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ASHEBORO - The Asheboro High School boys volleyball team has had a very successful first year operating as a non-sanctioned sport this spring. Next year, the sport becomes sanctioned as voted on this week by the North Carolina High School Athletic Association Board of Directors.

Boys volleyball and girls flag football will be sanctioned sports beginning with the 2026-27 school year after the Board voted 10-7 to sanction boys volleyball and 9-8 to sanction girls flag football.

A number of other decisions were made during the annual spring meeting, including denying a request to experiment by using a shot clock for basketball and denying a request to reduce the number of playoff teams in the 1-A through 7-A classifications from 48 to 32.

AHS boys volleyball coach Nicholas Neighbors said before the season even began that if the sport became sanctioned, the number of schools competing would shoot up. And that is what appears will happen.

"I expect a lot more programs to open up, probably a little more locally, too," Neighbors said after guiding the Blue Comets to a second-round playoff win over Jesse Carson on Thursday. "Randolph County will start growing in men's volleyball."

Neighbors said he has been in contact with personnel who have wanted to start club volleyball for boys, beginning as young as 11, 12 or 13 years old.

"I know at least two clubs who want to move forward and now that it is sanctioned, there's going to be even more opportunity," Neighbors said.

The cost to start up a boys volleyball program should be minimal, with basketball or soccer jerseys recycled. The biggest cost, of course, will be travel, especially with the gas prices.

Girls wrestling was the latest sport to be sanctioned by the NCHSAA. Although it was a close vote, both boys volleyball and girls flag football were sanctioned.

"It is historic," outgoing NCHSAA Commissioner Que Tucker said. "I don't think we've had one since my time here where we sanctioned two sports in the same board meeting. We've obviously sanctioned several sports since I've been here and typically it's just one.

"It speaks to the fact that folks have done some work out in the field, they were able to get that information to us in a manner that we were able to feel comfortable with casting a vote," Tucker added.



While the Blue Comets began their boys volleyball this season, many of the other athletic directors in Randolph County said they expect to have interest meetings and figure out the logistics of starting up a boys volleyball program.

"If it is a sanctioned sport, we want to give our students the opportunity to compete," Providence Grove High School Athletic Director Cody Moran said. "We'll definitely have an interest meeting and we already have some ideas for uniforms. We've talked to other schools and they say how fun it has been to watch and we've seen it and it is fun to watch."

Southwestern Randolph Athletic Director Matt Kiser said his administration was approached earlier this spring about having a boys volleyball team, but there wasn't sufficient time for this spring.

"We had a group who showed some interest and we told them if the high school association sanctioned it, we would definitely look into it," Kiser said. "It was just too close to the time to get the ball rolling this year."

Boys volleyball will be a spring sport. Though it was first introduced in Union County in 2017, its growth didn't take place until recent years, growing from seven schools in 2022 to more than 120 in 2025.

The invitational championships have been played at Queen's University and the proposal indicated that it is already scheduled for next year. The NCHSAA staff will still be tasked with determining the details of the regular season, playoff, and championship schedules. The NCHSAA staff will also have to place teams in conferences.

AHS Athletic Director Wes Berrier said the Blue Comets have already had an interest meeting for girls flag football and approximately 80 girls showed.

"The only holdback right now is finding a head coach and an assistant coach," Berrier said. "They are going to have to turn this thing around quick."

Girls flag football will be held in the fall of 2026.

It is unclear how many county schools will institute a girls flag football program, with SWR's Kiser saying there hasn't been much interest shown at his school.

The proposal to have a shot clock implemented "on an experimental basis for the 26-27 school year during scrimmages, invitational tournaments and special events," was voted down by a 17-0 count.

Board members argued that some of these tournaments, if they used a shot clock, would directly affect RPI numbers, which is the sole criteria for determining playoff seeds.

Dr. Stephen Gainey, the Superintendent of Randolph County Schools and outgoing President of the NCHSAA Board, said cost was a deterrent, especially for smaller schools.

Thirty-two states have already adopted a shot clock in the United States.

"We're ready either way, already have our shot clocks in," AHS' Berrier said. "I thought (using a shot clock) would have happened two or three years ago. It hasn't happened yet and that leads me to believe it won't happen."

On another topic, the Board admitted that 48 teams qualifying for the postseason may not be the right number. Since the NCHSAA went to eight classifications beginning this school year, the number of postseason berths per classification was debated. It was voted that 48 teams in the 1-A through 7-A classification and 24 for the 8-A classification would qualify.

However, in the very first year, the NCHSAA has seen a number of schools, mostly from the lower classifications, opt out because of travel expenses and making a lengthy trip only to lose by a wide margin.

"We've said this was a historic move to go to eight classifications," Gainey said. "I mean, if you don't think it's historic, come look at (the NCHSAA staff). They're tired. I mean, they are tired from all these state changes, but they're still smiling because kids are being recognized and being awarded for their great performances. But I just think that you don't want to act on a false positive or a false negative and then have to turn it back upside down three years later."

The Board voted 10-7 to not reduce the number of postseason teams at this time.

Also, Andy McCormick, the principal at Union Pines High School, was elected as vice president of the NCHSAA. McCormick was already serving on the board as the chair of the Review & Officiating Committee.

Mark Garrett, the superintendent of Henderson County Schools was elected as president of the NCHSAA. He steps into that role after serving as vice president. As Garrett transitions to president, Gainey will become the past president of the NCHSAA — a position he was elected to. That position was previously held by Chris Blanton, the assistant superintendent of Watauga County Schools.

The NCHSAA will be searching for a new leader in 2026 as well after Commissioner Que Tucker announced her retirement, effective October 1.