

Massachusetts Forensic League

Board Meeting Minutes, 11/16/2003

Present: Mark McNeil, Judy Crocker, Will Crocker, Debbie Simon, Chris Palmer

Opening remarks by Mark about the spirit of the board, encouraging cooperation for the sake of every student of the league.

1. At large board membership elections.

Mark began by recusing himself from discussion about the individuals who put in for membership as at large board members; he had talked to the candidates and wanted to be unbiased about the process.

Mark then presented statements from the candidates wishing to be at large members. Judy asked if there is any restriction on number of people from the same school on the board. No explicit restriction exists in the Constitution or Handbook, but there may be a philosophical issue with that.

Debbie noted that a small school presence is important. She also noted that in California the vice presidents' job was curriculum development; the league there maintained a packet of articles and advice for new schools along with a newsletter that came out periodically. New schools therefore had far greater information available to them when starting out. Debbie also noted that the board should include a presence from the Lincoln-Douglas debate coaches.

Judy noted that we have not had anything to hand new schools besides the constitution and handbook which is not valuable for new members. Judy also expressed a desire for new blood so that we're not longer all the same people trading the same jobs.

Mark noted as a general aside that the board has been traditionally limited its role and scope to auditing tournaments, and that perhaps other functions should be considered. One or two people could audit tournaments and concentrate on them; as Scott Wunn said about the NFL, we are a teaching society which has tournaments, not the tournaments themselves.

After a preferential ballot, the candidates elected to the board as at large members were:

Joyce Albert, Natick High School
Dave Cohen, Brookline High School
Mark Fellowes, Revere High School
Deanie Goodman, Wilson Middle School
Lisa Honeyman, Newton South High School

Beena Koshy, Sacred Heart High School

Paul Wexler of Needham High School, the next highest vote getter, was designated an alternate member in the event that one of those elected as an at-large member is unable or unwilling to serve.

2. Hall of Fame

Mark informally proposed that a Board position be created centered on the Hall of Fame and the Hall of Fame tournament, creating a signature event to emphasize the history of the league. He suggested the Hall of Fame director should be a board position, which would require a constitutional change at the next all coaches' meeting.

3. Board activity

Judy suggested that despite the trauma our personal lives already suffer, we should attempt to meet more often as a board to advance many of these projects. This suggestion was greeted with reluctant inevitability.

Debbie proposed a forum for the website for speech and debate questions, which will serve as an active living repository for the league and for information. She noted that many new coaches ask her questions and if those answers could be preserved future coaches might have a good starting point. Chris will set this up in the near future, saying it is relatively simple technically.

Chris suggested we try to have regular meetings at tournaments during the first round before anything needs tabulating. The board agreed to begin this practice. Tournament directors should take note that the board members must be kept free for the first round of sanctioned tournaments.

4. Website

Debbie began with some utterly embarrassing effusive praise for your humble secretary that does not need to be repeated.

Mark then asked how going email-only would be received. Chris said that without exception any coach he's talked to about communication has stated that they are fine with the idea themselves, but wonder if "everyone else would be."

The board then unanimously agreed that web and email communication will now supplant paper mail communication as the primary method of league communication, both unofficial and official. Mail is too expensive and infrequent, the website's communication tools are easy and instant, and email accounts are freely and easily acquired.

Chris will send one last postcard mailing will go out to the league telling them about the website and informing the league of this policy. See also Communication Policy below.

We also have to look into contingency plans for what happens if Chris gets hit by a bus to ensure the website is still viable without Chris' machine. Chris noted that the technical requirements are rather complex, however, due to the wide array of tools used for the website. It is not impossible that such a beast exists, however – Chris will look into it. Future website priority will also be to creating online communication tools for the league.

4. Dues

Judy noted that not enough schools have paid their dues, and the Board has to begin enforcing the no-qualifier rules. Therefore, **after January 1st 2004 no unpaid school will qualify anyone for the state tournament until dues are paid.** Next year, November 1st, 2004 will be a hard deadline for dues for qualifying for the state tournament.

5. Non-profit status

Judy has acquired a federal tax ID number for the league. She has investigated incorporation and acquiring nonprofit status. Non profit status will take about a year and incorporation will take a while as well.

An attorney friend of Judy's will do the process more or less pro bono, but we have to meet with him; if the league wants nonprofit status the board must prepare articles of incorporation. The total price of this process will not exceed \$1,000.

Mark and Judy note that a decision is required for not for profit status. Among other benefits to incorporating, if something happens at a tournament the board officers might be individually liable. With incorporation, we remove the officers from personal liability for incidents.

Incorporation also opens up greater possibility for fundraising, grants, and other donation opportunities for the league. We don't have to have a decision on the entire process. Judy requests board permission to meet with Paul Tardif (the attorney) and discuss the issue further before making any decisions.

This item will be moved at the top of the agenda at the Holly tournament board meeting as Judy will not be present at Lincoln-Sudbury.

6. Duo rules –

Chris noted that we need to formalize duo rules and prevent future confusion now that the CFL rules have settled down. The board adopted the new rules permanently; Duo is now a memorized event.

