

RIIAAA NEWSLETTER

July 2026

PRESIDENT'S OPENING MESSAGE

Dear RIIAAA Members,

I hope everyone is enjoying the summer and finding some time to recharge before another busy school year begins. As we prepare for the 2026-27 school year, I want to thank each of you for your continued leadership, collaboration, and commitment to education-based athletics and the student-athletes of Rhode Island.

Below are several important updates, reminders, and upcoming opportunities for our membership.

PCOA UPDATE

The PCOA recently met and discussed several important topics that will impact interscholastic athletics across Rhode Island. Below are some of the key updates and decisions from the meeting.

Boys & Girls Soccer - Yellow Card Policy

There will now be **two different tiers of yellow cards for boys and girls soccer**. Please see the attached information for complete details regarding the new policy.

Thank you to **Carl Africo and his committee** for their hard work and commitment to seeing this initiative through the approval process. The proposal was approved by the PCOA by a vote of **15-1**.

Cheerleading

Thank you to **Bobby Palazzo and his committee** for their work in creating additional structure and consistency within cheerleading.

We understand that some fall cheerleading squads may have already conducted tryouts. Therefore, the new fall rules will officially go into effect beginning in **Spring 2027**.

However, it is important to note that **NO competition cheerleading squad may begin its season before the first day of winter sports, November 30th**.

The proposal was unanimously approved by the PCOA by a vote of **16-0**.

Addition of New Sports

The PCOA unanimously approved, by a vote of **16-0**, the parameters and guidelines for adding new sports that could eventually be recognized and sponsored as championship sports by the RIIL.

We should be very appreciative of the work done by the PCOA, along with **Mike Lunney**, to establish a clear process that will allow new and emerging sports to be considered when participation numbers and other requirements warrant their addition.

This is an important step forward as we continue to look for opportunities to expand participation and provide additional athletic opportunities for Rhode Island students.

PCOA UPDATE CONTINUED

Middle School Winter Athletics Start Date

The start date for middle school winter athletics was also discussed.

Thank you to everyone who responded to the survey sent out by **Jamey**. By a vote of **25-12**, our membership supported beginning middle school winter athletics on the same day as high school winter athletics.

Alex Butler developed a calendar that would allow middle school winter sports to begin on **November 30th** while still completing the season before February vacation.

The reasoning behind this proposal is that high school fall sports are often still competing in playoffs, along with the challenges surrounding Thanksgiving and the conclusion of the fall season. From an operational and scheduling standpoint, aligning the middle school and high school winter start dates could provide greater consistency.

This item was **tabled and will be discussed again at the August PCOA meeting**.

Winter Sports Alignments

- Gymnastics
- Boys Basketball
- Girls Basketball
- Boys Swimming
- Girls Swimming

Future Consideration - Game Contracts Between Schools

The PCOA also discussed the possibility of establishing stronger expectations and procedures regarding **game contracts between schools**.

Jamey and Mike have been working to address concerns involving schools that agree to contests and later cancel or fail to honor those commitments.

The goal is to create greater accountability and consistency when schools agree to athletic contests, especially when cancellations create scheduling, transportation, officiating, and financial challenges for other schools.

This topic will continue to be discussed in **August at both the Executive Board level and the PCOA meeting**.

Thank you to everyone who continues to serve on committees, provide feedback, and work collaboratively to improve interscholastic athletics across Rhode Island.

RHODE ISLAND INJURY FUND UPDATE

Beginning this fall, all **Injury Fund contests will be played in a modified or shortened format based on the sport.**

For example, traditional timed contests will be played as **half-regulation games**, baseball and softball will use **speed-up game formats**, and volleyball will play **best two-out-of-three sets, with the third set played to 15 points when necessary.**

As a result, game officials will be compensated at **one-half of the standard game fee.**

Please remember that participation in an Injury Fund game is required for Injury Fund coverage. **Schools that do not participate in an Injury Fund game under the guidelines outlined above will not have their coaches and players covered by the Injury Fund.**

We ask all athletic administrators to communicate this information with their coaches and ensure Injury Fund games are properly scheduled and played.

If you have any questions or need additional information regarding Injury Fund games, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Thank you for your cooperation and continued support of the Rhode Island Injury Fund.

2026 NATIONAL ATHLETIC DIRECTORS CONFERENCE

The **2026 National Athletic Directors Conference** will take place **December 11-15, 2026, at the Phoenix Convention Center in Phoenix, Arizona.**

Co-hosted by the **NIAAA and NFHS**, the 57th annual conference will bring athletic administrators from across the country together for several days of professional development, networking, and collaboration.

Attendees will have the opportunity to participate in **Leadership Training Institute (LTI) courses, professional development workshops and sessions, networking opportunities, and an exhibit hall featuring more than 400 vendors** showcasing products and services for education-based athletics.

The National Athletic Directors Conference is a great opportunity to learn from fellow athletic administrators, bring new ideas back to our schools and communities, and strengthen relationships with colleagues from Rhode Island and across the country.

FIRST-TIME ATTENDEE SCHOLARSHIP OPPORTUNITY

We hope to have a strong group of Rhode Island athletic administrators attend this year's conference and represent RIIAAA in Phoenix.

For **first-time attendees, a scholarship opportunity is available to help offset the cost of attending the conference.** We strongly encourage members who have never attended the National Athletic Directors Conference to consider applying and take advantage of this opportunity.

Attending the national conference is an outstanding way to connect with athletic administrators from across the country, participate in professional development opportunities, and bring new ideas and resources back to your school and athletic programs.

Additional registration information and details regarding the first-time attendee scholarship and application process will be shared with the membership as they become available.

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SAVE THE DATE: RIIAAA ATHLETIC DIRECTOR SOCIAL

Please remember to join us for the **RIIAAA Athletic Director Social** on **Sunday, August 9th at 2:00 PM at The Thirsty Beaver in North Kingstown**, proudly sponsored by **BSN SPORTS**.

This informal gathering will provide an opportunity to connect with colleagues, welcome new athletic directors and members, and strengthen relationships within our association as we prepare for the upcoming school year.

Building stronger relationships among athletic administrators is one of my priorities as President, and events like this provide us with an opportunity to get to know one another outside of our daily responsibilities.

We hope to have a great turnout and encourage all members to join us for an afternoon of food, drinks, conversation, and camaraderie.

We hope to see you there!

MOVING FORWARD TOGETHER

As we move forward into a new year filled with opportunities and challenges, let us continue to support one another, share best practices, mentor new athletic administrators, and advocate for education-based athletics across Rhode Island.

Our association is strongest when we communicate, collaborate, and work together.

As we begin the 2026-27 school year, I encourage each of us to continue looking for ways to support our colleagues and the student-athletes we serve.

HOPE - Helping Other People Everyday.

Best wishes for a successful 2026-27 school year, and thank you for all you do on behalf of Rhode Island's student-athletes.

Sincerely,

Justin Erickson

President

Rhode Island Interscholastic Athletic Administrators Association

Quick Reminders

August: PCOA follow-up discussions on middle school winter start date and game contracts.

August 9: RIIAAA Athletic Director Social at The Thirsty Beaver, North Kingstown.

December 11-15: National Athletic Directors Conference in Phoenix, Arizona.