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New School Sports Season Begins August 8; Playing Rules Changes Announced For Fall

EAST LANSING, Mich. – Aug. 3 – Over 118,000 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 118,000 youngsters of 517,000 enrolled students taking part. This year, practice begins the on Aug. 8 with football, followed by boys fall golf on Aug. 11. Golf cannot begin competition before Aug. 15. All other fall sports may begin practice on Aug. 15, with competition allowed on the first day of practice in cross country and girls tennis.

The earliest game date for boys soccer is August 26, girls swimming and diving in the Lower Peninsula may open activity on August 27, and girls basketball may begin competition on August 29.

Practice in football must begin on August 8 for all schools wishing to begin regular season games the weekend of August 26-28. 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. Thursday varsity games will not take place in Week 1, but will take place in Week 2. On Labor Day weekend, 225 games will be played on Thursday, Sept. 1, 78 games will be played on Friday, Sept. 2, and 10 games will be played on Saturday, Sept. 3.

A noticeable National Federation of State High School Associations rules change in football involves pass interference, where contact made which is obviously away from the direction of the thrown ball is no longer a foul; and the rules were clarified to penalize hindering an opponent's vision without attempting to make a play on the ball, whether or not contact is made. There will also be a limit on forward passes to one during a play. While multiple forward passes on a play were rare, prohibiting them simplifies determining eligible receivers. Any number of backward passes may continue to be thrown during a play. The momentum exception is no longer limited to caught balls, and now also apply to recoveries of a ball hitting the ground on a kick or a fumble. A substitution rule requires a mark nine yards from each sideline, and all

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players must be between those marks when the ball is snapped. Additionally, a period may not be extended if its final play includes an accepted penalty that involves the loss of a down.

In Michigan, MHSAA Handbook regulations have been modified to cover situations where a school forfeits a football contest and it is alleged that the forfeit is for reasons other than health, risk or other compelling issues, but rather to avoid competition. In such situations, school administrations from the forfeiting school are required to appear before the MHSAA Executive Committee. Sub-varsity teams will be allowed to schedule and play football games under National Federation rules for fewer than 11 players.

Basketball will see the coaches box expanded to 14 feet for those games in which it is desired by the competing schools and which the venue can accommodate. Team members are prohibited from removing their jersey or pants within the visual confines of the playing area, with the penalty being a technical foul. A team control foul has been added to help officials more accurately and consistently penalize offensive fouls, with the penalty for such a foul being a throw-in. The penalty for double personal, double technical and simultaneous fouls has been changed from an alternating-possession throw-in to resuming play from the point of interruption. A player leaving the court for an authorized reason will now be treated as a violation rather than a technical foul.

A soccer rules change will see taunting become a more serious violation, resulting in a “hard” red card requiring the ejection of the player from the game and not being replaced. A swimming and diving rules change allows an individual to continue to compete if after being detected for wearing illegal attire or jewelry, removes the illegal items. No longer will that individual be disqualified from the event in which the illegal item was worn.

Golf will see the addition of a District level of competition in the MHSAA post-season tournament for Lower Peninsula boys. The change was made to help reduce the field reaching the Finals of the event to the same size as the Girls tournament in the Spring – 90 – to improve the flow of play. In addition, no cuts will be made in the two-day Final event of teams or individuals.

The 2005 fall campaign culminates with championships beginning with the Upper Peninsula Girls Tennis Finals on Sept. 30, and wraps up with the Girls Basketball Finals on December 3. Here is a complete list of fall championship dates:

Girls Basketball:

Districts -- Nov. 14-19

Regionals -- Nov. 21-23

Finals – Nov. 29, Dec. 1-3

Cross Country:

U.P. Finals -- Oct. 22

L.P. Regionals -- Oct. 28 or 29

L.P. Finals -- Nov. 5

Football:

Selection Sunday - Oct. 23

Pre-Districts – Oct. 28 or 29

District Finals -- Nov. 4 or 5

Regional Finals -- Nov. 11 or 12

Semifinals -- Nov. 19

Finals -- Nov. 25-26

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L.P. Boys Golf:

Districts – Sept. 29 or 30 or Oct. 1
Regionals -- Oct. 6 or 7 or 8
Finals -- Oct. 14-15

Boys Soccer:

Districts -- Oct. 24-29
Regionals – Nov. 1-5
Semifinals -- Nov. 9
Finals -- Nov. 12

L.P. Girls Swimming & Diving

Diving Quals -- Nov. 15
Swimming/Diving Finals -- Nov. 18-19

Girls Tennis:

U.P. Finals – Sept. 20
L.P. Regionals -- Oct. 6 or 7
L.P. Finals -- Oct. 14-15

The MHSAA is a private, not-for-profit corporation of voluntary membership by over 1,500 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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