

Will transfer change solve Rice controversy?

By Dennis O'Connor
staff writer

For weeks, a group tri-county athletic directors pondered solutions to the problem of an "unfair advantage" enjoyed by private schools over public schools in athletics.

Now they've come up with something — a recommendation to change a transfer rule.

The recommendation, approved by a 30-6 vote at the athletic directors' monthly meeting last Thursday at Dominic's Restaurant in Berkeley, says that high school students who transfer from one school to another be ineligible from athletic competition for one calendar year, if they don't actually move into the new school attendance boundary.

Currently, most students may transfer from either public or private schools to another institution without athletic ineligibility.

The decision culminated three, two-hour sessions by a 10-member committee investigating problems between public and private schools.

These problems stem from a public-school claim that private schools have an unfair advantage because they draw student-athletes from all over the state.

If approved by the council, principals at all high schools will vote on changing the current MHSAA transfer rule.

The whole process could take more than a year:

"ON THE SURFACE, I think it's a good move," said Carl Lemle, athletic director for Birmingham's public schools, concerning the transfer recommendation.

"I do think the big controversy between Brother Rice and the public schools came when three athletes who were all-star players at other schools went to Brother Rice the next year — and it was perfectly legal under Michigan High School Athletic Association rules.

"But I think this transfer rule that the committee came up with will help out tremendously."

For years, public-school officials and coaches have been upset over the attendance-boundary and transfer problems with the private schools. In fact, many public schools have refused to schedule Brother Rice and other private schools.

"I personally saw a lot of changes in attitude from the public sector and the private sector and a lot of tolerance developed," said Norm Quinn, chairman of the committee and athletic director for Bloomfield Hills public schools.

"There was more understanding on both sides and that's what it's all about."

equity of rules," Pendracki added, "and that was the most bothersome thing for all athletic directors in Oakland County."

Many athletic directors said if Rice was forced out of the MHSAA tournaments, it would seek competition out-of-state. And this would force Rice to attract or recruit more student-athletes — making its program even stronger.

"I'm not against Brother Rice having a stronger program," Pendracki said. "I hope they get stronger and stronger. What I'm saying is that no one's done anything about the equity of rules."

BILL NORTON, Rice's athletic director and head basketball coach, said he felt "stuck" by Pendracki at the meeting.

He wants to schedule local competition and not seek out-of-state opponents. But he would explore the possibility of seeking out-competition, if forced into that situation.

Rice's football team has three out-of-state non-league games next season because of in-state scheduling problems.

"I don't want to do that (schedule

out-of-state (teams), Norton said. "I don't want to be separate from you. There are inequities," Norton admitted. "There's no doubt about that. And if you try to squeeze us, then we're going to have to look at our other alternatives and squeeze back. I don't want to do that."

Jack Cotton, Farmington public schools athletic director, agreed with Pendracki.

"My job as an athletic director is to ensure that my schools have equitable competition, and they (Rice) do have a leg up and I know that," Cotton said.

"If I want to get a football game, I'll call you (pointing to a public school athletic director), not Bill (Norton). That's been my administrative style for 30 years, and I won't change that now."

THE TRANSFER recommendation will maintain many exceptions — some call them loopholes — to ineligibility listed in the current MHSAA transfer rule.

The scheduling boycott, unofficial in nature, still exists with many schools in Oakland County.



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BIRMINGHAM BROTHER RICE, an athletically-successful private school, has been the center of this problem.

Other committee concerns included possible attendance boundaries for private schools, separate state tournaments for public and private schools and the formation of an ethics committee to investigate alleged athletic-rule violations.

Nothing was recommended on the other concerns. The committee said these solutions were not feasible.

The recommendation now goes to the Representative Council of Michigan High School Athletic Association (MHSAA) for consideration.

ONE PERSON who wished more was done about the alleged inequities was Carl Pendracki, athletic director at Birmingham Groves. In fact, Pendracki was the only athletic director who supported separate state tournaments at this meeting.

"It seems to me that it was the charge of the committee to look into the unfair advantages of the private schools over the public schools," Pendracki said at the luncheon.

"And other than a change the transfer rule, I see nothing here that will change anything.

"I don't see any significant change in

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