

Peninsula Athletic League soccer, basketball teams going to Central Coast Section playoffs

By Nathan Mollat Daily Journal staff, May 21, 2021

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Woodside wing Katherine Sheldon dribbles the ball against Burlingame. The Wildcats, which finished in first in the PAL Bay Division, will now get to play in CCS as the PAL and Sequoia Union High School District reversed decisions to opt out of the playoffs.

In a pair of stunning, last-minute reversals, Peninsula Athletic League soccer and basketball teams will be eligible for the Central Coast Section tournaments.

Piggybacking off that, the Sequoia Union High School District reversed its decision and will now opt back into the CCS playoffs. The SUHSD decided last month to opt out of all postseason in all sports.

Following the threat of a lawsuit which accused the PAL Board of Managers of Brown Act violations, PAL commissioner Terry Stogner sent an email to PAL athletic directors Thursday morning, informing them that the board of managers declared void the vote to opt out of the CCS playoffs, immediately making PAL soccer and basketball teams eligible for postseason play.

The decision also immediately ends the PAL soccer season with three games left to play in the Bay Division.

The issue with the PAL Board of Managers vote was it did not follow meeting protocol, as noted by Lee M. Andelin of Aannestad, Andelin & Corn LLP, which sent an emailed letter to all PAL principals and Stogner, which threatened to file a lawsuit if the BOM's vote was not voided.

“The board did not post notice of the date and time of the meeting, did not post an agenda, and did not allow the public to comment. The public was thus denied the opportunity to have its voice heard, in violation of both the PAL Constitution (art. VII, § 5) and the Brown Act,” the letter stated.

Meanwhile, the Sequoia district hastily convened a meeting and reversed its decision early afternoon Thursday.

The sudden reversal left PAL soccer coaches and the league's CCS representatives scrambling for Thursday's CCS soccer seeding meeting. After weeks of not having to worry about playoffs, coaches suddenly have to compile their records and list of opponents to present to the CCS seeding committee.

There will be a slight change in how teams will be selected, said Melissa Schmidt, Sequoia girls' soccer coach as well as the league rep to CCS. In the past, teams were given points based on the strength of the teams played — the tougher the opponent, the more points accrued, even in a loss.

While the power-point system will still be in play, the math will be a little different.

“We adjusted the by-laws months ago,” Schmidt said. “Instead of total points, we'll divide points by the number of games you played.”

Compiling the appropriate information by PAL coaches was made a bit more difficult by the fact that the regular season “did not count” — meaning results and standings were not kept.

But Schmidt said the San Francisco Soccer Referee Association, the organization that supplies soccer officials for PAL games, kept results and standings, which were forwarded to Schmidt.

Before Thursday's seeding meeting, Aragon girls' soccer head coach Michael Flynn was trying to find out if he had enough players who wanted to play in the CCS tournament. While Flynn did not agree with the decision to opt back into the playoffs, he will now try to do right by his players.

Aragon went 9-0-1 in capturing the PAL Ocean Division title and the division's automatic CCS berth.

“If the girls want to go and we have enough players, we'll make it work,” Flynn said. “We haven't practiced since Tuesday, we can't practice Friday and play of Saturday. I'll have to get them motivated and ready after we've told them all year there would be no playoffs.”

Meanwhile, Aragon's graduation is Wednesday — the Division I, II, III and IV girls' semifinals are scheduled for the same day.

While PAL soccer coaches were feverishly filling out the playoff paperwork, basketball still has nearly two weeks before its seeding meeting and the start of the tournament June 4. As such, there will at least one basketball coach who will bask in these new developments. Capuchino girls' basketball coach Steve Hoff was vociferous in his stance against the initial decision to opt out of basketball playoffs. The Mustangs lead the PAL South standings with only tonight's game against Mills left on the regular-season schedule.

Needless to say, he was pleased with Thursday's news.

“We're super excited. I couldn't be happier, not only for Cap, but for all the schools who wanted to go to CCS,” Hoff said.

He said he told his team at practice Wednesday that he believed something would get done at the last minute and that there would more practices to come.

He was also grateful to his school administration for supporting his desire to compete in the playoffs.

“From the beginning, the administration at Cap, athletic director Matt Wilson, have been super supportive,” Hoff said. “And I don’t think it’s only because we have this team that is really good. I think they would felt the same way ... if we were the 10th seed. I’m extremely fortunate to have a school that supports athletics.”