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Representative Council Approves Sportsmanship Measures, Calendar Issues At Spring Meeting

EAST LANSING, Mich. – May 25 – Stiffer penalties for poor sportsmanship in ice hockey and soccer, the concept of game officials rating the sportsmanship of member schools, and a continued in-depth discussion of sports calendar issues were among items approved during the annual Spring Meeting of the Representative Council of the Michigan High School Athletic Association, May 6-8, in Gaylord.

The Spring meeting of the 19-member legislative body of the Association's nearly 1,600 member schools is generally the busiest of its three sessions each year. The Council considered 62 committee proposals and also dealt with a variety of eligibility rule, post-season tournament and operational issues.

Effective in 2007-08, the penalties for player and coach game disqualifications in ice hockey will be at least double that of the minimums listed in the National Federation of State High School Associations Ice Hockey Rules Book, in an action taken by the Council to approve an Ice Hockey Committee proposal. The applicable Federation rule allows state associations to increase the number of subsequent games an individual must sit out after receiving a game disqualification. The base rule requires sitting out the remainder of that game, plus the next game after receiving a game disqualification; and progressively adds games with subsequent game disqualifications.

In Michigan, a game disqualification will now require an individual to sit the next two games after receiving the first game disqualification in a season; four games after receiving a second game disqualification; and the remainder of the season after receiving a third game disqualification. Coaches are already subject to MHSAA rules which prohibit them from coaching in the Association's post-season tournament in their sport after their second ejection in a season for unsportsmanlike behavior; and players are prohibited from post-season tournament play upon their third such disqualification.

The Soccer Committee recommendation to increase the penalty for a player, coach or bench member receiving a simultaneous yellow and red card from a suspension for the remainder of that contest to include a next day of competition suspension was also approved by the Representative Council.

The Council approved in concept, a plan to have game officials rate schools whose games they work on their sportsmanship. For years, schools have been required to rate all of the officials who work their contests, and this feedback is used to help evaluate officials for tournament assignments. This program

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would not commence before the 2008-09 school year, and the Council will look at details at its fall meeting.

“Sportsmanship continues to be one of the things that separates educational athletics from other levels of sports by other sponsors, and it requires constant attention so that programming can be developed or changed as circumstances arise,” said John E. “Jack” Roberts, executive director of the MHSAA. “The ice hockey community feels that the most flagrant forms of poor sportsmanship deserve even stronger penalties, and the soccer committee is putting its sport on notice that a yellow-red card combination deserves a more lengthy suspension. Officials have been requesting the opportunity to evaluate schools for their sportsmanlike performance at contests, and as we develop that program, it will be with an eye towards continuing to promote the highest level of sportsmanship at our games.”

Since the beginning of the 2006-07 school year, work had been performed on a comprehensive proposal related to the sports calendar for potential distribution and discussion by the MHSAA membership during the fall of 2007. Among the objectives were to address the minimum number of practices before a team could begin competition and to reduce overlap between seasons. The project is in the second phase of an effort which saw the Council approve other measures intended to depressurize out-of-season periods for coaches and student-athletes.

With the recent court-ordered changes of season placement in some sports, the Council considered delaying the dissemination and discussion of the proposals, but eventually approved that the MHSAA lead such a discussion this fall, including the exploration of alternative scheduling mechanisms to keep Michigan’s participation rates high; and reporting the findings and recommendations of that work at its fall meeting.

“The Council had previously moved in a direction to help take pressure off coaches and students, implementing down times and dead periods and eliminating physical education classes which were nothing more than spring practices for fall sports,” Roberts said. “The calendar proposals also seek to eliminate stresses in school sports, and we now have the additional challenge of ensuring that we come up with the means to prevent the decline in athletic participation which has followed court-ordered schedule changes of sports in other states.”

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

Administrative/Regulation Matters

- Game Suspension Policies were modified by the Council. Any contest starting at 3 p.m. or later, must not have delays exceeding 90 minutes. Previously, 90 minutes was the standard for games starting between 3 p.m. and 6:59 p.m.; and a 60-minute delay was the maximum for games starting at 7 p.m. or later. The policy was also changed to allow competing schools to agree to a delays longer than 90 minutes if the event is not on a school night.

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3-3-3 – Spring Representative Council Meeting Summary

- A new interpretation was added to the MHSAA Handbook addressing Olympic Development Teams and so-called National Teams. Currently, a student may participate on Olympic Development Teams and National Teams without loss of interscholastic eligibility under certain conditions. The Council tightened the Handbook regulations to allow the loss of interscholastic eligibility if such participation by a student-athlete includes playing for a state, regional or national championship for a non-school club/community team; any team whose makeup is less than statewide in nature; or any competition that involved residents of Michigan only. “The new interpretation addresses eligibility based on what these teams are, as opposed to what they are called,” Roberts said. “The phrases Olympic Development Team and National Team have been tossed around too freely in some sports.”
- Experimentation with Online Rules Meetings will begin during 2007-08, with Track and Field being the first sport to have such meetings. Eventually, the Association may move toward a blend of online and face-to-face Rules Meetings in all sports.

