



ZONE DIRECTORS' COUNCIL

Zone Directors' Council Meeting

December 17th, 2023 - Minutes

8:00 PM ET/5:00 PM PT via Zoom

“Serving as a connecting link in the USA Swimming Community to build awareness and trust through shared communication and education.”

Present: Zach Toothman (Co-Chair), Keith Moore (Co-Chair), Tim Husson (Co-Chair Ex-Officio), Megan Braman, Nicole Caruso, Bernardine Dickman, Mike Dilli, Gavin Formon, Jamie Platt, Joel Shinofield, Bob Staab, Jack Swanson, TJ Walsh

Absent: Jerry Adams, Bruno Darzi, Jackson Fouras, Ryan Gibbons, Savannah Gurley, Melissa Hellverik-Bing, Simran Jayasinghe, Pam Lowenthal, Ellery Parish

The meeting was called to order at 8:03 PM ET by Mr. Toothman and the agenda was approved as submitted.

1. Ongoing Business

a) Zone P&P Updates

The hard deadline to have converted to P&P is upcoming on January 1st, 2024. The Central, Southern, and Western Zones have all completed their P&P Manuals. The Eastern Zone is anticipating the process will be completed by the hard deadline. Mr. Toothman reminded all of the Zones to keep updated P&P Manuals online along with the Sectional Manual, Zone Athlete Summit Manual, and ZDC Onboarding Materials.

b) Junior Officials Working Group Update

Mr. Toothman provided a report that the Junior Officials Working Group is moving forward and making good progress. Finalized educational materials will be presented to the ZDC for their approval before dissemination. The materials will then be approved by the National Officials Committee before some trial programs begin next summer.

c) Spring Legislative Session Update

Mr. Toothman announced that the ZDC will run a Legislative Session sometime in the Spring, around the same time as the Zone Workshop. Mr. Walsh mentioned that holding this meeting as close as possible to the submission deadline for legislation would be ideal

as last year there were many legislative items that came out after the deadline that would have been nice to discuss. Mr. Dilli remarked that people are often busy around this time and the co-chairs would like to keep the date similar to years prior. Mr. Swanson said that to Mr. Walsh's point, it may be worth it to potentially raise the threshold for submission (i.e. if a piece of legislation was not submitted before the ZDC's Legislative session, it should require a higher vote threshold to pass). Mr. Toothman also provided an update that next month, Ms. Mary Plant will be in attendance in order to discuss next steps for the House of Delegates working group and reminded members to keep their ears to the ground for any feedback.

d) ZDC Onboarding Materials

Mr. Toothman informed the group that comments were received from Mr. Platt. Mr. Platt summarized his comments and stated these onboarding descriptions are a great opportunity to define where the ZDC is going and formalize the mission, structure, and membership of the ZDC. Mr. Moore mentioned that from when he started on the ZDC, it has evolved significantly in the last two or three years. He also stated that he views the ZDC as a fluid entity that can jump in and help wherever needed and truly serve as the voice of the "boots on the ground." Mr. Staab asked Mr. Shinofield for what the Board thinks of the ZDC. Mr. Shinofield responded that the ZDC was born out of the former governance structure when the Zone Directors sat on the Board of Directors. His candid opinion is that the former governance structure is better because now, the Board does not work as closely with the Zone Directors. He believes that at least one Zone Director should come onto Board meetings. Mr. Shinofield also added that the voice of the ZDC is important and he feels that having the voice of the membership and having the voice of this group present before the Board is vital. Mr. Shinofield also added that he is interested in expanding the monthly LSC Leaders call and potentially having the ZDC briefly present to communicate information back to LSCs and provide updates. Mr. Swanson mentioned that the Central Zone garners this type of feedback during a monthly General Chairs call. Both Mr. Staab and Mr. Shinofield reiterated the importance of our grassroots athletes which fuel USA Swimming's higher-level competitive teams. Mr. Platt mentioned that if the sentiment of the group is to be a part of the Board of Directors meetings moving forward, a plan is needed before going into the meetings. Mr. Swanson and Mr. Shinofield also reiterated that having Zone Directors present at Board of Directors meetings moving forward will increase communication and engagement at the LSC level even more moving forward. Mr. Toothman asked, "How can we ensure more members of the Board of Directors understand who we are and our mission?" and "How can we be more connected to our grassroots members?" He stated that the ZDC Boots on the Ground Project will be particularly helpful in this area. Mr. Dilli asked for the rationale as to why Zones and Sectionals must be kept separate and Mr. Shinofield provided a historical context for this policy. Mr. Toothman asked for any additional comments on the onboarding descriptions before stating that himself and Mr. Moore will meet and polish the language. He also mentioned that they want to incorporate the concerns from the Zone Directors that were mentioned. Mr. Toothman also mentioned that increased accountability from Zone

