

▼ Local Search Site Search

GO

**HOME** TODAY'S GLOBE **NEWS** BUSINESS SPORTS LIFESTYLE A&E THINGS TO DO TRAVEL CARS JOBS HOMES LOCAL SEARCH

Local National World Politics Business Education Health Science Green Obituaries Special reports Traffic Weather Lottery

HOME / NEWS / LOCAL / MASS.

## Track meet on holiday draws ire in Newton

The Boston Globe

Officials defend scheduling event on Rosh Hashana

By Matt Rocheleau

Globe Correspondent / September 15, 2009

[Email](#) | [Print](#) | [Reprints](#) | |
Text size [-](#) [+](#)

The Massachusetts State Track Coaches Association scheduled an invitational meet on Rosh Hashana, prompting the Newton North girls cross country team to decide against competing as a team because eight members will be observing the holiday.

The scheduling controversy also sparked a sharp e-mail exchange between the association's executive director and a local rabbi.

Association officials said they were aware the Jewish holy day fell on the same day as the meet when they scheduled the event in January. But, said Frank Mooney, the association's executive director, there were no other dates available to book the venue, and he "had no real idea how serious that day was."

"I feel badly. We did not intend to offend the Jewish community. It will not be on Rosh Hashana again," Mooney said in a telephone interview yesterday.

"There was no other time and place to put it, and now it's too late to change the date," Mooney said.

He said he had not received complaints about the scheduling of the meet - which draws about 130 schools and 3,500 participants yearly - until he was e-mailed by Rabbi Susan P. Fendrick of Newton on Wednesday.

"I imagine that if such an event were accidentally scheduled on Easter, it would be rescheduled without a second thought," read Fendrick's e-mail.

"Why is this event being held on Rosh Hashana and not being rescheduled . . . And, what steps are you taking to make sure that this will not happen in future years?"

Hours later, Mooney sent a response.

"You are way off!!!! . . . Sorry you assumed we did this purposely and were not sensitive to a religious holiday," read Mooney's e-mail.

"We took what we could from a very busy schedule and then left it up to those who could attend to attend. . . . I guess you could also assume that we are antiacademic when we have a date in Oct. that conflicts with the PSATs. Unfortunately it is not a perfect world and when we try to accommodate as many people as possible we run into conflicts," the message read.

Fendrick learned the meet will be held on the Jewish New Year from her 16-year-old stepdaughter, Shoshana Kruskal, a senior at Newton North and a track team member. Kruskal became upset after learning she would have to miss Saturday's McIntyre Invitational at Franklin Park in Boston to observe the religious holiday.

"I don't think [not realizing the date's significance] is a good excuse at all. It's an

ADVERTISEMENT



LOCAL NEWS ON TWITTER »



FOLLOW GLOBEMETRO ON TWITTER ▶

Follow other Boston.com Tweets | What is Twitter?

### MOST E-MAILED »

1. [Clark University president to step down](#)
2. [Fires force evacuations of MBTA stations, disrupt commute](#)
3. [White House may extend homebuyer tax credit](#)
4. [10 'safest' cellphones](#)
5. [Charter schools see more attrition](#)
6. [Boston launches flu shot tracking](#)
7. [ZZ Top pumps up the volume and churns out the hits](#)

### RECOMMENDED SEARCHES

- |                                  |                                  |
|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| <a href="#">Yvonne Abraham</a>   | <a href="#">Food</a>             |
| <a href="#">Crossword puzzle</a> | <a href="#">Lottery</a>          |
| <a href="#">Obituaries</a>       | <a href="#">Crossword puzzle</a> |

ABOUT THIS LIST ▶

I don't think [not realizing the date's seriousness is] a good excuse at all. It's on all the calendars. It's clearly a very important holiday. I find it very difficult to believe they did not know how important it is," Kruskal said.

At least seven of Kruskal's teammates will also miss the meet in observance of Rosh Hashana, including 15-year-old sophomore Allie Phillips.

"I think it's very unfair for them to schedule a meet on such an important holy day," Phillips said.

Mooney and Charles Butterfield, the association's vice president, said yesterday a meet probably would not be held on major Christian holidays, like Christmas or Easter, because facilities are closed and not available.

"I don't fault him in not knowing," Fendrick said in a phone interview.

"There's no harm in not knowing. But he should have educated himself about the significance of Rosh Hashana," she said.

When contacted yesterday, Fendrick and Kruskal described Mooney's reply e-mail as rude.

Mooney, though, said he "had no intention to be rude."

"I tried to explain to Susan that unfortunately on the dates for our other invitational there are also serious conflicts," he said.

In another invitational meet slated for Oct. 17 at Northfield Mountain, some students will not be able to attend because they have to take the PSATs that day, Mooney said. On Nov. 7, other students who have to take the SATs will miss an invitational at the Wrentham Developmental Center.

Comparing standardized tests to religious holidays, however, upset Fendrick.

"It's absurd and a trivialized comparison," she said.

Though some of the Newton North girls will compete individually, the team's coach, Peter Martin, decided not to enter his group in the team competition because some of his top runners, including the team's captain, will miss the event because of the Jewish holiday.

Martin said he spoke to Mooney when he became aware of the date's conflict with Rosh Hashana and was told it was the only date the association could hold the meet.

"There just aren't very many sites that can host the whole state," said Martin. "And, it just didn't seem appropriate to cancel it."

The event is the one of the season's first statewide competitions and each school's participation is voluntary.

Mooney said he felt bad if anyone was offended, but he added, "There will always be some group that will not be able to attend for whatever reason. If I apologized each time, I'd be sending out apologies all year."

"When you can make a change you do, but when you can't, you can't," added Butterfield. "The bottom line is you're never going to please everyone," he said. ■

© Copyright 2009 Globe Newspaper Company.

