

Northshore Christian Academy

A Ministry of Northshore Christian Church

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Parents of incoming 6th-8th grade student-athletes,

Over the past three years, NCA has looked for ways to improve our sports program in order to provide better opportunities for our athletes. With this in mind, a new league direction for next year has been determined. We would like to share with you the year-long decision making process, the research behind the league decision and the conclusion that the school leadership has determined for NCA.

The purpose of our middle school sports program is three-fold. We estimate it will take three years to complete our three-fold purpose:

- Developmental Skill Introduction: Opportunities for beginning players – Clinics, camps or intramural teams
- Community and Character Development: School team opportunities for students to play with their classmates- League team or intramural team
- Competitive Skill Building: Opportunities to build on developed skills in order to prepare for future sports teams- League team, clinics and camps

Every year, the structure of our sports program is dictated by the league that NCA is a part of. For the past 12 years, we have been members of the Tri-County Sports League. When we initially joined the league we had twenty (20) middle school students. In the fall, we have 220 middle school students. The five other schools in the league have an average of 40 middle school students each.

If we stay in our current league (Tri-County), the league has indicated the following changes:

- The indication that league schools will not have volleyball teams to compete with our teams.
- The plan for some league schools to add 4th and 5th grade students to their varsity teams due to low middle school enrollment.
- The discussion of some league schools possibly discontinuing their basketball program next year.

After extensive research, input and prayer, it has been determined that NCA will be a part of two leagues. We will be adding an additional league to our program. This addition will be one of many steps we make over the next three years as we reach our 'threefold purpose' of our sports program.

As we investigated five other leagues (each had positive and negative attributes), we have determined that the Cascade League of the Washington Interscholastic Activities Association (WIAA) brings a good balance to our program. NCA will now be members of the Tri-county and Cascade Leagues.

Here is information about the outcome of combining two leagues:

- 6th graders will continue to play in the Tri-County League.
 - They offer coed soccer, boys and girls basketball and track.
 - They will *not* offer volleyball; therefore we will not be able to have 6th grade volleyball. However, those 6th grade students interested in volleyball will be able to play when they are in 7th and 8th grades with the new Cascade League. (Our PE program offers a three week unit every year in volleyball skills).
- 7th and 8th graders will play in the Cascade League.
 - They offer boys' and girls' cross-country, girls' volleyball, girls' soccer, boys' basketball, girls' basketball, and boys' and girls' track.
 - This adds 7th and 8th grade boys' and girls' cross-country.

- This League provides boys' football and boys wrestling, but we do not choose to add them to our sports program.
- This league provides 7th and 8th grade girls' soccer, but does not offer 7th and 8th grade boys soccer. (NCA would like to provide a school "club" soccer team for our 7th and 8th grade boys in the fall. League rules put some limitations on what we can provide; however, we are working on a plan to provide our boys a way to play on an NCA team through an alternate program).

The Decision Making Process....

We have been researching and examining the athletic structures of the *Catholic Youth Organization (CYO)*, the *Cross Town League*, *Puget Sound Lutheran Sports League (PSLSL)*, *Everett League* and *Cascade League* of the WIAA as well as the *Tri-County League*. The research for each league included: size of league, league structure, number and size of schools in each league, travel, sports offered, tournaments offered, league fees, sport seasons and loss of school time due to travel and league structure.

During the lengthy research process, we were able to bring our findings to the NCA School Board as well as this year's newly established NCA Athletic Advisory Board (NCAAAB). The NCAAAB is a group of NCA parents who have helped provide feedback and guidance for the athletics department and who will continue to be a sounding board for us in the future.

Those leagues eliminated from our options and reasons why:

- *Catholic Youth Organization (CYO)* - Games are on weekends (including Sundays); some of our coaches are unavailable on weekends and many NCA students could not participate due to church activities or being on Select teams which play on the weekends.
- *Cross Town League* - They do not travel north for games and they are not accepting new schools.
- *Puget Sound Lutheran Sports League* - We would have to travel too far and they have very small schools, many smaller than the Tri-County League.
- *Everett League* - Schools are much larger (800-1500 middle school students) than NCA's middle school (150+). In other words, the competitive balance will be the opposite of what we face in the Tri-County League.

