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## SLL to expand to 12 teams, two tiers

*BY JEFF ARENZ*  
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FREMONT -- The Suburban Lakes League superintendents dropped a bombshell after their meeting Tuesday morning.

Gibsonburg superintendent Thomas Peiffer announced in a news release that conference officials voted unanimously to expand from seven schools to a 12-school, two-division format based on enrollment.

"The SLL is an outstanding conference," Peiffer said. "We perceive this move to expand as being more of a good thing."

Peiffer said Eastwood, Genoa, Lake and Otsego will be in the larger division with two new members. He added the smaller division will contain Elmwood, Gibsonburg and Woodmore with three new members.

A target date of the 2011-2012 school year has been set for expansion. On Monday, SLL officials will meet to discuss the guidelines to make the transition.

"The meeting on Monday is going to set the tone," Peiffer said. "We can't assume that any school is being considered because no decisions have been made."

After Lakota announced in March 2008 that it was leaving the SLL for the Midland Athletic League this fall, SLL officials sought a replacement for the Raiders. Rossford and Fostoria sent letters of interest to the SLL, but officials voted to reject both of them.

"It's not 100 percent certain that we are leaving the Northern Lakes League," said Rossford athletic director Chuck Cox. "But we want to consider all opportunities to put our student-athletes in the best position for success."

Northern Lakes League commissioner Larry Morrison said he would not be surprised if Rossford decided to make a switch.

"They have been a great member of the NLL," Morrison said. "But there is a gap growing between the top enrollments in the conference and them."

Northern Ohio League president Jeff Ritz said the SLL's decision had no effect on his conference.

"At this point, it doesn't really affect us," Ritz said.

Fostoria athletic director Tim Murray declined to comment.

Sandusky Bay Conference executive secretary Stan Stewart said that all of the athletic directors and principals have told him they are fully committed to the league.

"As of right now, this really doesn't effect us," Stewart said.

Greater Buckeye Conference officials, who met in Findlay on Monday, are being affected by league shifting. Sandusky has applied to the NOL, which is seeking two replacements after Galion and Upper Sandusky were accepted into the North Central Conference in February.

"We want to sit back and listen," said GBC commissioner Nate Lynch. "We're waiting to hear from Sandusky about their application to the NOL. At the same time, we are going to send a letter to the Western Buckeye League to see how they feel about possibly merging with us."

Without Sandusky in the GBC, Fremont Ross, along with Napoleon, becomes the northernmost school. If a GBC-WBL merger happened, the Little Giants would be in a conference with schools as far as Van Wert, St. Mary's Memorial and Celina.

Other members of the WBL include Elida, Defiance Lima Bath, Lima Shawnee and Ottawa-Glandorf and Wapakoneta.

Ross athletic director Art Bucci said the Little Giants are exploring their options, but don't want to have to travel 150-170 miles for games.

"That would be some pretty far drives for us," Bucci said. "It's a good fix for Lima Senior, Findlay and Marion Harding, but not for Ross. I really don't know what the answer is right now. I have to dicuss this with our officials."

Morrison said he knows the NLL officials do not want to a 12-school conference. Oregon Clay, Napoleon and Ross have already expressed interest in joining the NLL.

"The superintendents and principals of the NLL are not interested in going to 12 teams," Morrison said. "You have to feel sorry for schools like Findlay, Fremont Ross and Napoleon because of their location. It's almost like they're out there on an island with no other conferences wanting to admit them."

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