

## High Schools

# Phila. Catholic League makes move to join PIAA

By Jeff McLane  
INQUIRER STAFF WRITER

For years, the question lingered: When will the Philadelphia Catholic League teams be able to compete for a state title?

Yesterday, that question was finally answered.

Bishop Joseph McFadden, who heads Catholic Education for the Archdiocese of Philadelphia, announced at a news conference that the 17 Catholic League schools under the jurisdiction of the Archdiocese will petition to join the Pennsylvania Interscholastic Athletic Association by July 1.

During its first year of membership, the Catholic League will transition into the PIAA — abiding by its rules — but will not participate in the state playoffs. In July 2008, the Catholic League will become full members and will be eligible for post-season play in the 2008-09 school year.

Even with the addition of the Catholic League, the PIAA is not considering having separate private and public championships, a practice New Jersey employs, according to Brad Cashman, PIAA executive director.

“I think the moment is now,” said McFadden, who added: “Shouldn’t our student-athletes have the same opportunity to exhibit their abilities at the highest level?”

The news gathering was held

at School District of Philadelphia headquarters on North Broad Street. The Catholic League will join the PIAA as a member of District 12, which is currently comprised solely of Public League teams.

Besides giving the Catholic League time to adjust its sports calendars and prepare for the monstrous move, the transition year was necessary because the Public League had a stipulation with the PIAA which forbid any non-Public school from entering District 12 until July 2008.

The 10 Catholic League schools located within the city limits will individually apply for membership through District 12, while the seven suburban schools will file paperwork with District 1, as PIAA rules require, simultaneously requesting a transfer to District 12.

District 1 covers the four counties surrounding Philadelphia.

Missing from the proceedings were the two Catholic League members that are not governed by the Archdiocese — St. Joseph’s Prep and La Salle. Although McFadden wouldn’t speak for the two full private schools, he did believe they would follow the Archdiocese and apply to the PIAA.

A statement from the Prep said as much: “The chance to compete for a state title in addition to a league title is very intriguing and we hope that it will

work out in the best interest of the students and athletes of St. Joseph’s Prep.”

The reason for keeping the Catholic League schools within the same district was to keep the 86-year-old Catholic League intact. Although there remains a grand amount of reorganization, the league plans to keep its championships.

If all goes according to plan, the “historical partnership” — as McFadden called it — between the Catholic and Public Leagues will at least bring back a variation of the City Title series that was discontinued during the 1979-80 school year. That year, Lurline Jones, the girls’ basketball coach at University City, filed a lawsuit to allow the girls’ teams — which were excluded — to participate in the series. This time, however, the girls’ teams will be included.

“We’re working on that structure and that will take some effort,” said Marge Weustner, executive director of health, safety and physical education for the School District of Philadelphia. “We’re committed.”

“It’s very clear right now in the Catholic League policies and procedures that you are not to recruit to athletes to your school,” McFadden said.

Schools that offer athletic scholarships will have to abandon that practice.

Contact staff writer Jeff McLane at 215-854-4745 or [jmclane@phillynews.com](mailto:jmclane@phillynews.com).

## SWIMMING NOTES

# Wood sets sights on PCL title

By KAREN SANGILLO  
COURIER TIMES

The Archbishop Wood girls have been eagerly awaiting this season.

That’s because the Vikings are serious contenders for the PCL title.

Wood finished runner-up last year to Archbishop Ryan. Perennial PCL contender Cardinal O’Hara placed third.

“It was great to finish ahead of O’Hara. That was a really big step toward getting our name out there, but we really wanted to win the league and Ryan beat us,” senior Jaclyn Smith said. “They beat us in our dual meet, too.”

It was the only loss of the year for Wood, which finished 6-1 overall, 5-1 in the PCL.

“We have a lot of depth this year, and I think we have a shot at winning,” said Smith, who typically swims freestyle events. “Every point counts, and we have a lot of people who can score for us.”

“Winning the events is important, but it’s just as important to have those girls who can get the second-, third- and fourth-place points. That’s the difference between winning and losing, and I think we can do that this year.”

Wood opens the PCL season against Ryan on Jan. 10 at Klinger Middle School.

Before that meet, the Vikings have a nonleague contest on Dec. 22 against Gwynedd Mercy and will attend the East Stroudsburg Invitational on Jan. 6.

But they have their eye on March 3-4, the dates of the PCL championships.

“We definitely think we can make a run at it this year,” Smith said. “Last year, we did really well, and I think that set us up as a team to be reckoned with this year. This year, we have a good incoming class who can help us.”

Smith hopes to continue her swimming career at Division III Washington and Lee in Lexington, Va.