This item led to a broader discussion about updating the handbook and event guides in particular; many old copies of ballots are floating around that include such things as a group discussion moderator. The handbook itself is inconsistent and the last revision of the handbook that floats around most commonly was in 1999.

Debbie also noted that the judges' handbook is different from week to week. By creating a more definitive MFL handbook for the MFL events, we could also produce a definitive judges' guide for all tournaments to use. If a tournament offers other events then they may add supplements.

A Handbook Committee was formed with Lisa Honeyman as chair and Chris Palmer as one member. Joyce Albert would also be on this committee if she agrees.

For consistency, the MFL events would have to use the official MFL handbook as of the beginning of next year.

Debbie then added when we agree with the wording on the handbook, she would like to coordinate a judge's video. She would include demonstrations of events from 8-9 different schools, and the video would go out to every school and it would play during the judges briefings, serving as both examples for judges of the events done properly and teaching examples for schools starting a program. The Board agreed that such a project would be hugely worthwhile.

Judy knows someone who might be able to do the production work, filming and editing and such, and will follow up on that. Debbie would coordinate the script and the groundwork of who would do what.

7. Board and League Procedures

Mark noted that we have a constitution, we have a tournament handbook, but we have no board procedures or bylaws. He proposed formalizing processes and pushing for more transparency in board functions.

A. Expenditures and reimbursements:

No policy on spending League funds existed. Mark proposes as an initial procedure anything under \$300 would be authorized by the president; anything over that the whole board would have to vote on. The board agreed that Judy should take the lead on setting up a more detailed expenditures policy. Re-imbursements must be authorized ahead of time or will not be given.

Mark also asked the entire board to consider the areas we can spend money and create a proposed rough budget for the year. By better planning and record keeping, we can perform audits and produce expenditures reports at the end of the year. We should all think on potential expenditures for the future and establish a budget. We will consider these proposed budgets at the Lincoln-Sudbury meeting.

Judy said that the budget should be based entire on dues, because that is our income, plus the entries from states and the Hall of Fame tournament, not any reserves the league might have. The board agreed. Mark noted that such reserves and extras might be better dedicated to things such as improving the profile of States or the Hall of Fame tournament.

B. Communication:

Chris has taken the lead and will send out the postcard notifying the league on the website. Mark also asked Chris to prepare an official policy on communication for the league.

Judy suggested using quick Issue Alerts for emails to go out when there is a change in policy or rules from the league, to distinguish them from other conversation.

C. Hall of Fame:

Mark will take the lead and also ask Marc R if he wishes to take a strong role in the Hall of Fame, given that Marc an ex officio non-voting member of the board as ex-President and also put a lot of work into the Hall of Fame.

D. Debbie Simon Service Award:

Mark noted that we need formal criteria for this award. Chris suggested that the NFL Service Awards serve as a model. The board discussed the possibility of forming a subcommittee, with Joyce and Dave Cohen mentioned as possible names interested in it.

E. Scholarship money for camp:

Mark said that camps are expensive, and people shouldn't be able to win automatically simply because they could attend camp and another cannot. We might be able to set up a camp committee to let kids apply for camp scholarship so they might attend where before they might not have been able to.

Debbie noted that the Texas league does a similar speech and debate scholarship for college students going into speech and debate, but this might be a similar program. Debbie offered to contact Randy Cox to find out what they do in Texas.

Lisa Honeyman was suggested as a good person to figure out criteria for camp scholarships from the league, as someone familiar with camps but who does not have a conflict of interest in teaching at a camp herself.

F. League funding for MFL programs in need:

The board discussed the possibility of League grants for new or struggling programs. Judy suggested that Mark Fellowes, as a new school head coach, would be a good person to talk about criteria for new schools applying to the league for assistance.

8. States Speech Location:

Shrewsbury cannot host States this year. Mark and Debbie asked permission from the board to explore college spaces who wish to host it. They will see about using Suffolk as a potential space though we're up against their own AFA college nationals. Judy will also investigate Bentley and Cape Cod Community College. Chris will look into Tufts.

Bill Porter of St John's has mentioned wanting to be a debate site host. Mark will follow up on that.

9. MFL T-shirts:

Mark suggested encouraging the t-shirt sales for the sake of funding the camp scholarships. Debbie suggested the board members wear them around the next tournament. Mark said the price will drop to \$13 and we'd still have enough money to send two kids to camps if they sell out.

Judy suggested asking the tournaments to sell them together with the food because no one on the board has time to sell them at a table. Mark will do this.

10. Logo:

Mark stated that the League needs a better logo – the one on the t-shirt was off the cuff and no copies of any former official logos exist. Judy suggested having a contest for the students to submit logo ideas. Chris suggested having the Student Advisory Board coordinate the contest, and the Board agreed.

11. The NFL:

Mark noted that the history between our league and the NFL has been somewhat checkered. He stated, however, that given new leadership on both sides, we are provided an opportunity for a new relationship. The league should try to keep smaller programs interested, beyond the competition aspects. He said that Scott Wunn, the new NFL Executive Secretary, talks of the NFL is a national honor society, not just a tournament, with degrees and honors that give added value for the students and competitors at all levels.

