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1661 ramblewood drive east lansing, mi 48823 517.332.5046 fax-517.332.4071 www.mhsaa.com

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Contact: John Johnson or Andy Frushour

517.332.5046 or www.mhsaa.com

Three-Person District Basketball Officiating Crews, Three-Player Rule Waiver Approved At Spring Representative Council Meeting

EAST LANSING, Mich. – May 24 – Establishing the use of three-person officiating crews for all levels of its basketball tournaments and the establishment of a waiver provision for its three-player out-of-season coaching rules in five individual sports were among the actions of the Representative Council of the Michigan High School Athletic Association at its annual Spring meeting, May 1-3, in Rothbury.

The Spring meeting of the 19-member legislative body of the Association's nearly 1,800 member schools is generally the busiest of its three sessions each year. The Council considered 65 committee proposals and also dealt with a variety of eligibility rule, post-season tournament and operational issues.

The MHSAA began the use of three-person officiating crews at the Final level of its tournaments in 1996 for Quarterfinal, Semifinal and Championship games. In 2001, the Regional level of play was added. The addition of the District level came only after careful consideration to the potential strain such a demand would place on a tight pool of tournament-qualified officials.

“As three-person crews became more and more prevalent for regular-season play,” said John E. “Jack” Roberts, executive director of the MHSAA, “it was only a matter of time for District tournaments. However, while certain parts of the state could easily supply the needed tournament-qualified officials for three-person crews, others could not. We may still face the need to send officials great distances and make other adjustments to our practices and policies to cover these games.”

During the school year when a sport is not taking place, the rules created by MHSAA member schools have allowed a coach to work with no more than three students during that off season. The advent of non-faculty school coaches in some individual sports who work professionally in non-school venues related to the sport they coach has posed some challenges that the Representative Council directed the MHSAA staff to address during the 2004-05 school year.

The input received from schools during the current school year opposed a rules change and supported clearer, tougher penalties, which were adopted. But in addition, the Council adopted a provision which will take effect on August 1, that will allow the Executive Committee of the MHSAA to grant an exception in certain circumstances to the three-player rule for specific school coaches in the individual sports of bowling,

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golf, gymnastics, swimming and diving, and tennis who are also involved with those sports through their vocations away from the school program. Application must be made in advance for the waiver, and the application must be based on circumstances which may include employment at a facility where the activity is routinely conducted and open to the public. The Executive Committee will evaluate each case individually and grant waiver as appropriate for a period of only one year.

“It is becoming more and more common for a school coach to also have involvement at a local club or sports facility which student-athletes often frequent outside of the school season,” said Roberts. “In the affected sports, this waiver, when granted, will not restrict students from being able to go to such public venues just because their school coach happens to be employed there.”

Here is a summary of other actions taken at the Spring Representative Council Meeting:

Administrative/Regulation Matters

- Beginning next year, new MHSAA member schools will be required to have an administrator attend an MHSAA New Athletic Director In-Service program as a condition of MHSAA tournament entry. The Council also approved in concept that first time athletic directors be required to attend a New Athletic Director In-Service program beginning in 2006-07.
- A year ago, the Council began an analysis of increased risks and insurance coverage when national playing rules are modified at the local level. After the MHSAA staff compiled a list of such modifications for Michigan, the Representative Council approved eight recommendations which included the official adoption of national playing rules for junior high/middle schools; approved advisories identifying areas of concern for junior high/middle schools, ice hockey schools and facilities operators, and gymnastics schools; adopted the Soccer Committee recommendation to apply the goal differential rule (10 goal lead) at the end of the first half, rather than ten minutes into the second half; and directed MHSAA committees in soccer, tennis and wrestling to revisit various risk issues.
- A change was made to the first exception for transfer students being immediately eligible – a move by a student into a new school district – to stipulate that the student must have been living with the persons for at least the last 30 calendar days in the previous semester for those persons to be considered those the student was living with at the time of the transfer.
- In-season transfers will now have a more standardized date by which a transfer must be made in order to be eligible for MHSAA post-season tournament play. In-season transfers which allow for immediate regular-season eligibility in all other respects must be made by the following dates to be eligible for the MHSAA tournament: Oct. 1 for Fall sports; Feb. 1 for Winter sports; and May 1 for Spring sports. A student must be enrolled and attending classes in the new school by these dates.
- In reviewing the requests of several sports for reclassification, the Council approved that bowling, a new and emerging sport, be reclassified into three equal divisions for the 2005-06 school year. The Council also directed that the reclassification proposals for girls competitive cheer (4 divisions), skiing (2 divisions) and girls volleyball (4 divisions) follow established MHSAA Handbook guidelines which could lead to change in 2006-07; and rejected a soccer proposal for 5 divisions in that sport, as well as a request for 3 divisions in Lower Peninsula swimming and diving as long as facilities are limited, or until the size of the Finals field can be reduced in each division so that more facilities, including high school facilities, are capable of hosting.

