

ATHLETIC DIRECTOR'S CUP

# The ultimate TROPHY

Even as SPC makes major changes to its format, one thing remains the same; every school's desire to attain the Athletic Director's Cup, the trophy that recognizes an athletic program's greatness.

STORY Ben Adams, Lawrence Gardner

**A**pril 29, 2022. It was a humid afternoon at the Houston Christian tennis courts, and the St. Mark's tennis team simply wanted to win their third-place match and start the long journey back to Dallas.

The team had heartbreakingly lost their semifinal to St. John's, and the third-place match against Kinkaid seemingly meant nothing. In, then-sophomore Arnav Lahoti's five-match series against Kinkaid, the rest of the team gathered to watch his match with the series tied 2-2.

Then, it happened. Lahoti hit the shot to win the grueling match, resulting in some half-hearted congratulations from his teammates. At that time, as far as the team was concerned, their win against Kinkaid was one for pride and nothing more.

But it was more than just that. Lahoti's fateful shot resulted in the 13th Athletic Director's Cup victory in 16 years for St. Mark's, culminating all the hard work and thrilling competition the 2021-2022 athletic year had brought.

**Lahoti, who had not even heard** of the Athletic Director's Cup before that day, did not realize the magnitude of his game-winning shot until the team was on the bus back to Dallas.

"We were pretty bummed because we lost to St. John's and we were just trying to secure third place so we could go home feeling a little bit victorious," Lahoti said. "So we didn't actually know anything about the Athletic Director's Cup. I figured it out on the bus ride back when someone just said 'Oh, apparently we won the Athletic Director's Cup because of that last game.'"

The competition started in 2007, and associate athletic director Josh Friesen appreciates the opportunity for the conference's athletic programs to compete against each other as a whole.

"The Athletic Director's Cup is the entire conference competing as one," Friesen said. "Lowest score at the end of the year wins. If you don't offer a sport, you get one place higher than the last-place finishing team. For instance, if there are 10 volleyball teams, and you don't offer boys volleyball, you'll get 11th place in that sport."

This year, the SPC decided to change up its competition process by having 3A and 4A teams compete separately when contending for the championship.

"When we had a 12-team bracket, if you didn't qualify for SPC, you were automatically getting 13th place," Friesen said. "Now, the worst you can do is eighth, because



**THE CUP**  
This prized possession is awarded to one SPC school each year for both the boy's champion and the girl's champion.

PHOTO / NEIL YEPURI

there are eight teams within 3A and eight teams in 4A, so this helps lower teams' points for the cup."

Though many had their doubts about the effectiveness of the new installment, Friesen feels the benefits outweigh the problems and that the competition for the Athletic Director's Cup will become more fun and competitive.

"I believe that by shrinking the standings, it makes SPC more competitive," Friesen said. "There's also less of a penalty for the teams that aren't strong in a certain sport."

**The SPC Board of Directors**, the group that makes these decisions, is comprised of nineteen heads of school, one from each school that competes in the SPC. Five of those heads of school also are part of the Operations Committee along with the SPC director and one athletic director.

"The SPC Board of Directors has regular meetings at the start of each conference championship weekend, and we have an annual meeting in early June," said Chris Gunnin '90, chair of the SPC board of directors. "The purpose of the meetings is to manage, operate, direct and supervise the activities of the conference."

While not every decision the SPC makes is agreed upon by everyone, Friesen supports the conference and recognizes there are many different types of schools within the conference.

"The conference is constantly trying to evolve," Friesen said. "They have the goal of making a conference that's best for all individuals involved, which is very hard to do in our conference. We have a wide variety of schools and it is really difficult to create a system that is perfect for everyone."

## 2021-22 ST. MARK'S ATHLETIC DIRECTOR'S CUP SCORING

- 7** total fall points  
volleyball - 1st  
cross country - 1st  
football - 5th
- 15** total winter points  
wrestling - 3rd  
soccer - 4th  
basketball - 4th  
swimming - 4th
- 21** total spring points  
track & field - 1st  
golf - 2nd  
lacrosse - 2nd  
tennis - 3rd  
baseball - 13th
- 43** total cup points,  
enough to win our  
13th cup title

## SPC makes major change, beginning the 3A/4A format for all sports

BY Ben Adams

**E**very school in SPC is now divided into two different brackets, 4A and 3A, during SPC tournaments for the majority of sports, meaning every team will be able to compete in a tournament.

While football and lacrosse have had this format in the past, this is the first time that sports such as soccer, basketball and baseball have multiple champions each season.

Although the determination for which bracket each school falls into depends on the sport, size and program history are major factors in deciding which schools will compete in the "big school" 4A bracket or the "small school" 3A bracket.

According to St. Stephen's Head of School Chris Gunnin '90, who serves as the chair of the SPC board of directors, the decision to make the switch was largely based on a competitive gap between the bigger and smaller schools.

"When you review the championship results across all sports over history, in recent history a handful of schools have won a disproportionate number of championships,

and a number of schools have not been as competitive in the conference," Gunnin said. "A number of the smaller schools simply struggle with being competitive against the larger schools."

Not only did several small schools deal with losing seasons in most sports, but the losing seasons also caused those schools to miss the opportunity to compete in SPC tournaments. Under this new format, every team in SPC will compete in the SPC tournament, albeit in two different divisions.

"We wanted to create competitive opportunities for more schools and we wanted to make sure that all of the competitions were as meaningful as they could be," Gunnin said. "The 3A/4A format allows all teams to participate in the tournament weekend in a structure that positions the matches to be as competitive as possible."

While the format for these tournaments is still very new, Gunnin and other leaders in SPC have appreciated the increased competition the new system offers after its use in the 2022 Fall Championships and the 2023 Spring Championships.

"I do feel that the new structure has been largely successful," Gunnin said. "This is an idea that the SPC

has considered before over its history, and it has taken us two to three years to explore and study the data that led to this structure. I have not heard of any major concerns or complaints about the structure, and I have heard of a number of schools who are grateful for the competitive opportunities that the new structure has provided their schools."



**LOPSIDED**  
A major reason for the 4A/3A change are games between two uneven schools that result in blowouts such as this one.

PHOTO / BEN ADAMS