

DAC

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Sullivan and Calais, the latter a former longtime DAC staple, with both also holding dual membership in both conferences.

“My rationale at the time was that the DAC was going to dissolve, so to protect programming and opportunities for kids at Machias was why I sought out the PVC,” said Machias principal and athletic administrator Brian Leavitt.

“The willingness of the PVC and the Aroostook League to take these teams in and meet their needs has really solidified the DAC.”

A declining conference

The Downeast Athletic Conference is believed to trace its roots to the early 1970s when consolidation of many of Maine’s smaller schools reshaped the state’s interscholastic sports landscape.

The DAC began as an association of all eight Washington County high schools at the time: Class C programs Calais, Narraguagus and Washington Academy of East Machias and Class D schools Jonesport-Beals, Lubec, Machias, Shead and Woodland.

All represented small, hardworking towns founded in ocean harvests or working the woods, communities where few things have sparked more emotion than the fate of the local high school sports teams — particularly in basketball.

Virtually every DAC school has taken its turn in creating local legends, beginning with Jonesport-Beals’ schoolboy basketball dynasty of the early and mid-1970s and continuing through only slightly less periods of dominance by both the boys and girls programs at Calais.

But as the region’s population aged and student enrollments began to wane, some fragility within the DAC was exposed.

Washington Academy, an independent school that attracts international students, was an enrollment exception. By the mid-2000s the Raiders had moved up to Class B in many sports and



Woodland’s Drew Hayward (4) talks to teammates Alex Morrison (left), Luke McDonald and Gavin Gardner before the start of an inning against Bangor Christian during their baseball game recently at the University of Maine in Orono.

added football and swimming, two activities not offered by the DAC.

WA subsequently left the DAC beginning with the 2008-2009 season and joined the Class B-rich Penobscot Valley Conference.

That left Calais and Narraguagus as the lone Class C programs in the DAC, and even they were exploring moves that would provide them additional Class C opponents. That prompted a meeting in early 2008 to discuss the conference’s future.

“It would be a darn shame for us to lose any more [teams],” Shead athletic director Bob Davis said in the Jan. 11, 2008, edition of the Quoddy Tides, an Eastport-based newspaper.

But two years later, Lubec closed its high school, leaving the DAC with just six schools.

Calais was the next to leave the DAC, initially scheduling more out-of-conference Class C games and eventually joining WA in the PVC. The Blue Devils still scheduled some DAC foes, particularly Narraguagus and Woodland, but the conference survivors

were tasked to travel great distances to fill their schedules against teams in other parts of the state with similar scheduling dilemmas, such as Temple Academy of Waterville, Highview Christian of Charleston and Greenville.

And three games a season against conference foes became even more common.

“It’s been very difficult, no question,” said Theriault.

Making their moves

Four of those five schools seriously looked elsewhere during the most recent school year, initially with the lone Class C member, Narraguagus, seeking entry into the PVC.

The other schools, fearing dissolution of the conference, also sought out alternatives.

“Narraguagus decided to join the PVC to get more scheduled games, and they play a lot of teams in the PVC anyways,” said Leavitt. “We followed suit with that because honestly at the time I kind of felt like the DAC was falling apart.

“We looked at joining the Aroostook League, too, but when I did the analysis of PVC schools versus Aroostook League schools, most of our games with the exception of Bangor Christian and Greenville are within an hour. We would have to travel nearly two hours to get to any of those [Class D] schools in the Aroostook League. At that point, for us it was a no-brainer.”

As PVC members, Machias and Narraguagus must play 50 percent of their games in a sport against fellow conference members in order to be eligible for postseason championships and awards — but those in-conference games can include each other as well as fellow DAC members Calais and Sumner.

“When you become a member of the PVC you basically are agreeing to the schedule that is given to you, but within that the PVC is very good about individu-

al schools’ requests,” said PVC president Brian Gaw, athletic administrator at Piscataquis Community Secondary School in Guilford.

“There’s no particular number you have to take, for example in an 18-game schedule you might only take six or eight games in the PVC. The only problem, if you see it as a problem, is you don’t qualify for PVC honors, team or individual, unless you play at least 50 percent of your schedule within the PVC.”