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The Council also adopted a nine-point document to be used to direct changes in policies and procedures in the event that some MHSAA tournaments are rescheduled by court order; approved an amendment to the MHSAA's Articles of Incorporation which better reflect the historical and continuing functions of the Association; changed the Due Process procedure so that the MHSAA staff would not conduct or authorize investigations into allegations more than four years old without a directive by the Executive Committee or Representative Council; appointed a study group to review the various periods of ineligibility which can occur under the transfer regulation; and added references to trimesters for the purposes of athletic eligibility in the Handbook.

Sports Matters

- In wrestling, the Council adopted the Wrestling Committee recommendation to eliminate the requirement that the second wrestler entered in the Individual Tournament in a single weight class have a winning record in at least 12 varsity matches. Wrestlers, including those appealing their weight assessments, may begin their descent plan to their minimum weight immediately following their assessment. A representative from each wrestling school will be required to have a representative complete an annual online nutrition education examination covering MHSAA and National Wrestling Coaches Association nutritional materials. Investigation of opportunities for girls-only wrestling competition during the regular season was approved. A committee recommendation to seed Team District Tournament brackets was rejected.
- In girls volleyball, a scheduling recommendation was approved that allows for District tournaments to take place over two days if six or more schools are assigned to a site, as long as all Semifinal and Final matches are played on the same day. The Libero position – a defensive specialist – was also approved for the 2005-06 school year.
- In tennis, the Council approved the Tennis Committee recommendation to play all Semifinal and Championship matches on the second day of the Final tournament – generally Saturday – unless weather conditions are unfavorable. Recommendations to modify the seeding process for Regional and Final play were also adopted.
- In soccer, the committee recommendations to anchor the boys Finals to the first Saturday in November was approved, as was the reduction of the number of days between the start of practice and the first competition to seven for both girls and boys. Both changes take effect with the 2006-07 school year. Schools which have not competed on an artificial playing surface during the regular season may practice on the field hosting a District tournament if it is not a natural surface.
- Responding to requests from the gymnastics community that the MHSAA Girls Gymnastics Tournament be scheduled in the Fall, the Representative Council authorized a survey of student-athletes, coaches, administrators and judges during November. The results will be reported at the next Representative Council Meeting on December 2.
- The Football Committee recommendation was approved that if a member school forfeits a varsity football contest and it is alleged by the opposing school receiving the win that the forfeit is for reasons other than health, risk or other compelling issues but rather to avoid competition, school administrators will be required to appear before the MHSAA Executive Committee to show cause why other sanctions should not be applied to the forfeiting school. A survey of Region 1 schools in the MHSAA Football Playoffs was authorized to determine if those schools would favor continuing the use of Geographic Pairings for first round games. If results of the survey favor it, change would take place in 2005. The Football Committee recommendation to seed all eight teams in a Regional in the MHSAA Playoffs was defeated.

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- In Girls Competitive Cheer, recommendations of that committee to change a variety of scoring matters were adopted. Junior high limits were increased to eight days of competition per season.
- In Bowling, there will be format changes affecting the Team Finals. The number of competition dates was increased to 24; the restriction of five days of competition over 14 days was eliminated, but the limit of three days of competition in a week was retained. Upper Peninsula schools will be allowed to begin practice and competition a week earlier than the Lower Peninsula.
- Another basketball committee recommendation was approved – to allow the use of a 14-foot coaching box at all levels during the regular season and post-season tournament play; but to rescind the action if Officials Reports show an increase in coaches conduct issues during 2005-06.
- In baseball, the Council acted on the Committee recommendation to assign an additional umpire to all Final round contests. Effective with the 2005 tournament, four umpires will be used for all Quarterfinal, Semifinal and Championship games. In addition, a Committee recommendation to play all four title games of the Baseball Tournament on the same field, weather conditions permitting, was approved, effective with the 2005 tournament.

The Council also reviewed reports on membership, with 765 senior high schools and 831 junior high/middle schools in 2004-05; eligibility advancement applications, which remained stable at 16 for the past school year; the use of Educational Transfer Forms, which was up over the previous year; school violations, which were up in the past year; attendance at athletic director and coaches in-service workshops, which saw an increase again over the previous year's totals; another 12,000-plus year for officials registration with the addition of lacrosse balancing a decrease in registrations in all other sports; rules meeting attendance; and officials reports submitted for the past three sports seasons. The Association's \$8.5 million budget for the 2005-06 school year was also approved.

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 approximately 1,600 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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