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MHSAA Announces "Save Our Friday Nights" Campaign; Denounces Televised College Football Games On Fridays

EAST LANSING, Mich. – May 21 -- Fighting to maintain one of high school sports strongest and longest-standing traditions, the Michigan High School Athletic Association is announcing a program to counter the recent action of the National Collegiate Athletic Association to allow college football games to be played and televised on Friday nights.

"Save Our Friday Nights," is a campaign to emphasize the role that Friday night high school athletic events plays in communities, and to rally MHSAA member schools to contact NCAA member school football coaches, athletic directors and conference commissioners to voice their opposition.

"There is no tradition in sports more hallowed than entire communities gathering together on Friday nights in the fall to rally around their school teams," said John E. "Jack" Roberts, executive director of the association of nearly 750 senior high schools and over 600 junior high/middle schools. "People generally associate Friday nights with the lights towering over football fields, but let's not forget that on those Fridays are girls basketball games, boys soccer matches and even cross country meets.

"These events are important to communities. They are not just sporting events, they're social events where neighbors meet, relationships are fostered, and where schools communicate about many of the other activities of the school. College football games on Friday nights threaten this local tradition, not to mention the financial well being of school athletic budgets."

Roberts added that the while the so-called mid major collegiate conferences may be starting out as the primary participants in Friday night games, it won't be long before everyone will be jumping into the fray.

"A Friday night football game played, for example, in Kalamazoo, will have an impact on anywhere from 30 to 50 games within a 90-mile radius of the site. Now, if the television networks entice a couple of Big Ten schools -- Michigan and Michigan State -- to take what has become a sometimes regionally

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televised game on Saturday and turn it into a nationally televised game on Friday night, the effects would be devastating.

"It wouldn't matter if the game was in East Lansing or Ann Arbor," Roberts continued. "The game would fracture the high school spectator base across most of Michigan. Many of the radio stations which broadcast high school games on Friday nights would be required, by their network contracts, to carry the college games. Television sports reports on high school games that evening would be reduced to a quick rolling of scores on the screen, instead of highlights of a number of games. Newspaper coverage would suffer.

"You can't say this move will be limited to the mid-major conferences, because the major colleges are in the same fight for air time and will use all of their leverage to turn the tables in their favor.

"There is no doubt that the NCAA men's basketball tournament in March, with every game televised, is hurting the attendance at high school tournaments around the country in winter sports, and college football on Friday nights will do the same thing to fall sports," Roberts concluded.

To show the level of concern that the high school sports community has about college football games on Friday nights, Roberts said the following steps are being taken:

- Roberts has already contacted the commissioners of the Mid-American and Big Ten conferences; and the issue will be discussed at a meeting in Chicago on May 22, which will be attended by representatives of Big 10 universities and state high school athletic associations;
- Support has begun to be voiced by the leadership of the Michigan High School Football Coaches Association, the Michigan High School Coaches Association, the Basketball Coaches Association of Michigan, and the Michigan Interscholastic Athletic Administrators Association, all of which are being asked to encourage their member schools to contact Division I football schools in Michigan;
- The MHSAA is launching a special page on its web site -- www.mhsaa.com/FridayNights -- to advance the reasons why Friday nights are for high school sports; and
- Roberts pledged that the MHSAA will review its post-season tournaments venues, and attempt to avoid facilities owned by colleges which are playing Friday night football games; and he called on high schools to refrain from using such college facilities for regular season events and practices.

"Colleges have to see that high schools, the very group they depend on for their future student-athletes and general student population, are genuinely concerned about this situation," Roberts said. "We

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have to go beyond letter-writing campaigns and actually reduce the opportunities colleges have through our tournaments to bring potential students on campus and the financial benefits colleges may receive from those tournaments."

The addresses for the Michigan-based universities and conferences which may participate in having college football games on Friday nights are:

Central Michigan University

Mt. Pleasant, MI 48859

Herb Deromedi, Athletic Director (h.w.deromedi@cmich.edu)

Mike DeBord, Head Football Coach (michael.debord@cmich.edu)

Eastern Michigan University

Ypsilanti, MI 48197

Dave Diles, Athletic Director (david.diles@emich.edu)

Jeff Woodruff, Head Football Coach

Michigan State University

East Lansing, MI 48824

Clarence Underwood, Athletic Director

Bobby Williams, Head Football Coach

University of Michigan

1000 South State Street

Ann Arbor, MI 48109-2201

William C. Martin, Athletic Director

Lloyd Carr, Head Football Coach

Western Michigan University

Kalamazoo, MI 49008

Kathy Beauregard, Athletic Director (kathy.beauregard@wmich.edu)

Gary Darnell, Head Football Coach (gary.darnell@wmich.edu)

The MHSAA is a private, not-for-profit corporation of voluntary membership by over 1,300 public and private senior high schools and junior high/middle schools which exists to develop common rules for athletic eligibility and competition. No government funds or tax dollars support the MHSAA, which was the first such association nationally to not accept membership dues or tournament entry fees from schools. Member schools which enforce these rules are permitted to participate in MHSAA tournaments, which attract approximately 1.6 million spectators each year.

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