Finally, the decision to join the WIAA came after nine months of research, meetings, telephone calls, e-mails, league observations, feedback from our NCA parent athletic advisory board, coaches' feedback, school board input and a lot of prayer:

- Tuesday, April 12- NCAAAB meeting for final input
- Monday, April 18- WIAA/Cascade League A.D. meeting
- Tuesday, April 19- School Administrator Team recommendation meeting
- Thursday, April 21- School Board meeting and vote

NCA was recently voted as a member of the **Cascade League of the Washington Interscholastic Activities Association (WIAA)**. Cascade League members include: Coupeville Middle School, Granite Falls Middle School, King's Junior High (Shoreline), Lakewood Middle School, Langley Middle School and Sultan Middle School.

The Decision...

After discussing the different league options with both the School Board and the NCAAAB, it was the decision of the *NCA administrative team* to combine both Cascade League/WIAA and Tri-County League. This combination, we believe, meets the needs of our athletes and athletic program goals. While the WIAA has some limitations, it does offer us the best opportunities for our student-athletes to grow athletically.

Next year, our 6th grade students will continue to play in the Tri-County League. The Tri-County League athletic directors approved the change to allow NCA to play only its 6th grade student-athletes against the 4th-8th grade students of the Tri-County League schools. On paper, this scenario doesn't seem logical, especially

when our 6th grade teams are facing older junior high athletes. However, while our 6th grade teams will experience some difficulty playing against older students, the majority of the Tri-County League teams may be made up of 4th-8th grade students. After discussion with their athletic directors and coaches, the Tri-County League firmly believes our structure will actually benefit the entire league and, specifically, NCA. We won't consistently be one of the advanced teams, but we will be competitive enough to keep pace with strong teams, thus giving our athletes a competitive athletic experience.

Athletic Structures...

This structure means that, for the 6th grade students, the sports seasons will stay the same as it has been in the past:

- September- November: Co-ed soccer
- November-February: Basketball for boys and girls
- April-May: Track for boys and girls

Co-ed soccer has regular season champions and boys' and girls' basketball have tournaments.

To ensure a smoother running athletic program, the maximum 6th grade roster numbers for each sport is as follows:

- Co-ed soccer-18
- Boys' basketball-12
- Girls' basketball-12
- Track-open to all 6th grade students
- Volleyball (if offered)-12

The athletic structure of the Cascade League/WIAA is slightly different than the Tri-County League.

- August 30-October 19/20: Boys' and girls' cross country
- August 30-October 19/20: Girls' volleyball
- October 23-mid December: Boys' basketball
- October 23-mid December: Girls' soccer
- February 1-late March: Girls' basketball
- April 11-late May/early June: Boys' and girls' track

Unfortunately, the WIAA does *not* offer boys' soccer and typically has football and wrestling in its place. The WIAA has a strict rule that member schools are not permitted to play schools that are not members of the WIAA. After an extensive search, we could not find a WIAA middle school that offers boys' soccer. We checked with the WIAA and we are permitted to allow our boys' soccer team an opportunity to play in a non-school league (basically a "club" sport). With that in mind, NCA is in the process of finding a non-school league where our 7/8 grade boys can play soccer as a team.

As members of the WIAA, our new athletic structure also includes **grade-level only** teams for volleyball and basketball and **combined grade-level** teams for boys' and girls' cross country, girls' soccer and boys' and girls' track. As NCA continues to grow, it is possible we could form 7th grade *junior varsity* and varsity teams and 8th grade *junior varsity* and varsity teams for both boys' and girls' basketball and girls' volleyball. This will give our students more opportunities to play against competition that is their specific age, grade and skill level and will help them develop their athletic ability. For now, the number of students on the rosters for each sport will be the same as the 6th grade teams.

- 7th grade volleyball-12
- 8th grade volleyball-12
- 7th and 8th grade girls soccer-18
- 7th grade boys basketball-12
- 8th grade boys basketball-12
- 7th grade girls basketball-12

- 8th grade girls basketball-12
- Cross country and track are open to all 7th and 8th grade students

Girls' volleyball, girls' soccer and boys' and girls' basketball have regular season champions. There are no tournaments. Cross country and track conclude with "finals."

Possible Parent Questions...

How come we can't just stay in the Tri-County League if the Cascade League/WIAA doesn't offer boys' soccer? WIAA rules stipulate that member schools may not play non-member schools even if a league does not offer a sport that currently exists at a school. We have attempted to appeal this decision, but have been denied.

