



# media information

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

December 14, 2000

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## **A Commentary By MHSAA Executive Director John E. “Jack” Roberts: Sports & Their Seasons**

The Michigan High School Athletic Association is a defendant in a lawsuit which attempts to use the judicial system to force the MHSAA to force its member schools to change the sports they sponsor and the time of year when they sponsor some.

From the pleadings and their publicity, it appears the plaintiffs want field hockey, ice hockey and water polo programs for females. As anyone casually involved in school sports knows, the MHSAA doesn't determine the sports that schools will sponsor. That is the exclusive jurisdiction of school boards.

The MHSAA merely conducts post-season tournaments for some of the sports, namely, those that are sponsored by 64 or more of the MHSAA's member schools. Currently, field hockey, ice hockey and water polo are sponsored for girls by less than 25 percent of this minimum requirement.

Plaintiffs want high school seasons aligned with college seasons. Again, the MHSAA hasn't determined the seasons. Schools began the sports at certain times of year, and the MHSAA placed its post-season tournaments at the time of year when schools were conducting their seasons.

If plaintiffs would get what they ask for, all high school seasons would be like college seasons, with this result:

- Boys Lower Peninsula golf would move from the fall to the spring;
- Girls tennis would move from the fall to the spring;
- Girls Lower Peninsula swimming would move from the fall to the winter;
- Girls basketball would move from the fall to the winter;
- Girls volleyball would move from the winter to the fall;
- Girls soccer would move from the spring to the fall.

The burden should be on the plaintiffs to prove that different is discriminatory. They may speculate one result of the difference is that girls have fewer opportunities for college athletic scholarships; but no

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evidence of such has ever been presented to the MHSAA office, even if the pursuit of such scholarships were a goal of school sports – which it is not – and even if such were a realistic possibility for more than one percent of high school student-athletes, which they are not.

More than 82 percent of Michigan schools which responded to the last survey (May 1998) indicated that they opposed this realignment of seasons. Associations of coaches for basketball, tennis, swimming and diving, golf and soccer are opposed. Associations of volleyball officials are opposed.

A coach of boys and girls swimming at one Michigan high school volunteered that if the girls and boys seasons had been conducted at the same time of year, he would have eliminated 600 boys and girls from his programs over the last ten years because of facility limitations.

What's the MHSAA to do? It tried and failed once to move its post-season girls swimming and diving meet from the fall to the winter. If the MHSAA were to put its post-season Girls Soccer Tournament in the fall when more than 330 schools play girls soccer in the spring, the association would at least look foolish and at worst look arrogant and out of touch with schools' needs and desires.

Schools call the shots in this association, and they know what they're doing. They know when they have the local interest, resources and opponents to add a new sport program for boys or girls. They know when to schedule sports in order to maximize the availability of facilities, coaching personnel and officials.

The MHSAA has no authority for interfering in these decisions; but once a sufficient number of schools have determined that they will sponsor a sport, the MHSAA is committed to serving the activity in a way that doesn't see major sports or minor and doesn't see girls sports or boys: the MHSAA only sees students and their sports and will serve them as fully as its authority allows.

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