

## **HISTORY OF THE WEST SUBURBAN CONFERENCE**

The West Suburban Conference is one of the strongest and most successful organizations of secondary schools in the state of Illinois in both the academic and athletic arenas. From its inception in 1924, the league has maintained a high degree of respect from its opponents because of its outstanding competitive nature.

The West Suburban Conference is the fourth oldest Illinois League that is in existence today. Its roots go far beyond the period of formation of the original high school leagues at the turn of the century. The start of the conference is listed as January, 1924, with six charter members competing on only two conference-sponsored sports during that initial year.

Back in the early 1910's, the precursor to the conference had early ties to what was known as the Cook County League. The last of their many re-organizational periods took place during this time, with the league reaching a total of twenty-three members; most being from the city of Chicago. At the end of the 1912-1913 school year, the league disbanded and many schools went to an independent status. The Suburban League was formed in September of 1913 with current WSC members Lyons Township, Morton, Oak Park-River Forest and Proviso being four of the original nine members.

As these changes were taking place inside Cook Country, The Du Page County Athletic Association underwent its own re-alignment over the next ten years, The original league split into two new conferences in 1922; the Little Seven Conference and the Du Page Valley League. The "Valley" became the forerunner to the West Suburban Conference, as five of the original six WSC schools were

in this new league. While Naperville and Wheaton were enjoying much success in the Little Seven, the Du Page Valley League went through one last change after 1 1/2 years of competition.

In January of 1924, the West Suburban Pioneer League was formed with the five remaining schools of the Du Page Valley League and the lone entry from the previously disbanded Cook County League. The original six charter members included Downers Grove, Glenbard, Hinsdale, Maine, West Chicago and York. Since the league was formed in mid-year, only two sports, baseball and track, were offered in competition. Hinsdale won both titles to claim the first President's Cup. The Cup was a trophy awarded to the conference school which placed the highest in a combination of all league sports. The following school year saw the addition of two more sports; football and cross-country.

Some changes in membership followed soon after, with Riverside-Brookfield joining in 1928 and LaGrange-Lyons in 1935, replacing West Chicago. There were seven conference members for the next sixteen years, and it was during this time period that the league dropped Pioneer from its name. During this period, many new sports and levels were added as the member school's populations continued to grow.

Many rivalries have existed over the years between member schools, and one of the most well-known in the state is the battle for the Old Oaken Bucket. Made by the manual training class at Hinsdale High School in 1935, the Bucket is awarded annually to the winner of the Downers North - Hinsdale Central football game.

The conference added golf in 1937, tennis in 1941, and baseball in 1949. During the 1947-48 school year, the conference discontinued

the practice of the heavyweight-lightweight competition format and went with freshmen-sophomore levels. There were now freshmen-sophomore levels of competition in football, basketball and outdoor track.

It was in this time period that the league began to experience significant success in state-sponsored competitions. A total of forty individuals were crowned state champions; twenty-seven in track, along with the first individual state champion in cross-country. In addition, WSC teams won ten team state titles from 1935-51.

In the fall of 1951, Arlington High School joined the league, giving the WSC eight members. In 1957, wrestling was added as a sport, and by this time the conference had lower-level competition in all of the sports. At this time, the WSC trailed only the Suburban League in number of state titles won on an annual basis.

The sixties saw the WSC add three new sports; gymnastics in 1964, along with swimming and indoor track in 1966. Membership changes saw some districts adding sister schools as Downers Grove, Glenbard, Maine and Hinsdale had new buildings erected to alleviate the growing population in their communities. Realignment was also prevalent with these changes, as Proviso West replaced Arlington in 1966.

Many of the present WSC members had their roots in the Des Plaines Valley League, which was organized in 1963. The DPVL started with six charter members: East Leyden, West Leyden, Morton West, Proviso West, Willowbrook and Niles West. In 1964, two more teams, Palatine and Maine South joined. The year of 1965 brought about four more changes as Addison Trail, Glenbard East, and Downers Grove South replaced Maine South, Palatine

and Niles West. Hinsdale replaced Proviso West when it left for the WSC. The conference remained an eight-team league until the Suburban League disbanded in 1975 and Morton East was added. Other changes that transpired before the league merge; with the WSC included West and East Leyden combining into one school in 1983, Riverside-Brookfield replacing Glenbard East before later dropping from the league in 1985 and Morton East and West combining into one campus also in 1985.

The WSC doubled in size in the seventies, not in membership, but by addition of girls athletics. Gone were the "Playdays" and "Sportsdays" for the girls; festival-like meetings of fun and games between schools, The interscholastic movement started with the IHSA instituting state tournaments in tennis and track in the 1972-73 school year. The conference quickly became a leader in this movement by adding five sports: volleyball, basketball, badminton, softball, and archery. The following year, gymnastics, swimming and bowling were added to give the girls ten sports.

The membership changes in this decade all happened in the early years. Maine East, a charter member, left to join the Mid-Suburban League in 1971. The Suburban League went through another change that was again felt by the WSC. What was once one of the state's most powerful conferences dissolved. Two schools, Oak Park-River Forest and Proviso East, joined the WSC, giving the conference nine schools for the remainder of the seventies. Boys soccer was added in 1975; girls cross-country in 1978; and due to a lack of interest and safety reasons, archery was dropped in 1976.

The 1980's brought much success on the field of competition for the conference. This included numerous state and "mythical" national

championships, along with the setting of a large number of IHSA records.

The biggest change in the history of WSC occurred in the spring of 1985 with a major re-alignment. This took place between the conference and the Des Plaines Valley League with a vote of the Superintendents from the Inter-Suburban Association. This action combined the two leagues under one umbrella conference. Each Division would have seven teams, with one division named the Gold, and the other the Silver. Initial competition for the newly structured West Suburban Conference began in the fall of 1986.

According to WSC folklore, the division names were finalized after many hours of deliberation, arguing and negotiation. Their final names were not arrived at with the intention of ranking one ahead of the other, but came from the color of hair of the athletic directors in each division. The Silver Division's athletic directors were primarily distinguished gray-haired professionals who all happened to have "silver hair locks", thus securing the name.

To this day the members of the West Suburban Conference continue to be the following.

<b>GOLD DIVISION</b>	<b>SILVER DIVISION</b>
Addison Trail	Downers Grove North
Downers Grove South	Glenbard West
Hinsdale South	Hinsdale Central
Leyden	Lyons Township
Morton	Oak Park - River Forest
Proviso East	Proviso West
Willowbrook	York