Directors and Zone Directors providing their input when asked are important moving forward. Mr. Swanson asked if there was a plan for increased Board of Directors integration moving forward. Mr. Toothman responded that him and Mr. Moore are going to meet with Ms. Kathleen Prindle and Mr. Chris Brearton. Mr. Staab also mentioned that including more Zone Directors in these conversations with the Board of Directors could be helpful. He also mentioned that onboarding materials traditionally consist of orienting a person to a new role while the current document reads as “this is what our role is and this is what we’re doing moving forward.” Mr. Shinofield agreed and stated that it would be advantageous to keep the onboarding materials light. He mentioned this is particularly true when the goal of the ZDC is communicating and managing up. Mr. Staab stated that members get a lot of communication from USA Swimming and questioned whether it would be possible for each Zone to have a similar communication avenue. Mr. Shinofield stated that this group could potentially: garner input on select communications before they are sent out, communicate with technical chairs on how the competitive needs of athletes can best be served, and help to assist new general chairs and establish an open line of communication with them. The need for ongoing R-9 feedback demonstrates the niche that the ZDC could fill in terms of soliciting feedback and reporting back to the Board. Mr. Staab mention that in January, he and Mr. Swanson would be starting some of these roundtable discussions in order to solicit feedback after issues at the Central Zone Championships. Mr. Dilli agreed with Mr. Shinofield that the ZDC should function as a communication conduit. He also asked, “What does the implementation currently look like for R-9 and Junior Officials?” Mr. Shinofield stated that there was a presentation to the Board of Directors by Tim Husson and Dana Skelton. The Board deferred a vote and assigned three members of Board who are officials to come back with a recommendation. Mr. Shinofield made it clear that the implementation of R-9 would only affect new officials and possibly recertification in the future. Mr. Toothman closed out the topic by reiterating that it was a good discussion and he and Mr. Moore would put their heads together on the best direction moving forward.

2. New Business

a) Boots on The Ground Roundtable Topics

Mr. Toothman asked for potential topics for the “Boots on the Ground” initiative that was presented at the October meeting. Mr. Swanson mentioned three potential topics: 1) a decline in volunteerism, 2) a lack of flexibility in volunteering, and 3) difficulty in becoming a member. Mr. Platt mentioned that he sees communication as a huge issue and discussed the idea of disseminating information at the top and having it flow down to the lower levels. He also shared the results of a General Chair Survey that assessed General Chair knowledge on the role of the Eastern Zone, EZ programming, and overall support offered by the Eastern Zone. Mr. Moore mentioned that there are major politics sometimes in play at the local level. Mr. Shinofield then mentioned that USA Swimming loses approximately 135,000 athletes every year. He stated that the majority of this loss stems from 12 & under families who are not finding what they’re looking for in the sport

of swimming. He also reiterated the call for simpler meets with less regulation. Mr. Shinofield mentioned that swimming compares differently with other youth sports. He said that pre-COVID, parents placed a higher emphasis on childrens' experience than money or time. Now, money and time are ahead of experience. He also mentioned that there have been studies showing a decline in 11-14 year old girls participating in after school activities. However, Mr. Shinofield mentioned that the overall participation rate for girls in swimming at the entry phase is higher while the participation rate declines at the higher age brackets. Mr. Swanson asked that in offering this programming, how can USA Swimming minimize the number of volunteers needed to run a meet while maximizing the integrity of the meet. Mr. Dilli confirmed that the current officiating requirements call for three officials. Mr. Shinofield and Mr. Swanson corrected him that these requirements vary by LSC and there are also requirements vs. best practices. Mr. Shinofield mentioned that with a lack of officials, coaches should be instructing swimmers, not officials. Mr. Husson then mentioned that parents will enter swimmers in events that they should not be swimming and then these swimmers are disqualified, which is another coaching problem, not an officiating problem. Mr. Shinofield and Mr. Moore agreed that this problem of parents entering swimmers into events is unique to swimming.

The meeting was adjourned by Zach Toothman at 9:41 PM ET.