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2006-07 High School Sports Season Begins Next Week; Fall Playing Rules Changes Announced

EAST LANSING, Mich. – Aug. 2 – One of the first signs of a new school year will appear next week when over 120,000 students 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 120,000 youngsters of 525,000 enrolled students taking part. This year, practice begins the on Monday (Aug. 7) with football, followed by boys fall golf on Aug. 10. Golf cannot begin competition before Aug. 14. All other Fall sports may begin practice on Aug. 14, with competition allowed on the first day of practice in cross country and girls tennis.

The earliest game date for boys soccer is August 21, girls swimming and diving in the Lower Peninsula may open activity on August 26, and girls basketball may begin competition on August 28.

Practice in football must begin on August 7 for all schools wishing to begin regular season games the weekend of August 24-27. 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, and Thursday varsity games will take place both weeks. In Week 1, 17 games will be played on Thursday, 265 games will be played on Friday, and 21 games will be played on Saturday. On Labor Day weekend, 226 games will be played on Thursday, 84 games will be played on Friday, and 6 games will be played on Saturday.

Two of the football rules changes made by the National Federation of State High School address equipment. Beginning this year, all tooth and mouth protectors must be any color except white or clear, and helmets must be secured with a four-snap chin strap. In addition, plays referred to in the past at “fumblerooski” plays – a planned loose ball – have become prohibited. Under this change, an offensive lineman may not run with a planned loose ball in the vicinity of the snapper. Holders on place kicks will now be allowed to rise to catch or recover an errant snap and either place the ball for a kick or again rise to either run with, hand off, throw or kick the ball. Previously, the holder had no opportunity to recover a bad

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snap and return into position for a place kick. The definition of a kicker was clarified to state that a player becomes a kicker when the knee, lower leg or foot makes contact with the ball. This will afford a kicker protection on planned rollout, or rugby style, punts.

A change was made to the spearing rule to eliminate intent in calling a penalty. All illegal helmet contact, which includes spearing, will be called by officials regardless of whether or not it was intentional.

The rule to distinguish illegal participation from an illegal substitution has been defined in the NFHS rule book. Participation is now defined as an act or action by a player which influences a play. An illegal participation foul is a 15-yard penalty; and an illegal substitution penalty is a 5-yard walk off. A noticeable officials mechanic new this year occurs on an offensive play which results in a gain for a first down near the sideline. At the end of such plays, the official will give two signals – the first is a winding the clock signal, followed by the signal to stop the clock. This will indicate to the game timer and others that the play ended in bounds and that the clock will start again after it is placed for the next play.

In basketball, two rule changes address timing issues. Officials will now be allowed to place the exact time they observe back on the clock when an obvious mistake is made by the timer in starting or stopping the clock. Previously, NFHS rules did not permit an official to correct situations resulting in normal reaction time of the timer which resulted in a “lag” of longer than one second in stopping the clock. In addition, only one warning will be given to a team for delaying the game before a technical foul is assessed, and an additional delay warning was added for failure to have the court ready for play following a time out.

Uniform regulations are also addressed in rules changes for 2006-07. Headbands and wristbands must now match the color of the jersey or be white. Other limitations placed such items include:

- Only one wristband can be worn on each arm, be a maximum of four inches in width, and worn below the elbow;
- A single headband, if worn, can be no wider than two inches;
- There may be only one visible manufacturer’s logo/trademark/reference or school logo/mascot on such a sweatband.

A new officials mechanic has been put in place to indicate team fouls – those fouls which occur by the offensive team off the ball, such as illegal screens. Last year, team fouls were added to the rules book, and resulted in a throw-in for the offended team regardless of the number of team fouls. The new mechanic will have the official use a punch signal to indicate that a team foul has occurred, followed by a signal for the nature of the foul, and the signal as to where the throw-in will take place.

The 2006-07 school year will be the last year that home teams can wear light-colored game jerseys. Beginning next year at the varsity level, the home team will be required to wear white jerseys.

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In soccer, protective face masks may now be worn by players with facial injuries. The mask may be made of a hard material, but must be worn molded to the face with no protrusions. A medical release for the player, signed by a physician, is required. An action taken by the MHSAA Representative Council in May changes the goal-differential rule for regular-season play from ten goals to eight goals, ending a game at halftime or at any point during the second half when such a differential is reached. In addition, the Council approved that penalty kicks will be used to determine the winner in the Final game of the post-season tournament if regulation and overtime play ends in a tie.

A significant rules change in swimming eliminates the recall of all swimmers in a race when one or more competitors gains an unfair advantage at the start of the race. The offending swimmer or relay team will now be disqualified at the completion of the event.

The 2006 Fall campaign culminates with post-season tournaments beginning with the Upper Peninsula Girls Tennis Finals on Oct. 5, and wraps up with the Girls Basketball Finals on December 2. Here is a complete list of Fall championship dates:

Girls Basketball:

Districts -- Nov. 13-18
Regionals -- Nov. 20-22
Finals -- Nov. 28, 30, Dec. 1-2

Cross Country:

U.P. Finals -- Oct. 21
L.P. Regionals -- Oct. 27 or 28
L.P. Finals -- Nov. 4

Football:

Selection Sunday - Oct. 22
Pre-Districts -- Oct. 27 or 28
District Finals -- Nov. 3 or 4
Regional Finals -- Nov. 10 or 11
Semifinals -- Nov. 18
Finals -- Nov. 24-25

L.P. Boys Golf:

Districts -- Oct. 5 or 6 or 7
Regionals -- Oct. 12 or 13 or 14
Finals -- Oct. 20-21

Boys Soccer:

Districts -- Oct. 16-21
Regionals -- Oct. 24-28
Semifinals -- Nov. 1
Finals -- Nov. 4

L.P. Girls Swimming & Diving

Diving Quals -- Nov. 14
Swimming/Diving Finals -- Nov. 17-18

Girls Tennis:

U.P. Finals -- Oct. 5
L.P. Regionals -- Oct. 12 or 13
L.P. Finals -- Oct. 20-21

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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