How early will my son/daughter have to be released from school to travel to the Whidbey Island schools? According to the other Cascade League schools, early release is typically around 1:30-1:45.

Some games are played in Coupeville and Langley. How are we going to get all the athletes and parents to these destinations? NCA will continue to use carpools since we do not have a school vehicle to transport students. We plan to continue with parent help in carpooling and transportation needs. The Cascade League schools have informed us that the Washington Ferry system has priority boarding passes for schools.

How large are the middle schools (7th/8th grades) in the Cascade League? Coupeville-240; Granite Falls-550; King's (Shoreline)-181; Lakewood-581; Langley-425; Northshore Christian Academy-150; Sultan-465;

Aren't these schools larger than NCA? They are, however these numbers reflect the total amount of middle school students at each school, not the numbers of actual students coming out for sports. In the end, it does not matter how many students each school in the Cascade League has, because of the WIAA structure of grade level teams playing each other. We will only play teams that match us in a particular grade(s). (*This is one reason we chose this League over some of the other leagues that either had very low enrollment or very high enrollment*).

Aren't the public schools going to be a lot tougher to play? Will it take us a long time to compete with them? Any "expansion" team, in any sport, at any level, will experience a challenging and motivating transition period. Middle school students are still middle school kids. No matter what their characteristics are, whether tall or short, naturally talented or still improving their game, all of them are still developing and advancing their athletic abilities. It's the same for all students no matter if they are in private or public schools.

Are you going to provide an alternative opportunity for a 6th grade volleyball team? At this time, Tri-County League schools do not offer volleyball. Also, Everett schools do not offer 6th grade sports. Due to the difficulty of finding schools to schedule for 6th grade only teams, we will not offer volleyball for 6th grade in the fall. However, 6th grade students interested in playing volleyball will have the opportunity to play in 7th and 8th grades.

How is NCA going to be able to afford all these new teams? A sports budget is funded by NCA allocated funds, Athletic fees, fundraisers, and contributions. Athletic fees will NOT be raised next year.

Where are all these teams going to practice and play? Won't there be practice space limitations? With careful planning, we have determined there will be adequate space at NCA available for practices. This means there are NO practices scheduled for early morning or evenings. Since all games for the 7th and 8th

grade volleyball and basketball teams will be played off campus due to the size limitation of our gym, this frees up space for practices.

What days of the week will each League play games? What time will the games start?

Game days for the Tri-County League will be *Tuesdays* and *Fridays* and Cascade League games will typically be *Mondays through Thursdays*. However, it is important to note that NCA will not always play games on these days due to the League schedules. Start times for the Tri-County League are typically between 3:30 and 4:00 for the first game and between 4:30 and 5:00 for the second game (depending on the sport and how many teams are involved). Start times for the Cascade League are typically between 3:00-3:30 for the first game and between 4:30 and 5:00 for the second game.

NCA Managing Two Leagues...

With adding a new athletic league, NCA is currently in the process of hiring more coaches, renting outside facilities for games, scheduling practices in our gym and budgeting for new uniforms, equipment, referee fees and coaching stipends. To ensure that this program runs as smoothly as possible, Mr. Donahue will continue to oversee all athletics but will be primarily responsible for the Cascade League/WIAA teams and Mrs. Diede will be responsible for the Tri-County League.

In Conclusion...

We understand that this new athletic structure does not meet all of our three-fold goals, but it reinforces many of them as we move toward a strong and competitive sports program. Every league we looked into joining had numerous positives and negatives. Each league choice would have included some people and excluded others. The choice in adding the Cascade League/WIAA represents the best possible middle school athletic structure available to us. More importantly, it will serve the athletic needs of NCA, not only in the short term, but the long term as well. We realize that there is no perfect time to make a big change, but after much prayer and research, we feel we must move in this direction.

NCA is committed to challenging our students academically, and likewise, must also challenge them athletically. We continually look for the most innovative ideas to meet the academic needs of our students, and recognize that our athletic program must also focus on building its structure due to the master plan and vision for our school and the campus. Only by consistently inspiring our middle school students to improve their abilities through hard work and developing their Godly character will they be adequately prepared to face the increased rigor of high school and their future endeavors. We feel, by adding this blueprint to our athletic structure, we are moving towards a program that meets this challenge and builds a strong foundation for more opportunities in the future.

In His service,

Ben Donahue, Holly Leach, Mike Thornton and Rachel Diede