

Lackawanna Trail discusses reopening plan for sports
August 25, 2020 By Ben Freda For Abington Journal

FACTORYVILLE — During a special meeting of the Lackawanna Trail school district, Aug. 20, via Zoom, the board discussed the reopening plan of the district’s fall sports. Superintendent Matthew Rakauskas said that they are in Phase 3 of the reopening plan.

He said that the first day of fall practice is Monday, Aug. 24, for field hockey, golf, and cross country, and that football begins on the second week of September.

“If the board doesn’t act on it, we can wait to see if he governor’s (Tom Wolf) recommendation has any impact on what the PIAA releases,” he said.

Rakauskas said it will be “status quo” having Aug. 24 as the first full day of fall practice including cheerleading and band.

Dr. Michael Mould, treasurer, asked if the board would be committed to a season if the “status quo” remains the same. Rakauskas mentioned that they won’t be committed to a season but a decision would have to be made the next day. He said that the athletic reopening plan allows the board to start fall sports in waves on Monday, Aug. 24. Murphy said that the next opportunity to take action as a local board would be at a voting meeting on Sept. 8.

“Fall sports that are set to start in full in Phase 1, as far as Lackawanna Trail is concerned, would be golf,” he said. “Golf would be allowed to compete starting Monday. Phase 2 would be Sept. 14 for mandatory practices for cross country, volleyball, and a few others. And Phase 3 would be football.”

Murphy said that football would start at the end of September. Mould expressed concerns about moving forward with contact sports.

“These concerns involve the safety of our athletes,” he said. “It’s a concern I wish I did not have. As most of you know, I’m a physical educator. I coached for 30 years, and I understand the value of athletic competition.”

Mould mentioned that in this area, every division III collegiate institution chose not to participate in sports. He said that many of them have greater capabilities to test, contract, and trace the virus than Lackawanna Trail.

He said that the Big 12 Conference is testing their athletes three times a week.

“They’re going to ensure that those athletics that are tested positive receive a medical work-up related to hard issues that apparently are associated with the COVID,” he said. “We don’t have these kinds of resources.”

Board member Joseph Ross said that he agreed with Mould, and asked if he board could wait until the next board meeting. Murphy said that the golf athletes would start as early as next week. He mentioned he option of reversing to Phase 2, which is voluntary practices with no competition for all teams.

“As it stands now, we are in Phase 3 locally of our plan, which means that we can scrimmage at least other schools,” he said. “Of course we have not done that yet but that is in Phase 3 of our plan.”

Murphy said that if the board recommends not to travel beyond the district’s boundaries, then they need to either revert to Phase 2 or shut down a few sports for the fall. Rakauskas agreed with the option of reverting to Phase 2 until further notice so that workouts and preparations may continue. Athletic director Ed Gaidula recommended to wait to see what PIAA decides the next day. He said that the decision would most likely be to let students play a short season.

“If we are worried about certain teams or certain games moving along, we do have the option to decide not to play a particular team that week,” he said.

Gaidula said that he spoke with a few coaches, who are eager for the students to keep playing. Ross then stressed the importance of athletics in developing a student’s life.

“Some kids need extracurricular activities whether it’s band, whether it’s cheerleading, drama, whether it’s sports,” he said. “These kids need that. That’s what keeps them in school and keeps them directed in life.”

Board member Debby Naylor said that it’s a tough decision but believes in the opportunity of allowing students to play.

“We’re asking them to come to school, then we should at least afford them the ability to play the sport,” she said. “Every kid has a niche at Lackawanna Trail.”

David Thorne, board president, said that he believes sports serve students both physically and mentally. He agreed with waiting for PIAA’s decision. He said that they can amend the resolution in the future if they ever need to. Mould thanked everybody on the board for the conversation.

In other business, the board voted to:

• Acknowledge the retirement of Rick Kordish as transportation director/maintenance supervisor, effective Dec. 8, 2020

• Appoint Thomas Schofield as transportation director/maintenance supervisor, effective Aug. 21, 2020

• Ratify the consulting contract with Transfinder for $2,400

• Appoint Ashlinn Simpson as secondary education teacher

• Appoint Cody Packer for the maintenance position starting Sep. 4, 2020

• Appoint Jessica Bentley as mentor to Simpson for the 2020-21 school year