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Sports Seasons Among Issues Facing Representative Council At Spring Meeting

EAST LANSING, Mich. – April 24 – Development of a plan to submit as part of a Federal Court Order to realign some of its member schools previously-selected sports seasons is among a variety of topics on the agenda of the Representative Council of the Michigan High School Athletic Association at its Spring meeting, May 5-7, in Gaylord.

The Spring meeting of the 19-member legislative body of the Association's 1,300-plus member schools is usually the busiest of its three sessions each year. The Council will be considering 35 sports committee proposals as well as a number of other sport, eligibility and operational issues.

By order of U.S. Federal District Court in Kalamazoo on December 17, the MHSAA has until May 24 to submit a plan which would require schools to realign seasons in a way that "advantage and disadvantage girls and boys equally" in six sports involved in a nearly four-year old court case – basketball, golf, soccer, swimming and diving, tennis, and volleyball.

Since the District Court's decision in December, MHSAA staff have participated in approximately 50 meetings with every group in its constituency which could be affected by the outcome of this litigation – from student-athletes to superintendents and school board members. The input from those meetings was used to develop a non-binding survey instrument that schools were sent in mid-April to gather information to assist the Council in formulating a plan to submit to the District Court.

"We have been proactive in seeking the input from the membership, and we did not turn down any invitation to meet with any group on this topic," Executive Director John E. "Jack" Roberts said. "We used these meetings to develop consensus for ideas, and even tried to develop discussion on plans the membership clearly did not want to see implemented."

The survey asks each school six questions: 1. Of the six sports involved in the litigation, which ones do they sponsor; 2. Of those sports, which girl's sport would they least like to see switched; 3. Of those sports, which boy's sport would they least like to see switched; 4. Of those sports, which of those conducted

(more)

2-2-2 – Spring Representative Council Meeting Preview

in separate seasons for boys and girls would they least like combined to be played in the same season; 5. If the girls basketball and volleyball seasons were reversed, which combination of the other sports seasons would they least like to be moved; and 6. If the girls basketball and volleyball seasons were not reversed, which one of four realignment plans would be preferred.

Those four realignment plans are: 1. Switch golf, soccer and tennis seasons for boys and girls in the Lower Peninsula, and switch the soccer and tennis seasons for boys and girls in the Upper Peninsula; 2. Switch the golf, swimming and diving and tennis seasons for boys and girls and move girls gymnastics to the fall in the Lower Peninsula, and switch the tennis season for boys and girls in the U.P., while discontinuing that Peninsula's participation in a statewide soccer post-season tournament and switching the boys and girls soccer seasons, leaving the decision on girls gymnastics up to those schools sponsoring the sport; 3. Switch the soccer, swimming and diving, and tennis seasons for boys and girls and move girls gymnastics to the fall in the Lower Peninsula, and switch the soccer and tennis seasons for boys and girls in the U.P., leaving the decision on girls gymnastics up to those schools sponsoring the sport; and 4. Switch golf, soccer, swimming and diving and tennis seasons for boys and girls and move girls gymnastics to the fall in the Lower Peninsula, and switch the soccer and tennis seasons for boys and girls in the U.P., leaving the decision on girls gymnastics up to those schools sponsoring the sport.

“The Representative Council is seeking a lot of data to help it read into the choices schools make on the survey,” said Roberts. “Larger schools may select a realignment plan because they have the resources to deal with a plan; smaller schools may select a plan because it may not sponsor some of those sports. We also need to get a handle on which specific sports schools are the least comfortable in moving or combining.

“It may turn out that the data may point the Council to develop a plan that varies from those that the membership were reviewing.”

Roberts added that the Council's decision on season realignment may not be made until a special meeting later in May, and in any event, would not be announced until the MHSAA submits its plan to the District Court, not later than May 24. He added that the results of the survey would also be announced at that time.

Also before the Council is a decision about a future site of the MHSAA Ice Hockey Finals. At its March, 1999, meeting, the Council voted to keep the event in Flint, based on the construction of a new IMA Sports Arena in that city. Since then, plans for the new building have been put on hold indefinitely, and the Association sought requests for proposals from various venues this winter.

(more)

3-3-3 – Spring Representative Council Meeting Preview

Those sites under consideration include the current IMA Sports Arena in Flint, which has hosted the Ice Hockey Finals in 26 of the 28 years since the MHSAA began sponsoring a post-season tournament in that sport in 1975; the Compuware Sports Arena in Plymouth; and Wings Stadium in Kalamazoo.

Also before the Council are proposals to revise an MHSAA regulation related to a student-athlete's participation on U.S. National Teams and in Olympic Development Programs; to assign three-person crews to officiate MHSAA Basketball Tournaments beginning at the Regional level of play; to change the format for the MHSAA Girls Volleyball Semifinals and Finals to be played over three days instead of two; and to make modifications to the Michigan Weight Monitoring Program in wrestling. The Association's operating budget for the 2002-03 fiscal year will also be voted upon.

The Representative Council is the 19-member legislative body of the MHSAA. 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 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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