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2004-05 School Sports Season Approaches; Playing Rules Changes In Fall Sports Few

EAST LANSING, Mich. – July 30 – Over 115,000 student-athletes will greet the beginning of a new school year in the coming week, beginning 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 115,000 youngsters of 517,000 enrolled students taking part. This year, practice in all but one sport begins on August 9, the lone exception being those schools sponsoring boys Fall golf, which may begin practice on Thursday (August 5), but may not begin competition before August 9. 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 20, girls swimming and diving in the Lower Peninsula may open activity on August 21, and girls basketball may begin competition on August 23.

Practice in football must begin on August 9 for all schools wishing to begin regular season games the weekend of August 26-29. Schools must have 14 days of preseason practice at all levels before their first game. All football schools must conduct at least three conditioning days of practice before beginning contact, and the conditioning sessions may not include any pads. This year, two football dates precede Labor Day. 223 games will be played on Thursday, Sept. 2, 84 games will be played on Sept. 3, and 7 games will be played on Sept. 4.

The only visible change in football rules for the coming season is one which allows the head coach of a team to call a time out from the bench. The official must be able to clearly see the head coach on the sideline in order to grant the time out. Head coaches of teams which work games from the press box will not be allowed to designate an assistant coach on the sideline to call time outs.

There are three basketball rules changes of note for the upcoming year. The kicking rule now applies to any part of the defender's leg if it is ruled that it was used to intentionally affect the flight of the ball. Purposefully obstructing an opponent's vision has now been extended to all players on the court, not just a player without the ball. The third change involves penalties for players who leave the bench during a conflict on the court. Previously, a conflict was labeled as a fight only if there were punches involved, but

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now the rule will include any situation in which a fight may occur. Therefore, any person who leaves the bench for a fight or potential fight will be subject to ejection from the game. The National Federation of High School Associations, the rules-making body, also announced earlier this year that the home team must wear white colored jerseys for varsity play effective with the 2007-08 school year.

Fans in soccer will note that the defensive team will be allowed to substitute any number of players in corner kick situations when the offensive team makes a substitution. There are no major rules changes in any other Fall sports.

The 2004 fall campaign culminates with championships beginning with the Upper Peninsula Girls Tennis Finals on October 1, and wraps up with the Girls Basketball Finals on December 4. Here is a complete list of fall championship dates:

Girls Basketball:

Districts -- Nov. 15-20
Regionals -- Nov. 20-24
Finals -- Nov. 30, Dec. 2-4

Cross Country:

U.P. Finals -- Oct. 23
L.P. Regionals -- Oct. 29 or 30
L.P. Finals -- Nov. 6

Football:

Selection Sunday - Oct. 24
Pre-Districts -- Oct. 29 or 30
District Finals -- Nov. 5 or 6
Regional Finals -- Nov. 12 or 13
Semifinals -- Nov. 20
Finals -- Nov. 26-27

L.P. Boys Golf:

Regionals -- Oct. 7 or 8 or 9
Finals -- Oct. 15-16

Boys Soccer:

Districts -- Oct. 18-23
Regionals - Oct. 26-30
Semifinals -- Nov. 3
Finals -- Nov. 6

L.P. Girls Swimming & Diving

Diving Quals -- Nov. 16
Swimming/Diving Finals -- Nov. 19-20

Girls Tennis:

U.P. Finals -- Oct. 1
L.P. Regionals -- Oct. 7 or 8
L.P. Finals -- Oct. 15-16

The MHSAA is a private, not-for-profit corporation of voluntary membership by over 1,800 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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