

# THE BUFFALO NEWS

## Buffalo Public Schools Football Teams' Petition to Join ECIC Denied

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The Buffalo Public Schools' football teams have been denied entry into the Erie County Interscholastic Conference on Tuesday.

Twenty-nine members of the ECIC's Athletic Council voted on a petition to let South Park, Bennett, McKinley, Burgard and Hutch-Tech into the 28-team conference.

The vote went 21 opposing entry, seven favoring it and one abstention. Three voters did not show up for the meeting.

"We were hoping that this wouldn't happen, but we're going to deal with it the best way we know how for our kids," Bennett coach Steven McDuffie said.

BPS petitioned the ECIC for membership after last week's announcement by Section VI that it was shifting responsibility of scheduling for football to each member's respective league.

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"The ECIC has 28 football-playing schools that we still are not sure how we are going to align and schedule," Mark DiFilippo, executive director of ECIC, said. "Adding five more teams to the mix only complicates it. We will have spots for nonleague games with the city and other leagues."

The denial is a blow to the Buffalo Public Schools, which disbanded its football league 10 years ago in order to join the Section VI Football Federation, which for decades handled the scheduling and division alignments for the area's public school teams.

However, that changes effective this year as a proposal to return scheduling and division alignments to the leagues passed by a 19-11 vote Jan. 3. The reasons cited for the switch includes teams' desires to promote more interest in their programs with rivalries that cross multiple sports. They believe if familiar foes are scheduled each year, that it'll help increase attendance and perhaps athlete participation. They also believe league schedules will cut travel costs.

BPS and the Southern Tier-based CCAA were the only leagues to vote against the proposal.

Buffalo's five football coaches plan to meet Thursday to discuss the next recommendation to district officials, according to South Park coach Tim Delaney.

Applying for entry into the Niagara Frontier League appeared to be an option, but Delaney said the schools will not go that route. The NFL voted in favor of changing to league scheduling and has even fewer teams (eight) that play football than ECIC.

Delaney said the most viable options are to form a league or for each team to play an independent schedule.

He also said the district will move swiftly because the first drafts of each team's football schedules need to be submitted to Section VI by March 1.