

Hanahan High School dropped its suit against the S.C. High School League on Monday, clearing the way for **Loris** to wrestle **Woodruff** for the Class AA state duals championship.

"I think it boiled down to no matter what we did, it didn't look like we'd be able to wrestle for a state championship," Hanahan athletics director Charlie Patterson said. "That was the determining factor. That was the bottom line as far as dropping the case."

Hanahan appeared to have won the Lower State final 34-33 on Feb. 10, but **Loris** coach Thomas Britt appealed the outcome, saying the Hawks used a wrestler in the 125-pound weight class who was ineligible at that weight because he had weighed in at 135 pounds and wrestled at 140 pounds earlier in the season. The SCHSL ruled in **Loris'** favor, resulting in a forfeit of the 125-pound win and swinging the final score to 39-31 in favor of the Lions.

The state final was set for Feb. 13, but was postponed due to impending winter weather, and then Hanahan filed a counter appeal, delaying the match again. Hanahan lost that appeal last Thursday in a 13-0 vote by the SCHSL's executive committee, prompting the Berkeley County School District to file a complaint against the league in Ninth Judicial Circuit. Circuit court judge Kristi Lea Harrington issued an injunction that forced **Loris** and Upper State champion **Woodruff** off the mat just moments before the state championship match was to start that night.

"It's an unfortunate thing for everybody," Patterson said. "Particularly with the match being stopped. That's not something we are proud of, but something we felt like we had to do to fight for our kids."

As part of agreeing to drop the suit, SCHSL executive director Jerome Singleton has agreed to meet with school and district officials to explain why the situation happened the way it did, according to Bob Horner, a lawyer for the SCHSL.

Patterson said something needs to be done about the SCHSL's method of delivering rules to coaches.

"I think that is certainly something that needs to be addressed," he said. "If we don't get to wrestle, I hope that nobody else gets put in this situation where they haven't been made aware of the rules."

At the center of the debate is an e-mail sent by the SCHSL to **wrestling** coaches detailing weight management procedures for the 2009-10 **wrestling** season. According to the rules in that e-mail, if a wrestler is certified to wrestle at a certain weight class, but weighs in two weight classes higher, they lose certification at the previous lowest weight class.

Rule 15b in the e-mail gives the following example, which Britt and the SCHSL said is the basis for the disqualification: "Wrestler is certified to wrestle 130. The wrestler weighs in for a dual meet at 140. Since this is two weight classes above the minimum weight class established by the wrestler, they have now re-certified their lowest weight class to 135. This athlete is no longer eligible to compete at 130."

Patterson said he and Hanahan coach Ray Adkins never saw the e-mail and questioned the validity of the rule if it is only sent out electronically. Patterson said he believes the e-mail was sent by a secretary at the SCHSL, but the rule is not recorded in the state's rule book and is not available on the SCHSL's Web site.

"As far as I know, that's the only way these rules are sent out," Patterson said. "... If you are going to be held accountable, don't just send it out and then there's no explanation of it."

Patterson suggested that coaches or ADs should be required to reply to an e-mail or send a return fax as a way to confirm rules have been received. "We didn't seem to be the only people that were in the dark on this thing," he said.

Britt said the weight management rules have been discussed extensively in coaching clinics since before they were implemented as a way to prevent wrestlers from losing unhealthy amounts of weight or giving wrestlers an unfair advantage, and that Adkins was included in the e-mail list.

“It’s my job to know this stuff,” Britt said. “It’s my job to keep these kids safe.”

Britt is glad the situation is settled, giving the Lions a fourth-straight Lower State championship and a shot at a third state title in four seasons. The date, time and location have not been set for the championship match, a rematch of the 2008 state final, which **Loris** won. **Loris** AD Barry Brooks has been in contact with **Woodruff** officials, but the sides have not been able to agree when the final should take place. He said **Woodruff** would like have the match on Wednesday or Thursday, but with the individual state championships set for Friday and Saturday in Rock Hill, **Loris** would prefer to wrestle the final early next week.

“We’ve got some kids that can win state championships, and we want to give them the best opportunity possible to achieve that,” Brooks said.

Britt thinks the match will happen sooner rather than later, and will likely be held at Ridge View High School, the original match site. “I believe the high school league wants it wrapped up this week,” he said.

Regardless of the time and place, Britt said his Lions are ready. “They want to go and wrestle. They believe in themselves and they think they have an opportunity to win a championship,” he said.