FOR MORE INFORMATION

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**Organization Supports Indiana High School Unified Sports® Coaches**

Following the launch of two Indiana High School Athletic Association (IHSAAA) state championships in Unified Sports® and two more high school state championships sponsored by Special Olympics Indiana (SOIN), a new organization has been launched to support individuals coaching these teams.

The **Unified Coaches Association of Indiana (UCAIn)**, organized as an Indiana nonprofit corporation and held its inaugural meeting to select its officers and board of directors. It is believed to be the first such organization of its kind. The organization’s first event will be when it holds the Inaugural Unified Track & Field Coaches’ Clinic on March 6 prior to the eighth IHSAA Unified Track and Field season that will conclude with its state championship on June 5. A new website will be launched in the next few weeks to gather both memberships and clinic registration. Those selected to serve were:

* Alan Bodenstein, President --- Carroll (FW)
* Ryan Pepple, Vice President --- East Noble
* Todd Sheely, Executive Committee --- Elkhart
* Mike Branam, Secretary --- Bedford North Lawrence
* Brooke Fleener, Treasurer --- Bloomington North
* Kevin Anderson --- Twin Lakes
* David Prokop --- Valparaiso
* Jamie Stephen --- Carmel
* Dave Whittemore, Bishop Chatard

Mitch Bonar and Michael Zmija, Jr. were added as Ex Officio members and Bruce Wolf was named as Executive Director. Assisting Wolf in his responsibilities will be former IHSAA Commissioner Bobby Cox, Special Olympics Indiana Director of Unified Champion Schools Michael Hasch and Director of Champions Together Lee Lonzo.

Active Membership dues will be $30 annually and will be open to any individual currently coaching a Unified high school team in a recognized sport and Associate Membership will be $20 annually and will be open to officials, parents, former coaches, partners and athletes, and all other friends of Unified Sports. For more information about membership, email ucaindiana@gmail.com.

Unified Sports joins people with and without intellectual disabilities on the same team. It was inspired by a simple principle: training together and playing together is a quick path to friendship and understanding. It has continued to show that participation in sports has the power to break down social barriers and stereotypes.

In the fall of 2012, the IHSAA Student Advisory Committee (SAC) recommended to the IHSAA Board of Directors establishing a partnership with SOIN to be known as Champions Together. Noting a “mutual love of sports,” this recommendation was made in response to a challenge from then Commissioner Bobby Cox for them to find a way for IHSAA athletes to give back to their schools and communities while learning the lessons of servant leadership.

In the fall of 2013, the IHSAA SAC recommended the establishment of a Unified Track and Field State Championship as the 21st IHSAA sanctioned sport. The first such tournament was held in June of 2014 and the Warsaw Tigers were crowned the first championship team in an IHSAA sanctioned Unified Sport. Since then the IHSAA has added Unified Flag Football (2018) and SOIN has added Bocce (2016) and Bowling (2018) high school state championship tournaments.

One of the goals for IHSAA Unified Sports has been to be treated equally to all other sports. Commissioner Cox began by presenting the Unified Track and Field Champions the same trophy that is awarded in all other sports and hosting that event in the same venue as the Boys’ and Girls’ Track and Field State Championships (Indiana University). Another step was taken towards that goal with the establishment of a recognized coaches association. The original idea for forming the UCAIn immerged from a gathering of coaches in October of 2019 held in conjunction with the SOIN Annual State Convention. This group of coaches continued to meet until their ultimate goal of corporate status was achieved.

**About Unified Coaches Association of Indiana (UCAIn)**

The Unified Coaches Association of Indiana (UCAIn) was organized in January 2021 as an Indiana domestic non-profit corporation and is currently seeking IRS nonprofit status under IRC 501 (c) (3). The mission is to support, inform and educate those individuals coaching high school unified sports in the Hoosier state. Unified Sports joins people with and without intellectual disabilities on the same team based on a simple principle: training together and playing together is a quick path to friendship and understanding. For more information about UCAIn email them at ucaindiana@gmail.com.

To stay abreast of any developments regarding UCAIn, follow their social media channels, including:

* Facebook =  @UCAIndiana or follow link <https://www.facebook.com/UCAIndiana>
* Twitter = @UnifiedCoaches or follow link <https://twitter.com/UnifiedCoaches>
* Instagram = @UnifiedCoaches or follow link <https://www.instagram.com/unifiedcoaches/>