Registered Officials Matters

- Beginning in 2007-08, officials will have the option to take a 30-question online rules examination in the following sports: baseball, basketball, football, ice hockey, lacrosse, soccer, softball, volleyball and wrestling. The results of these tests will be provided to the MHSAA tournament officials selection committee in those sports. A person taking the test will be presented 30 questions on a random basis from a pool of 50 questions. The test is not required for an official to be considered for a post-season tournament assignment.
- Officials who are Michigan residents, and who are members in good standing of an officials association in a neighboring state, may now be considered for post-season tournament assignments, pending an MHSAA review of the out-of-state association. Non-Michigan residents who are members in good standing of an MHSAA approved officials association in Michigan may now be eligible to work the early rounds of post-season tournaments, providing they meet all other applicable criteria.

Sports Matters

- In basketball, the Representative Council again rejected a Basketball Committee recommendation to lengthen the regular season by allowing schools to participate in a non-counted tournament of not more than two games; as well as recommendations to establish a study group to determine interest in expanding the number of classifications for the MHSAA Basketball Tournaments; and to allow schools to experiment with two 18-minute halves as opposed to four 8-minute quarters. The timing experiment is not allowed under National Federation rules.
- The Council approved the Bowling Committee recommendation to change the order of the Regional events so that the team championships will take place on the first day of competition, and the singles championships on the second day; mirroring the change that took place a year ago at the Finals level.
- The Track & Field/Cross Country Committee recommendations to advance the top 20 runners at a cross country Regional who are not members of qualifying teams to the Finals when there are more than 80 finishers, and to allow watches in both cross country and track and field competition, were rejected.

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4-4-4 – Spring Representative Council Meeting Summary

- In football, the Representative Council approved a recommendation of the Football Committee to adopt specific policies for when bands may play during MHSAA Playoff games. During the game, bands may perform from when an official's whistle blows a play dead until the offensive team breaks the huddle in a traditional huddle offense; or from the official's whistle to indicate the ball is ready for play when no-huddle offenses are used. For Predistrict games during 2007 taking place on Saturday, Oct. 27, unless the teams mutually agree to a different time, games shall begin at 7 p.m. unless a facility lacks lights, where a 2:30 p.m. start will take place. The specific timing structure was put in place to accommodate ACT testing taking place that day.
- In golf, the Council approved the recommendation of the Golf Committee to allow one practice round at the Finals course for each qualifying team and individual after the completion of the school's Regional play and before the first scheduled day of the Final tournament.
- The Representative Council approved the Executive Committee recommendation establishing a waiver procedure in skiing to allow a team to participate in the MHSAA Tournament if weather conditions force a school to have fewer than the required four regular-season competitions. The same condition was added to the waiver procedure for individual skiers.
- In tennis, the Limited Team Membership rule, which allows an individual to compete two in outside events during the defined school season for that sport, will be applied from the school's first scheduled competition, rather than when an individual first joins the team that season. The tennis rule is now the same as skiing.

Previously

- In wrestling, the Council voted to unify the Individual Wrestling Tournament series effective with the 2007-08 school year. The Lower Peninsula Individual Wrestling Tournament began in 1948, and the Upper Peninsula Tournament started in 1967. The individual format was used to determine a team champion until 1988 in both peninsulas, when the Team Dual Wrestling Tournament started. This action was taken by the Council at its fall meeting this year. At the winter meeting of the Council, the entry and seeding of competitors for the Individual District Tournament was moved to the Friday night before Saturday morning competition.
- Effective with the 2007-08 school year, the Lower Peninsula Girls and Boys Swimming and Diving Tournaments will be conducted in classifications of three nearly equal divisions. There will be a limit on the number of qualifiers to four heats in each swimming event. Twelve divers will advance to the Finals from each Regional site. This Council action took place at its winter meeting.

The Council also reviewed reports on membership, with 762 senior high schools and 814 junior high/middle schools in 2006-07; eligibility advancement applications, which was down to 12 after three straight years of 16 such waivers; the use of Educational Transfer Forms, which was down slightly over the previous year; school violations, which were well below an average 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; the progress of criminal history checks on all officials; rules meeting attendance; and officials reports submitted for the past three sports seasons. The Association's \$8.4 million budget for the 2007-08 school year was also approved.

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5-5-5 – Spring Representative Council Meeting Summary

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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