Machias will maintain its recent practice of playing Greenville in some sports, but beyond that its longest road trip for a game during the coming school year will be to Bangor Christian.

“The only thing the PVC asked of me was if we would play Greenville, and I said certainly because I want to help the league and we have played them in the past so it wasn’t any big deal for us,” said Leavitt.

“I couldn’t have asked for a better situation, really. Everything just kind of fell in line.”

Shead and Woodland also explored both the PVC and Aroostook League as possible dual-conference destinations.

Theriault and athletic administrators Josh McGuire of Shead and John Rogers of Woodland met with Aroostook League officials in January, and both schools were accepted this spring as members of that conference beginning in 2017-18.

The one-year delay for full membership stems from the Aroostook League building its schedule every two years, though league president Tim Watt said the conference is working to get Shead and Woodland some games for 2016-17.

The exception

The one Downeast Athletic Conference program that hasn’t pursued dual membership is its smallest school, Jonesport-Beals.

“For us, it didn’t really make sense,” said Jones-

port-Beals athletic administrator Dan Campbell. “Sure, it would be great to join a conference like that to get the scheduled games and be guaranteed games.

“But for us to go up to Aroostook County, that’s about a four-hour drive every time, and the vast majority of the schools that are closest to us in the PVC are Class C schools and we’re a school of 70 kids, so playing a Class C schedule isn’t going to be very beneficial for us, either.”

Jonesport-Beals will remain in the DAC and draw much of its schedules from those schools. Beyond that,

think that’s part of it,” said Campbell. “With basketball I haven’t had as much of an issue, but with these schools joining other conferences I feel like it maybe is just a matter of time before they aren’t going to be as willing to come and play us. The PVC has to look out for itself, too, so some of these schools we’re playing now might not be able to reserve those spots down the road.”

Solidification of sorts

The trend toward dual conference affiliation among Down East schools has worked both ways, with Calais and Sumner seeking admission to the DAC in order to take advantage of benefits that come from being part of a smaller grouping.

The Penobscot Valley Conference is the state’s largest high school league with more than 30 schools from the northern half of the state representing all four classes — five, counting basketball.

That makes eligibility for postseason awards and recognition a challenging aspiration.

Calais athletic administrator Randy Morrison always appreciated the emphasis the DAC placed on recognizing Down East athletes during his school’s long tenure in the league. He sees his school’s return to that conference as a dual member as a chance to shine another light on standout Blue Devil student-athletes through all-star teams and championship events.

“I didn’t really want the DAC to dissolve because Calais was in it for quite a few years until a couple of years ago,” he said, “and this will help our student-athletes to get recognized more.”

Sumner will join the DAC for the first time, but the Ti-



Bangor Christian’s Jack York (bottom) tries to dive to second past Woodland’s Windsor Brooks during their game recently at the University of Maine in Orono.

the Royals have established relationships in recent years with island schools Vinalhaven and Islesboro and also have traveled to the likes of Temple Academy in Waterville and Greenville.

“All of us will make sure they have games down here, and after that they’ll probably have to play some of the island teams,” Sinford said.

One sport for which Jonesport-Beals hasn’t had as much difficulty generating schedules is basketball.

“I think it’s because people remember the dynasties when we were super successful before I ever got here. I

gers have a history of playing DAC schools.

Morrison said he expects Calais to continue playing several DAC opponents, including those also affiliated with the PVC, and that the dual-membership moves by both his school and Sumner also may be beneficial to other PVC programs.

“It may save some other PVC schools maybe from having to travel down this way, and travel is always a big thing,” he said.

So, too, is DAC pride, an intangible that will continue to exist at least in small part thanks to cooperation among conferences.

Red Sox

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from which his entire career has been built.

He has been a masher for most of his baseball life, yet he flashed that thunder for only one extended stretch since he returned to the Sox last season when he clobbered 10 home runs in April.

He went from hitting 10 home runs in his first 21 Red Sox games to just 14 more over his next 145 games.

That’s not Ramirez, that’s not the pedigree that led the Sox to ink him to a four-year deal before last season with the potential of becoming David Ortiz’ replacement as the DH.

Yes, he messed up his shoulder and thus his swing after banging into the left field wall at Fenway last year, but that excuse ended when he returned this season.

