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An Open Letter to District Chairs on Hardship Accommodations

1 message

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Greetings,

In the spirit of the email just sent full of agenda items, I write to discuss how we should deal with requests for accommodation of various hardships involved in participation at the district tournaments.

Our rules require that for most students, attendance at the NDT requires two weekends, one to qualify or attempt to qualify through districts, the second for the tournament itself.

Our hearts naturally go out to students who seem deserving of attending the NDT, but who for some reason cannot participate in the district tournament. Family emergencies, medical problems, military service obligations, dangerous travel conditions or even accidents, can all make it impossible for a team to participate in districts.

We might as a community simply accept that it's a two-weekend proposition and decide that no accommodation is necessary. We obviously would not be able to accommodate a student who could not attend the NDT itself. I believe the district participation requirement is sufficiently important that it would be fair to refuse all accommodations. That has been almost the universal practice throughout the decades, and as late as last weekend, accommodation was refused for the FRALB applicants United States Military Academy BC.

However, I think maybe that's not the consensus, or at least that not all of us are comfortable with it. I am not writing to debate about how absolute the requirement of district participation ought to be. Rather, I want to address the PROCESS of how accommodations ought to be accomplished

I think it incumbent on all district chairs to understand that in the first instance, accommodations must occur at the district level. Furthermore, any accommodations undertaken must be of a nature that allows the team being accommodated to have a real chance of securing one of the bids allocated to the district.

Our rules require district participation as a condition of applying for a SRALB because we want the second round pool to be for teams who COULD not make it through districts. If we don't have this requirement, the top dozen or so teams who do not receive FRALBs will simply skip districts and take the SRALBs. The six third team slots will go not to third teams, but to second teams pretending to be third teams. This rule is very important. It is surely of sufficient weight to sustain the requirement that all SRALB applicants participate in districts. In order to sustain this important regime, it is vital that ANY ACCOMMODATION MUST MAINTAIN THE CHANCE FOR THE ACCOMMODATED TEAM TO WIN ONE OF THE DISTRICT'S BIDS.

There are many opportunities for the district to accommodate. District 8 does not have to have a rule requiring bid allocation eligibility for participation at districts, but it does. That could be repealed, or amended to allow exceptions. District Chairs are free to adjust schedules, provide for make-up rounds, even days before or after the tournament. Districts that forbid mavericks could make exceptions for that. If absolutely nothing else avails, districts are free to dispense with their tournament in whole or in part and adopt some ranking system that includes the team to be accommodated. All of these are ways to try to let everyone compete for the bids in the district.

All of these accommodations maintain the accommodated team's chance of securing a bid at districts. Some of them may require you to amend your rules. Ranking is discouraged by NDT rules; we might want to reconsider those penalties, at least in emergencies. (We already did so in the case of bad weather.) There are lots of alternatives to consider, based on your specific facts and requirements.

The one thing that I want to discourage you from doing is failing to accommodate locally in the hope that the Appeals Committee will bail you out. This is obviously not altogether fair to all the other SRALB applicants, but it is also a huge hassle and emotional burden on the members of the committee while they are trying to

prepare their teams for the national championships. Basically, this is a district problem. Please try to do your best to work it out there, so that all of your teams get to compete for a district bid. If your rules are in the way, as is definitely the case here in D8, consider encouraging your members to change the rules to allow reasonable accommodations for hardships. Don't hesitate to be creative. Your membership understands that next year it might be their team that needs some accommodation; they will cooperate.

I look forward to seeing all of you in Binghamton.

Best,
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