

Ross believes joining NLL would be mutually beneficial

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Fremont News-Messenger

January 28, 2021



Toledo St. John's lists home towns and previous school attended for athletes in college-style team programs.

Even if that doesn't provoke animosity at Fremont Ross, that's not life at a public school. It's not the same world for St. John's and the Little Giants, although they both play in the Three Rivers Athletic Conference.

Ross varsity boys basketball coach John Cahill was watching 9-year-old kids Monday. That's the world through Little Giants eyes.

None of the above includes any criticism. That doesn't mean Ross didn't jump at the chance to apply for entry to the Northern Lakes League.

"We saw the release through NLL Commissioner Richard Browne, looking to expand and solidify membership with disparity in enrollment numbers," Little Giants athletic director Chad Berndt said. "We're waiting to see what the NLL decides to do.

"We'll present who we are and why membership would be mutually beneficial. We're proud members of the TRAC. We'd be proud members in a new conference."

The NLL told Ross it will be in touch. There is no timeline for when the NLL will make decisions and there's no reason to rush in January.

Anthony Wayne, Bowling Green, Maumee, Sylvania Northview, Perrysburg, Sylvania Southview and Springfield comprise the NLL. Findlay, Oregon Clay and Toledo Whitmer might logically also apply to join the NLL.



Travel would remain comparable to the TRAC for Ross. Many schools in the NLL travel well for gate money, if the coronavirus allows.

Speculatively, the league might consider a two-tier structure, with as many as 16 teams. Ross would likely be in the upper tier in such a configuration, based on enrollment.

The Sandusky Bay Conference has three divisions the last few years.

"It becomes an even playing field," Ross football coach Chad Long said. "We'd be playing some schools bigger than us, but they're home-grown kids from their home town. They live there. We'd rather lose to a school that has their own kids, rather than kids from another town, district.

"If we lose, they're better. Everything will go in cycles, based on talent."

Ross lost to St. John's and St. Francis by three points each last season. It beat Anthony Wayne.

"Fremont's at the level we can compete against the Catholic schools," Long said of football. "Basketball, no matter what Catholic school you look at, their starting guards are 6-4. I wouldn't want to be in Cahill's shoes.

"I'm O.K. in the conference we're in, but I'm also O.K. moving. We're able to compete football-wise."

When the coronavirus forced Lucas County to shut down, athletic directors at St. John's, Toledo Central Catholic and Toledo St. Francis suggested their schedules include four basketball games against teams in the TRAC to avoid travel.

This was less appealing to Ross and Findlay, but has nothing to do with NLL circumstances. Six regular season games against Catholic schools is a lot, but condemnation isn't part of Little Giants boys varsity basketball coach John Cahill's mentality.

"(Catholic schools) need students, so they have to go out and sell what they have to offer," he said. "The coaches are good people with classy kids, but we're playing by different rules. Would I like to see it happen?"

"Yes, it creates a level playing field. I came from the SBC with community-based schools and kids from biddy like us. That's the level of comfort I'm used

to. I went to a fourth-grade practice (Monday). We find kids that way, not getting the best eighth-graders to come."

Cahill got a taste of the disparity at the postseason level coaching Clyde's varsity girls. The Fliers lost to private schools Hathaway Brown and Dayton Carroll at state.

"Clyde brought in Clyde players," he said.



Obviously, the Ohio High School Athletic Association made competitive balance an issue with proposals and recent realignment.

"It's not just a TRAC issue, it's a struggle to make this equitable," Cahill said. "I'm excited about what we're doing right now, period. We're trending in a good direction at Ross. I'm happy with the school district and Ross going in a good direction, with good people.

"We're more competitive in the conference than we were three years ago. It's exciting, but we'll battle what we've got. Who they choose and how it goes, that's above my pay grade."

Conferences don't typically look like the TRAC. St. Mary Central Catholic is a member of the SBC River Division for sports other than football.

"It's best if we play schools like us," Cahill said. "(The NLL) is a better fit. There aren't a lot of conferences with public and private schools. State-wide, there's not a lot of leagues like ours with this mix.

"(The TRAC) was put together out of need quickly and it ran it's course."

The NLL appeals to all the programs at Ross.

"We have Fremont kids," Berndt said. "Our kids are our kids. We don't have kids from the outside, except open enrollment kids. The Catholic schools do have an advantage drawing from a larger population."

Much is unknown for Ross, but it knows a symbiotic relationship when it sees one.

"There's some traction," Cahill said. "I don't think it's empty talk. Fremont has applied. COVID sped this up. As a coach, we play these teams that play by different rules than we do. Look at Findlay.

"Findlay kids play Fremont kids. If we lose, tip your hats to the better team."

Ross requested entry to the NLL and SBC in the past.

"The TRAC knows we've been searching for a new league," Berndt said. "(The NLL) is a better suit in terms of competition and geographic location to make the league more holistic. It's no secret we've struggled to compete in the TRAC across the board since its inception.

"It's not to downplay our competition. We want our students to have the best chance for success. It would give us a much better opportunities across the board for all sports to compete for league titles.

"It's nice when teams win and the community gets behind them. The community supports our teams, but everybody likes a winner. That would increase follow-ship of our programs."

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