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# Coaches group explains decision to have meet on Rosh Hashana

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Globe Correspondent / September 17, 2009

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NEWTON - A state coaches association issued a statement last night explaining its decision to schedule an invitational cross country meet on Rosh Hashana, saying it was apologizing to "those who are upset and offended" by the situation.

"It is unfortunate that the focus of this week on the McIntyre Cross Country Invitational meet and our organization has been so negative," said the statement from the Massachusetts State Track Coaches Association's board of directors. The statement will be included with paperwork given to coaches at Saturday's meet.

The association scheduled Saturday's meet at Franklin Park in Boston on the Jewish New Year, prompting the Newton North girls cross country team to decide against competing as a team because eight members will be observing the holiday. A Newton rabbi whose daughter is on the team also raised concern about the scheduling.

The team is not boycotting the event, but its coach decided not to enter the runners when he learned that nearly one-third of his squad would not be able to attend.

"Our organization works very hard at providing a very full schedule of events for the cross country and track student athletes of Massachusetts," the coaches association said in a statement. "MSTCA does that so we will give the track and cross country athletes several opportunities during the year to compete at a state level meet.

"We have come to realize that with such a comprehensive schedule we might have conflicts that will not allow some athletes to compete in a particular event on a particular day. It is never our intent to deliberately upset any group. To those who are upset and offended with our decision to run this weekend's meet we apologize."

However, the Newton rabbi who first contacted the association about the scheduling conflict said the statement "says nothing new."

"They have a right to respond however they're going to respond," said Rabbi Susan Fendrick. "... That's fine; just don't call it an apology."

Frank Mooney, the association's executive director, reiterated a promise he made this week that no future meets will be scheduled on Rosh Hashana. "Personally, I've become a lot more aware of how holy a day it is," he said yesterday. ■

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