It’s been a slow start. And even though last night’s blast was a long time coming, Ramirez knew it was coming.

And he knows that there’s more to come, too.

“No, no, I needed a couple of hits for my confidence but in my mind, I knew that I

was getting close,” he said.

Anyone who has seen Ramirez at the plate lately has seen flashes of his lethal power stroke. A hard line-out to the opposite field Tuesday night, a sharp single up the middle his next time up.

“Just my hands were coming out quick and short, that’s it,” Ramirez said. “As a hitter, you know, even one swing, wow. For something like that, you just go from there.

“I know I’ve been feeling better and better and better every day at the plate and that’s it, just feeling good and seeing the ball better.”

The hazard certainly is present that Ramirez’ confidence may not bear out and that the power display is one and done, but let’s give him the benefit of the doubt that he knows a thing or two about hitting and when he is hitting right.

If he’s right, the impact of him getting hot for a lineup that is already the best in the game is significant. Others — mainly Ortiz, Xander Bogaerts, Mookie Betts and Jackie Bradley Jr. — have carried the offense this season.

Ramirez has been waiting, sometimes patiently, for his turn.

“That relaxes you a little bit even if you’re struggling because you’ve got guys who can pick you up until you get hot,” said Ramirez.

The Sox patiently kept Ramirez hitting in the fifth spot in anticipation of this.

“To have that type of middle of the order bat, which we still have a lot of confidence in Hanley and his capabilities of doing that, it would certainly add an extra base threat to the middle of the order,” Sox manager John Farrell said. “The way other guys are going around him right now, particularly David ahead of him, the way Jackie has come on this year, it makes that middle of the order even that much more formidable. It’s encouraging to see this last five to seven day stretch. It’s starting to come to life a little bit.”

In another nod to having put his power slump behind him, Ramirez described how he simply kept working until he felt the click.

“I don’t play around with my offense,” he said “That’s my thing. I get here early, go to the (batting) cage, do my thing, I never get away from my offense.”

Farrell never detected a letup in effort even if the results were not there.

Mets’ Wright undergoing neck surgery

THE SPORTS XCHANGE

New York Mets third baseman David Wright said he will undergo neck surgery on Thursday to repair the herniated disk that has sidelined him since late May.

Dr. Robert Watkins, who has previously treated Wright back for spinal stenosis in his lower back, will perform the operation in Southern California.

Wright, 33, attempted rest and anti-inflammatory injections before agreeing with Watkins that surgery was necessary.

“After trying every way to get back on the field, I’ve come to realize that it’s best for me, my teammates and the organization to proceed with surgery at this time,” Wright said in a statement. “My neck simply did not respond to any of the treatments of the past few weeks.

“While incredibly frustrating and disappointing,

I am determined to make a full recovery and get back on the field as soon as I can to help the Mets win. I greatly appreciate the support of my teammates and our fans throughout the last few weeks.”

There is no official timetable for Wright’s return and the Mets said it “will be determined based on the results of the procedure and the progress of the recovery.”

Wright was batting .226 with seven homers in 37 games before being shut down.

Wright’s contract runs through the 2020 season.

Torre named Team USA's GM

Hall of Famer Joe Torre has been selected as general manager for Team USA in the 2017 World Baseball Classic, Major League Baseball announced Thursday.

Torre, 75, is the chief baseball officer for MLB. He served as the manager of Team USA when it lost in the second round of the 2013 World Baseball Classic.

“I’m excited to be in-

involved again,” Torre said in a statement. “I had a taste of international play in 2013 and was disappointed that we didn’t advance further.”

Torre managed the New York Yankees to four World Series crowns and was a nine-time All-Star as a player. He was inducted into the Hall of Fame in 2014.

Jim Leyland is the manager of the 2017 squad.

Rays place Souza on DL

The Tampa Bay Rays placed right fielder Steven Souza Jr. on the 15-day disabled list Thursday due to a hip injury.

Souza strained his left hip while diving for a ball during Tuesday’s game against the Seattle Mariners.

Placing Souza on the disabled list opened up a roster spot for promising left-hander Blake Snell, who is slated to start Thursday’s contest against the Seattle Mariners.

The outing will be the second major-league start for Snell, who is being recalled from Triple-A Durham.

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