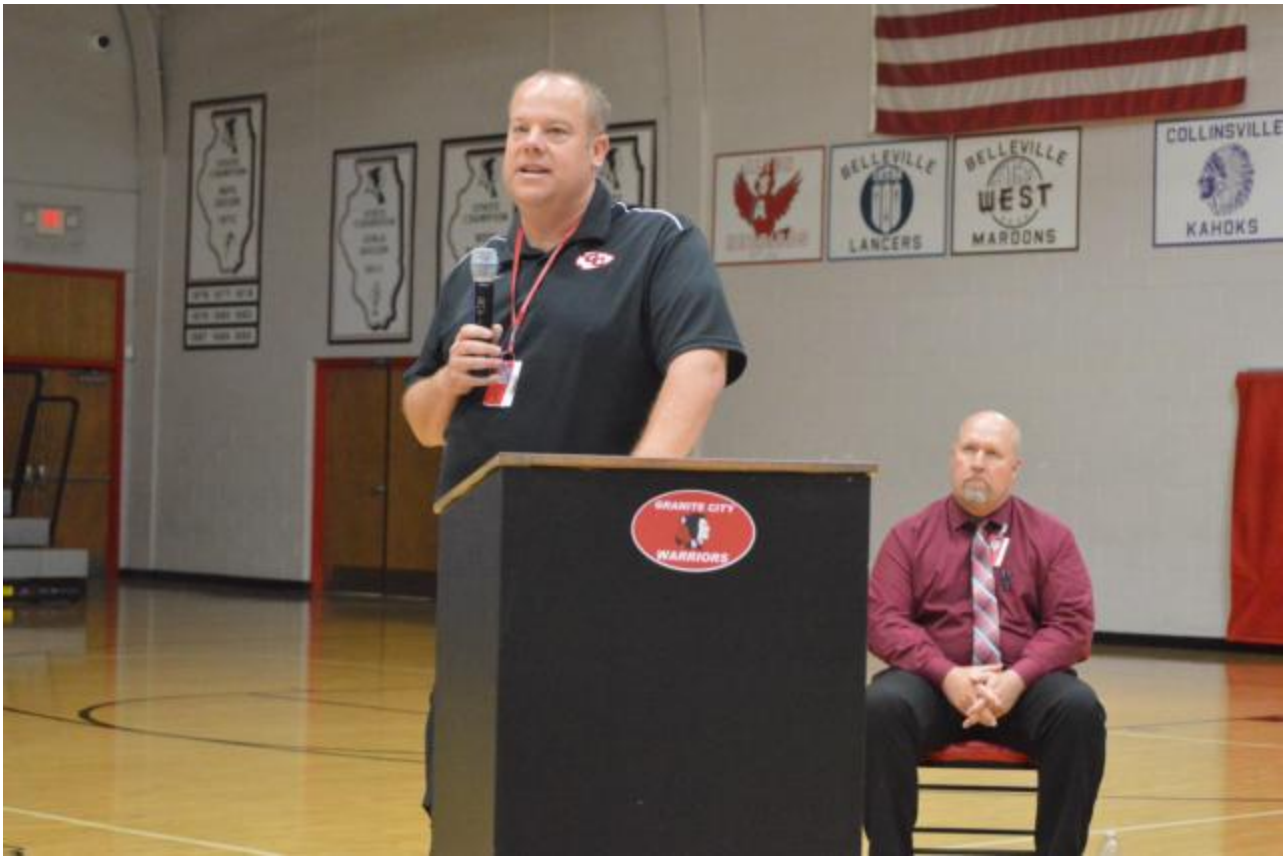


Granite City administrators address reasons for SWC departure in Tuesday meeting

by Brent Feeney, Sports Writer
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GRANITE CITY – Many questions have arisen in Granite City since last week's unanimous decision by the Granite City School Board to begin procedures to withdraw from the Southwestern Conference at the end of the 2017-18 school year.

Granite City school superintendent Jim Greenwald, GCHS principal Daren DePew and athletic director John Moad answered questions about the decision to depart the SWC after next year in a town hall-style meeting at Memorial Gym in Granite City Tuesday night.

The decision to withdraw from the nearly 100-year-old league – from which Granite City had once left in 1975 during the two-high school era as Granite City South, eventually helping to form the old Gateway East Conference with Granite North, Belleville Althoff, Cahokia and Edwardsville in 1979 until the two Granite City schools had re-merged in 1983, re-joining the SWC in 1985 – was not taken lightly, officials said.

Greenwald, DePew and Moad each answered questions from the audience about the reasons behind GCHS' impending withdrawal from the league and the reasons cited for the decision, stemming from an incident during the Feb. 21 SWC boys basketball game in East St. Louis between the Warriors and Flyers in which a spectator was reported to be in possession of a gun during the game, prompting officials to stop the game and clear the gym. Questions also concerned future conference affiliations and how GCHS athletes could be scouted for collegiate teams in the future without the SWC affiliation.

“I think it (the meeting) went really well,” Greenwald said. “We're doing this (leaving the SWC) for all the right reasons; there's a lot more to it than the safety issues; a lot went into it, the incident at East St. Louis prompted it. It wasn't the sole reason, but it just prompted it. We just feel that this is best for our student-athletes moving forward.

“I'm hoping everyone here tonight, whether they agree or disagree – I felt like that I put it all out there.”

Greenwald cited what he felt were 'inequities' in a 2010 probe into East St. Louis' football program using ineligible players when Greenwald was the league's president that ended up forcing the Flyers to forfeit five games; the IHSA eventually became involved in the investigation. “I talked about the inequities back in 2010, I talked about challenging East St. Louis – and I would have challenged any school, it's not just about East Side.”

Granite City will continue to play the SWC schools once the school leaves the league, Greenwald said. “It's a big move, without a doubt,” Greenwald said. “Not burning any bridges as we leave, hopefully, but just wanting to move forward for what's best for our

student-athletes, and we will be playing a lot of those schools in many sports; it's not like we're going to be completely divorced from competition.”

“There's been positives and negatives” about leaving the SWC, Moad said. “This has not been an easy decision for us; (Greenwald and DePew) and myself have all played in this conference, we've coached in this conference and now we're in these positions as athletic director, principal and superintendent in this conference.”

Leaving the SWC was something many thought would never happen. “We never planned on leaving the Southwestern Conference; it was just unfortunate incidents that led to this. This was the last thing we wanted to do was leave, but we've got to take care of ourselves and that's the most important thing – take care of ourselves and our student-athletes, make sure we're giving them the best environment we can – safety and everything included.

“This move had a lot of factors to it; it's just not the incident in East St. Louis by any means, there's a lot of factors that went into it. When that (incident) happened, that went to the forefront. There was a lot of attention brought to leaving the Southwestern Conference once that surfaced.”

The fact that Granite City has previously not been a member of the SWC is not 'uncharted waters” for the school; prior to the 1979 formation of the Gateway East, then-Granite City South had competed as an independent for four years. “Almost every school in the conference has jumped in and out at one point,” Moad said. “This is not uncharted waters, but it hasn't happened in a long time and we've always been one of the faces of the Southwestern Conference.

“It is what it is; people are afraid of change, and I understand that. But change can also be exciting. From this point on, we've got to move forward and look at the positives and make this the best thing we can. We struggled with (the decision to leave); that's why we had this meeting tonight, to try to get the facts out to the community – that's all we can do. I hope everyone understands that our decisions are going to be based on what's best for our kids.”