

THE OSAA: HIDING IN PLAIN SIGHT



McKay celebrates tying for fifth in the string orchestra competition of the OSAA Orchestra State competition at Oregon State University in Corvallis on May 11. ANNA REED / STATESMAN JOURNAL

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STATESMAN JOURNAL

Every fall Friday night in Oregon, high school football players take to the field while thousands of family members and fans filter in to cheer them on. On Sept. 25, school administrators will come together in a room in Wilsonville and close in on a decision that will affect most of those athletes and their families.

The Classification and Districting Committee of the Oregon Schools Activities Association could decide to combine five of Salem's public high schools with three schools in Bend. That would require travel over a mountain range to play league games.

It's not a popular idea in Salem. "Leaving at 1 o'clock, getting home at 1 a.m.," testified McKay parent Chris Tarver earlier this year. "That puts a lot of strain on these kids."

Every four years leagues and classifications under the OSAA umbrella are realigned, an event sort of a like a presidential election in its importance to high school athletics.

One big difference: athletes and parents don't get a vote, at least not directly. Who are the people who have the power over Oregon's high school athletics?

We have met the OSAA and it is us

Prior to 1918, high school sports in Oregon were essentially without rules and without structure.

In the 1910s, Chemawa Indian School's football team – coached by William J. Warner, brother of Pop Warner – played military teams like the 91st Division of Camp Lewis, Wash., the Multnomah Athletic Club, Willamette University and Stanford as well as high school teams like Salem High, which would later become North Salem.

And there were no state champions. A group of high schools came together in 1918 to form the Oregon State High School Athletic Association.

"They formed the OSAA ... to set some baseline standard of how we're going to do things," OSAA Executive Director Peter Weber said.

The OSAA has grown to a group of 294 member high schools in Oregon – schools join, and sometimes leave, every year – that provide an outlet for high



The Dallas team with their second place trophy following the Marist Catholic vs. Dallas OSAA class 5A championship softball game at Oregon State University in Corvallis on Saturday, June 3, 2017. Marist Catholic won the championship game 12-7. ANNA REED / STATESMAN JOURNAL

school students to participate in athletics and activities.

The primary function of the non-profit, with headquarters in Wilsonville, is to enact rules and bring structure in the form of postseason play.

The leagues essentially operate regular season play and choose their automatic representatives for the state postseason.

"What people don't realize is that they're not an association of their own, but they're a representation of the schools," said Oregon Athletic Coaches Association executive director Rob Younger.

Who pays for this?

"We work off about a \$4 million budget every year," Weber said.

There are three main sources that fund the OSAA: Admission at state championship events (about 55 percent of the budget), membership dues (about 15 percent) and corporate sponsors (about 15 percent).

To be a full member of the OSAA, schools pay \$750 in dues each year plus \$85 for each OSAA sponsored activity in

which the school competes. The 86 associate member schools pay between \$100 and \$500 per year.

Sprague, for example, pays \$2,960 as it competes in 26 OSAA sanctioned activities.

Out of its budget, the OSAA pays officials for state championship games, rental fees for venues for postseason events, reimbursement to schools for travel and per diem for meals.

"If there's an excess," Weber says, "we have a policy that we hold it for a year to see how the next year went, then by the constitution we have to give it back to the schools."

One of the ways the OSAA has given back the money is paying for new equipment compatible with the Track Wrestling website to help run the state wrestling tournament and purchasing equipment for athletes through the OSAA Foundation.

How the reclassification decision is made

Every four years there is controversy surrounding the OSAA and it's all based on one word: Reclassification.

The OSAA's governance is made up of two main bodies and 10 committees.

The OSAA's 43-member Delegate Assembly is made up of one representative from each league – they have to be an athletic director or higher-level administrator – who are elected by their league's leaders, along with representatives of groups like the OACA.

The purpose of the delegate assembly is to adopt rules and articles of the OSAA constitution and elect the executive board.

The OSAA 13-member Executive Board is made up of delegate assembly members who are voted for three-year terms by the members of their classification on the delegate assembly.

The board's purpose is to manage business and affairs of the association and create policy.

By the OSAA constitution, since 2002 the executive board has formed a classification and districting committee every four years to make recommendations on how to classify schools and in which leagues to place them.

The executive board approves or disapproves the committee's final recommendation. If it is approved, it is sent to the delegate assembly and that group votes to accept or decline it.

"When you have to make these difficult decisions about reclassification or even certain amendments to different rules, there's going to be losers and winners, but that's why you have to understand your mission," said Crosshill Christian principal Adam Kronberger, a member of the OSAA Delegate Assembly.

"The mission is to have as high student athlete participation as possible and to have a level playing field as much as possible. You're not doing it to pacify people."

There are 14 people on the redistricting committee who represent each class in multiple ways, representatives of each of the associated organizations, plus an ex-officio member and two staff liaisons.

Since the current classification committee was formed a year ago, it has held 11 public meetings and produced 19 drafts of its proposals.

"I think that this been a really good example of the process working the way that it's meant to work," said Executive Board president Mark Hannah, an ad-

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Silverton finds new star running back

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Hunter Meissner has become the kind of physical running back that thrives in the offense that Silverton High School likes to run.

The junior fullback rushed for 191 yards and three touchdowns on 25 carries in the Sept. 15 38-22 win against Dal-

las. The 5-foot-9, 190-pound Meissner has rushed for 417 yards this season and has rushed for over 100 yards in each of the Foxes' past two games.

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Silverton's Hunter Meissner (21) runs in for a touchdown in the Dallas vs. Silverton football game at Silverton High School on Sept. 15. ANNA REED / STATESMAN JOURNAL FILE