



# media information

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## **Procedures For Allowing Sudanese Refugees Athletic Eligibility Set By MHSAA Executive Committee; Winter Representative Council Meeting Notes**

**EAST LANSING, Mich. – March 30** – In a historic, progressive move, the Executive Committee of the Michigan High School Athletic Association adopted guidelines to allow hundreds of Sudanese refugee students being placed in communities around the state the opportunity to play interscholastic athletics, some as early as this Spring sports season.

“Since December, young people from the Sudan have been arriving in Michigan, being placed in homes by social service agencies and enrolled in public and private MHSAA member schools,” MHSAA Executive Director John E. Jack” Roberts said. “These students are arriving without academic records, their academic abilities and preparation vary greatly and they are being placed by schools in grades 6 through 12. They are being given dates of birth by immigration authorities which are approximations at best.

“Shortly after these students began arriving, member schools began to inquire about how to provide athletic participation opportunities for them,” Roberts added. “Since schools have an interest in serving and mainstreaming as many of these displaced students as possible, and at the same time preserving a level playing field for interscholastic athletics, the Executive Committee needed to take a lenient, yet cautious approach.”

At its monthly meeting last week, the Executive Committee adopted a six-point approach to providing eligibility for these refugees:

1. A Sudanese refugee is not eligible for interscholastic competition until he/she has been in attendance at one or more MHSAA member schools for 45 school days and is passing the equivalent of 20 credit hours of course work.
2. If after 45 school days the student is eligible under school and MHSAA regulations in all respects except that his/her age is only approximately determined, the student's date of birth will be deemed to be that indicated on the student's Immigration and Naturalization Service I-94 form and the minimum and maximum age eligibility standards will be applied accordingly.
3. INS I-94 forms must be on file with the student-athlete's required physical examination statement prior to participation.
4. A student placed in a foster home is eligible according to Handbook Interpretation #58 at (a) the school he/she had been attending, (b) the public school of the new district, (c) the closest public school academy, or (d) the closest nonpublic school, except that the executive director may waive the requirement of closest nonpublic school if the other children in the foster home attend a different nonpublic school and that is where the refugee is enrolled.

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5. Local school districts determine for themselves if a student may participate in practices prior to gaining or after exhausting eligibility for competition.

6. The Executive Committee will review these matters further if it receives evidence (a) of transfer irregularities, (b) that one or more individuals are participating far in excess of their 19th birthday, or (c) that the participation of one or more of these students has upset the competitive balance in regular season or MHSAA post-season competition.

Roberts said that these determinations apply to Sudanese refugees placed in foster homes in Michigan since December 2000. Refugees of other places and times may require separate consideration.

The MHSAA Representative Council conducted its annual Winter meeting last week, and among the actions taken at that meeting were the following:

**Reversed a previous decision, returning the MHSAA Lower Peninsula Cross Country Finals to the first Saturday in November** – Based on Update survey results and a recommendation of the Track/Cross Country Committee, the Representative Council voted last May to schedule the Regional and Finals of the Lower Peninsula Cross Country Tournament series one week earlier beginning in 2001. At its January meeting this year, the Track/Cross Country Committee voted to reverse its previous decision, asking the Representative Council to do the same. This year's finals will take place November 3 at Michigan International Speedway in Brooklyn.

**Voted to apply the Mercy Rule in all MHSAA Baseball/Softball Tournament contests, including Finals** – The Baseball/Softball Committee of the MHSAA recommended earlier this year to the Council that the rule which ends games when there is a differential of 15 or more runs after three innings or 10 or more runs after five innings be applicable in all MHSAA tournament contests. Previously, this rule was only used in play-in and semifinal games at the District, Regional and Final levels of the tournament, not the championship game of each round. The change is in effect for this year's MHSAA tournament in each sport.

The Representative Council is the 19-member legislative body of the MHSAA, which meets three times annually. All but five members are elected by member schools. Four members are appointed by the Council to facilitate representation of females and minorities; and the 19th position is occupied by the Superintendent of Public Instruction or designee. The officers and two other representatives of the Council form the Executive Committee, which meets on a monthly basis to review eligibility appeals and other current business.

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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