’s NYT? Make it harder to do well if you don’t prepare? According to Dan Sapir that didn’t work when it was tried before. This spins the event towards preparation for extemp or congress. Does the event have to be geared towards current events?

There was significant conversation about the difference between debate and group discussion and if group discussion is a training event for any other events.

Proposal by Newton South: “Group Discussion will become a novice event only. It will no longer be offered at States, starting with the 2008-2009 season.” Second by Needham.

This is open for comment and discussion until the fall meeting. A vote will be taken at the fall Board meeting on October 13, 2007.

- Children’s Literature
 - Great way to move novices into MFL
 - Material already fits into PL, PR or PO, so why separate this out? Bring life back to those other events. KL does tell a story and could be absorbed into those other events.
 - It’s very hard to judge humorous vs. dramatic. How do you judge Dr. Seuss against T.S. Elliot? Does it matter that the genres are so different or is poetry poetry?

Patrice – are we asking the right questions? Does the event have enough value to stand on its own?

We decided to leave KL alone for now.

- Radio
 - Where is the value in this event? It’s good for kids interested in a career in radio, but how many actually go into this field?
 - Should we eliminate this event? The numbers are dropping every year. It may be dying on its own.
 - Impromptu would be a good replacement. If we eliminate non-interp events we should be sure to offer some more platform events.
 - We could put this on probation for the 2007-2008 year. See how it goes.

Proposal by Needham: “Replace Radio Broadcasting with Impromptu beginning with the 2008-2009 season.” Second by Silver Lake.

This is open for comment and discussion. A vote will be taken by the Board at the fall meeting on October 13, 2007.

- Impromptu
 - If this is going to become an official event, we need MFL rules so there is consistency this year in preparation for the 2008-2009 season. Dan Sapir will draft rules. Look at current middle school rules, NFL rules and college rules and come up with rules for next season.

- Novice Reading
 - Nice way to get novices involved
 - Should we only offer it until, say, January? Then force all students into regular events?
 - What about kids who join teams later in the season? Maybe we could continue to offer NR throughout the season, but not at States. This way, we give students the opportunity to participate no matter when in the season they join their team, but force them into the varsity level if they want to qualify for States.
 - Reminder – It is already an MFL rule that students cannot stay in NR if they break to finals twice. We need to be sure the computer can flag students who have reached finals twice and prevent them from registering for the event again. This moves people out so the event should get smaller as the year goes on.
 - Possibility - Eliminate event but offer trophies to top 2 novices in each category. So there are top 6 trophies for event + 1st place novice and 2nd place novice trophy.

We discussed all of these issues and then. . . .

Proposal by Milton Academy: “Novice reading will no longer be offered at States and we will enforce the ‘two times in finals and you’re out’ rule.” Second by Silver Lake. Passed unanimously.

In keeping with the philosophical argument that we should not offer “State Championships” in any novice events if we are not going to offer them in all, the following proposal was made. Since it was not on the agenda for this meeting, however, it will be voted on officially on October 13 at the fall Board meeting. We also briefly discussed the difference between debate and speech and decided to restrict our focus to speech events for now.

Proposal by Needham: “Novice extemp will not be offered at States.” Second by Natick. This is open for comment and discussion. A vote will be taken by the Board at the fall meeting on October 13, 2007.

Proposal to adjourn by Silver Lake. Seconded by Needham.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:38 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Lisa Honeyman

VP/Secretary