Judy offered to go around and talk up the NFL to the coaches that are not members at MFL tournaments.

Debbie asked that the MFL endorses and encourages all member schools to participate in both the NFL and the CFL at whatever level they may, both as tournaments and as honor societies. On a unanimous vote, the Board agreed. The board adopts the stance that

NFL membership is encouraged for all members for the sake of joining this honor society even if the schools would not attend Nationals.

Debbie also proposed recognizing the students that are high point getters in the NFL, and Debbie and Chris will prepare a section of the MFL website for the NFL New England district.

12. Boston 2004 NCFLs:

Mark is on the steering committee and offers to be the MFL board liaison for the 2004 NCFL Tournament in Boston. Chris also will send out official communication for the voluntary dollar surcharge to fund the CFL tournament that local tournaments have been asked to provide.

Debbie noted that schools coming to the Holly from outside might need more information about Boston 2004.

13 Student Advisory Board:

Some coaches have asked the Board to consider the productivity of the Student Advisory Board and its meetings. After some discussion about the history of the SAB, the Board designated Chris as the MFL board liaison to the SAB. Chris will assist the SAB with procedure and ways to achieve constructive conversation, and bring proposals to the MFL Board.

Chris will also set the SAB up with their own online communication tools. Mark suggests opening an MFL board meeting up to SAB representatives at some point in the near future.

14. Protests:

Mark wants to keep a history for at least two years of all protests to establish precedence for decisions. He suggested using a protest log so that we can keep track of what previous decisions and previous protests were made to guide future decisions or Board actions.

Further discussion about the handbook's inadequacies followed.

15. Stopwatches:

Judy offers to order MFL stopwatches to sell at tournaments for a fundraiser. The proceeds will go to fund educational material for new schools and league members.

16. Congress:

Debbie states that Congress has grown impressively in the past years that has grown under the leadership of Rob Croteau and Will Crocker. It has gone from a state tournament on Wednesday afternoon to a real event with nationally competitive students, and so Debbie salutes Will Crocker.

Will noted that the number of people from one school can severely affect the outcome of the tournament because some kids get the chance to talk more. The board discussed ways to get around this problem including limiting entry, but did not make a decision yet.

Chris asked if it isn't time to eliminate rules committee and elect presiding officers, in the hope that an open election would lead to better presiding officers with more incentive to know the rules. Will agreed; going forward presiding officers will be elected by decision of the VP of Congress.

Mark suggested dividing the event between Novice and Varsity congress. The novice congress would be explicitly a teaching division until they can build up confidence. Chris wondered if the educational value might be lost because the novices could not then observe the varsity competitors. Judy suggested having a half hour session at the end of congress tournaments as a seminar for new students.

Judy suggested putting together a congress subcommittee of Will (chair), Chris, Lisa, Dave Cohen, Beena Koshy, and Mark Fellowes – the Board members who coach Congress students -- to explore options. The Board agreed.

Will will also maintain a list of certified Parliamentarians for congress in the League, given that the list of qualified parliamentarians is growing.

17. Tie Breaking and Group Discussion.

The Board tabled the Tie Breaking and Group Discussion items until the Lincoln Sudbury meeting, because Lisa Honeyman proposed them, and since she is now appointed to the Board, she can be there to present the ideas herself fully.

Judy noted that seventh person breaking into the final very often ends up being the seventh person in the final rankings when a tiebreak is used. Judy would like to see tie breakers be consistent across all tournaments, and that any ties that can be broken via any method may be broken.

18 Judging fines:

Everyone noted that judging fines don't help the tournament – the \$50 check does not help the tournament when a last minute judge drop, and some coaches have been known to rely on the fee as a substitute for bringing a judge. The Board wishes to re-emphasize that if the judging quota is not met, then tournament directors have the option of forcing the school in violation to drop students from the tournament.

Mark will send out a notification that the judging fee is not a substitute for bringing judging at local tournaments, and we do not provide a neutral tournament judging pool in this league. Chris will also put up a mailing list signup for hired judges in the area on the league website so coaches in the need of judges can contact the body of college students and others in the community willing to judge for any school.

19. Corporate Sponsorships:

Mark noted that companies may be interested in becoming official sponsors of the MFL – if we want that. It would cost us perhaps giving an award in their name. The board will consider the ramifications and whether that is a place the MFL wants to be.

Judy suggested we have to open it up for the full board. The board will have to figure out if that is where we want to be down the line; the NFL takes corporate funding to an extreme, perhaps, but the MFL doesn't require that sort of funding.

Debbie notes that any funding for schools is positive in this economic and budgetary climate.

20. Mission Statement.

Related to the corporate funding, Mark noted that the League has no formal mission statement and needs to adopt one.

Debbie also noted that we need to package the league better and have materials showing the value of the league to past members. Mark will continue to look into it; the whole board will consider their opinions on the issue and that of corporate involvement in general.

All agenda items being covered, the meeting then adjourned.