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2002-03 Sports Season On Horizon; Playing Rules Changes Announced

EAST LANSING, Mich. – Aug. 6 – A new school year has its approach signaled in the coming week, as a large portion of the nearly 300,000 young student-athletes who participate in educational athletics begin fall practice in eight sports at member schools of the Michigan High School Athletic Association.

The fall season is generally the most popular participation season, with approximately 110,000 youngsters taking part. This year, practice in all but one sport begins on Monday (August 12), the lone exception being those schools in the Lower Peninsula sponsoring boys golf, which may begin practice on Thursday (August 8), but may not begin competition before Monday. Competition may also take place on the first day of practice in cross country and girls tennis.

The earliest game date for boys soccer is August 23, girls swimming and diving in the Lower Peninsula may open activity on August 24, and girls basketball may begin competition on August 26.

Practice in football must begin on Monday for all schools wishing to begin regular season games the weekend of August 29-Sept. 1. All football schools must conduct at least three conditioning days of practice before beginning contact, and the conditioning sessions may not include any pads.

There are two significant rules changes in football for 2002. The first defines blocking in the back, and assigns a 10-yard penalty for that foul; while a traditional clipping penalty will continued to be assessed a 15-yard mark off. The other major change allows a team to accept the penalty and replay the down or accept the result of the play and have penalty yardage enforced at the ensuing kickoff if the defensive team commits a penalty during a successful point after touchdown attempt.

In basketball, players will not automatically be forced to leave the game for blood or injury if the problem can be corrected by the end of a called timeout. The rule can have an impact on a contest when a player has blood – which may not be their own – on their uniform, and has to leave the game without the ability to immediately return to action. The penalty for excessively swinging arms or elbows by a player has been reduced to a violation from a technical foul. A new signal will be utilized by officials to indicate the violation.

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The most significant rule change in soccer in Michigan for 2002-03 addresses the use of shinguards and how they should be worn. The rule has been modified to read that shinguards provide adequate and reasonable protection, be age-appropriate, and be worn underneath the stockings. The remainder of the country joins Michigan in a return to a full set of signals used by officials to indicate fouls. Since 1995-96, the National Federation rules book called for a very limited set of signals. However, Michigan continued to use the full set.

“It’s important that players, coaches and spectators know what the officials are calling on every play,” said John E. “Jack” Roberts, executive director of the MHSAA. “Under the abbreviated set of signals, everyone knew that the official had called something, but they didn’t know what had been called. We felt that the signals were a vital communications tool that kept everyone in the game, and so while the rest of the country changed several years ago, Michigan didn’t. We’re pleased to see this return to fuller communication on the field.”

The 2002 fall campaign culminates with championships beginning with the Upper Peninsula finals in girls tennis on October 4, and wraps up with the girls basketball finals on December 7.

Here is a complete list of fall championship dates:

- **Girls Basketball:** Districts -- Nov. 18-23
Regionals -- Nov. 25-27
Finals - Dec. 3, 5-7
- **Cross Country:** U.P. Finals -- Oct. 19
L.P. Regionals -- Oct. 26
L.P. Finals -- Nov. 2
- **Football:** Selection Sunday – Oct. 27
Pre-Districts – Nov. 1 or 2
District Finals -- Nov. 8 or 9
Regional Finals -- Nov. 15 or 16
Semifinals -- Nov. 23
Finals -- Nov. 29-30
- **L.P. Boys Golf:** Regionals -- Oct. 10 or 11 or 12
Finals -- Oct. 18-19
- **Boys Soccer:** Districts -- Oct. 21-26
Regionals – Oct. 29-Nov. 2
Semifinals -- Nov. 6
Finals -- Nov. 9
- **L.P. Girls Swimming/Diving** Diving Quals -- Nov. 19
Finals -- Nov. 22-23
- **Girls Tennis:** U.P. Finals -- Oct. 4
L.P. Regionals -- Oct. 10 or 11
L.P. Finals -- Oct. 18-19

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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