

12 June 2023

ATTN: NJSIAA Swimming Rules Committee
1161 US-130
Robbinsville Township, N.J. 08691
RE: Modifications to NJSIAA Swim Championship Format

To Whom It May Concern,

We, the undersigned New Jersey high school swim coaches, write to express our shared bewilderment and disappointment at the recently approved changes to the NJSIAA Swimming Championship formats, including and especially the elimination of the Meet of Champions consolation finals.

We have to believe the NJSIAA would never intentionally diminish the student-athletes' experience, but that is exactly what this will do. Regardless of what the NJSIAA hopes to accomplish with this arbitrary decision, we are quite certain it will be a detriment to New Jersey's high school swimmers and fear it will ruin the most highly anticipated event of the season. What gain could possibly be worth that cost?

It must be more than wanting to make the Meet of Champions "a really class event," as NJ.com reported June 7. The Meet of Champions already is a high-level meet that has consistently produced exciting races and fast swimming in both Championship and Consolation Finals. Eliminating the consolation finals is more likely to detract from the meet's allure than it is to enhance anything.

And it must be more than a simple desire to apply the same format to all sports. Different sports have different championship formats for the very reason that they are different sports. A prelim/final format with at least two finals heats ("A/B," "Championship/Consolation," etc.) is Swimming's championship meet "industry standard" for secondary-aged athletes and older. This is true for competitions sponsored by USA Swimming, the NCAA, FINA and the IOC. Change for the sake of conformity among unique sports seems misguided.

Please consider the following:

- We would be remiss not to point out that the NJSIAA just abandoned the meet format overwhelmingly favored nationally.
- During the 2022-23 school year, 41 states held a championship swim meet with a prelim/final format, and 37 of those states -- New Jersey included -- held consolation finals (just over 90%). Even accounting for the seven states in which the championship meet was a single "timed finals" session and the two states for which we could find no high school swimming information, 74% of states still followed this standard format.
- The consolation finals actually drive participation at the Meet of Champions; swimmers and coaches choose months in advance which meets they will target for optimizing performance (i.e., shaving and/or resting). These are delicate choices that influence preparation all season and part of the decisions hinge on how many racing opportunities swimmers will get. Fewer racing opportunities on the second day of competition will increase the likelihood that swimmers choose *other* meets to target for peak

- performance. We are concerned about the possibility *fewer* swimmers attend, declining travel and lodging arrangements with such a risk they won't get additional swims.
- Consolation Finals also play a crucial developmental role for swimmers. Swimming on Sunday at the Meet of Champions is a "high-leverage" situation, akin to a baseball/softball player walking to the plate as the go-ahead run with two outs in the last inning, or a basketball player shooting critical free throws in the late stages of a big game. The only way athletes can learn to perform in these situations is experience, and the consolation finals provide invaluable opportunities to gain it, especially considering the Meet of Champions is the *only* NJSIAA-sponsored prelim/final meet. Many swimmers who compete for state championships in the "A-Final" first gained experience competing in "B-Finals." These accumulating experiences help them perform not just later in their high school careers, but in college, where they will unquestionably compete under that same format.
 - Lastly, this will disproportionately impact "high school-only" swimmers who do not participate with year-round clubs. It is already difficult for these swimmers to advance beyond preliminaries vying for 16 spots; with half of those spots eliminated, it will be exceedingly rare for any such swimmers to qualify for an NJSIAA Meet of Champions final in the future.

There are certainly other considerations supporting our position, and we hope the NJSIAA is open to hearing them all. In the meantime, we stand unified regarding those aforementioned; it is our conviction that the consolation finals are a crucial component of the Meet of Champions serving several important purposes and that the rationale provided for their elimination has thus far been misguided and shortsighted. We implore the NJSIAA to reconsider its decision in light of the widespread opposition from those most directly affected, and to correct this mistake before the 2023-24 season.

Respectfully,

Mike Schneider, Vineland Girls
Sarah Bennett, Vineland Boys
Megan Carlin, Vineland Girls (*asst.*)
Audrey Koering, Vineland Girls (*asst.*)
Rich DeValle, Vineland Boys (*asst.*)
Stephen Tucker, OLMA
Mark Jamieson, Egg Harbor Township
Melanie Dupuis, Ridge
Kathryn Cummings, Bernards (*asst.*)
Megan Decker, Mount Saint Mary Academy
Lia Kunnapas, IHA / Bergen Catholic
Theresa DeCoursey, Eastern Regional
Tracey Wojdon-Smith, Eastern Regional (*asst.*)
Joshua Atkins, Audubon/Collingswood
Jeffrey Knight, Westfield Boys
Todd Sudol, Hillsborough
Adele Morgan, Hillsborough (*asst.*)
Chris Levin, Bridgewater-Raritan Girls
Evan Seavey, Bridgewater Raritan Boys

Jay Imus, St. Peter's Prep
Dan Dreher, Southern Regional
William Entrikin, Southern Regional (asst.)
Michael Shale, Wayne Hill Girls
Sarah Teklinski, Watchung Hills Girls
David Hauck, Watchung Hills Boys
Matthew White, Tenafly
Karen Schoenwise, Kingsway Regional
Shannon McKinnon, Gloucester
Lisa Marandola, Clearview Regional
Jack Bower, Clearview Regional (asst.)
Luke Wister, Haddonfield
Shane McGrath, Ocean City Boys
Richard Husted, Cumberland Regional Boys
Stacey Hengst, Bishop Eustace
Joseph Cucinotti, Cherry Hill East Boys
Anita Bowser, Cherry Hill East Girls
Kim McGonigle, Delran
Eric O'Neill, Shawnee Boys
Meghan Warren, Shawnee Girls
Sari Carroll, Holy Spirit
Amy Mosser, Seneca Girls
Christine Gerber, Seneca Boys
Thomas Gratton, Highland Regional
Alex Ridinger, Haddon Heights
Lindsey Cooper, Haddon Heights (asst.)
Mike Suter, Haddon Heights H.S.
Brian Sloan, Millville (formerly)
Kim Glassman, Pemberton Township
Steve Roberts, Pemberton Township
Jillian Miller, St. Rose Boys
Brittany O'Donnell, Lower Cape May Regional
Michael Kilduff, Northern Valley Demarest
Deirdre O'Mara, Pingry
Megan Bull, Pingry
Patrick Savage, Delbarton
Matthew Acciani, Cherokee Boys
Chelsea Latini, Cherokee Girls
Juliet Lancaster Avila, West Deptford
Brian McKeever, West Deptford (asst.)
Liz Begley, Cherry Hill West Girls
Linda DuBois, Schalick
Jessica Slates, Washington Township Girls
Justin Harvie, Washington Township Boys
Bill Malone, Washington Township Girls (asst.)
Carli Misiewicz, Princeton
Maura McDermott, Haddon Township

John Battersby, Moorestown Girls
Brian Booth, Mainland Regional Boys
Tim Tedesco, Northern Burlington
Denny Atkinson, Hopewell Valley
Lauren Ashman, Hopewell Valley
Edward Larkin, Hightstown
Vanessa Rosa, Hightstown
Maria Spitzer, Hamilton West
Gerardo Gomez, Hamilton West
Jessica Bidwell, West Windsor-Plainsboro South