

Baltimore Catholic League to continue, but will consider changes before 40th season

The Baltimore Catholic League, one of the premier high school boys' basketball conferences in the nation, will reconsider expansion, its postseason tournament format and the regular-season schedule.

Those issues were discussed at a Jan. 6 meeting at Mount St. Joseph High School of member schools' administrators, who agreed to continue the BCL.

According to Jack Degele, commissioner of the BCL, he requested the meeting after a 4-1 vote Nov. 13 by representatives of five of its seven schools that the league disband, in this, its 39th season of operation.

That action occurred at a meeting of Archdiocese of Baltimore educators.

"That was not an announced (BCL) meeting," said Calvert Hall College High School principal Louis Heidrick, designated to speak for BCL members. "Principals were gathered for archdiocesan business; that (the vote to disband) was not a formal recommendation."

According to Degele, the November vote was in response to concerns about the redundancy of the BCL's postseason tournament, which occurs on the heels of the Maryland Interscholastic Athletic Association A Conference tournament; membership, which lost its eight-team symmetry last July, when Towson Catholic High School was closed; and regular-season games being played on Sundays.

According to Heidrick, those issues will be up for discussion at a meeting of member schools, tentatively scheduled for Feb. 23, after the BCL's annual awards banquet.

"There's some concern about the double tournaments," Heidrick said. "That precipitated some of the discussion in November."

The most likely resolution is that the BCL tournament be held concurrently with the MIAA A Conference tournament, once its practice.

St. Maria Goretti in Hagerstown is the only BCL school that is not a member of the MIAA. McDonogh School is the only non-Catholic school in the MIAA A Conference, which also includes The John Carroll School in Bel Air.

"It's been a goal of ours for several years to be a member of the Baltimore Catholic League," said Larry Dukes, the John Carroll athletic director.

"We applied for membership when we moved up to the A Conference, three or four years ago," Dukes said. "They wanted to make sure we were sustainable in the A Conference. Last year, when we applied again, we were told that there were questions about what was going to happen with the league.

"I hope they will consider us again."

In addition to Calvert Hall, Mount St. Joseph and St. Maria Goretti, the other BCL members are Archbishop Spalding High School, The Cardinal Gibbons School, St. Frances Academy and Loyola Blakefield.

The BCL was formed in 1971, precipitated by safety concerns after a Mount St. Joseph at Dunbar game in the old Maryland Scholastic Association was marred by a riot.

It has sent hundreds of players into the major-college ranks; several currently star in the National Basketball Association.

It was the proving ground for Calvert Hall's Juan Dixon, who led the University of Maryland to the NCAA championship in 2002; Towson Catholic's Carmelo Anthony, who succeeded Dixon as Most Outstanding Player in the NCAA tournament by taking Syracuse to the 2003 title; and Archbishop Spalding's Rudy Gay, at age 23 the leading scorer for the Memphis Grizzlies in the NBA.

"The Baltimore Catholic League gets some good publicity for Catholic schools," Heidrick said. "It allows our student-athletes to be showcased for scholarships. The league also helps pay for the cost of Alhambra."

The BCL is guaranteed a berth in the Cumberland-based Alhambra Catholic Invitational Tournament, which will celebrate its 50th year in March. Mount St. Joseph, in 2006, was the most recent Alhambra champion from the BCL.

Heidrick was an assistant coach for the Cardinals in the late 1970s.

“There are several generations of alumni (of BCL schools) who feel strongly about maintaining the tradition,” he said.

The 39th annual BCL tournament will be held Feb. 27-March 1 at Loyola University Maryland’s Reitz Arena.

“I’m pleased,” Degele said. “I didn’t want to see the league fold for reasons that can be corrected. We want to try to improve those areas and continue a league that has served everyone in a great manner for 39 years.”