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New High School Sports Season Begins Next Week; Playing Rules Changes Announced For Fall Sports

EAST LANSING, Mich. – July 31 – Preparations for the 2007-08 fall sports season begin next week when over 120,000 students begin Fall practice in eight sports at member schools of the Michigan High School Athletic Association.

This year, fall sports participation will involve approximately 115,000 of 525,000 enrolled youngsters. Fall practice begins on Monday (Aug. 6) with football, followed by girls fall golf on Aug. 9. Golf cannot begin competition before Aug. 13. All other Fall sports may begin practice on Aug. 13, with competition allowed on the first day of practice in cross country and tennis.

The earliest game date for soccer is August 20, girls volleyball may begin competition on August 24, and girls swimming and diving in the Lower Peninsula may open activity on August 25.

Practice in football must begin on August 6 for all schools wishing to begin regular season games the weekend of August 23-26. 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, 19 games will be played on Thursday, 270 games will be played on Friday, and 17 games will be played on Saturday. On Labor Day weekend, 240 games will be played on Thursday, 66 games will be played on Friday, and 6 games will be played on Saturday.

Football rules changes made by the National Federation of State High School address illegal helmet contact, define flagrant fouls, add an enforcement option for penalties occurring on touchdown-scoring plays, and require new field markings to keep sideline personnel at least six feet away from the field.

Illegal helmet contact is defined as an act initiating contact with the helmet against an opponent. Such contact includes: butt blocking, an act where contact is initiated against a non ball carrying opponent with the front of the helmet; face tackling, an act by a defensive player initiating contacting with a ball

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carrier with the front of the helmet; and spearing, an act where contact is initiated with the top of the helmet. All illegal helmet contact – intentional or unintentional - shall incur a 15-yard penalty.

Teams scoring touchdowns on plays where the opponent is called for a penalty will now have an additional enforcement option beginning this fall. The offended team can now have the penalty enforced on the kickoff following the extra point attempt. Previously, the only option was to have the penalty enforced on the extra point. The exceptions are penalties called on touchdown scoring plays prior to a change of possession resulting in a touchdown; and on dead ball personal fouls following touchdown scoring plays. If the scoring team has a foul called against its opponent prior to the change of possession, it will have to refuse the penalty to keep the touchdown. Dead ball fouls are always enforced on the succeeding play.

To provide for space for officials to work unencumbered outside the sidelines and end lines, and to provide for the safety of sideline personnel, all football fields are required to have a broken restraining line placed at least six feet off the boundary lines around the entire field. Outside the team bench area between the 25-yard lines, this area may not be occupied by coaches, statisticians, trainers, ball people, media or any other non-team personnel. Where possible, line to gain crew personnel should also observe these lines. Such markings, and their restrictions, are common at professional and collegiate venues. Game management shall have the primary responsibility for enforcement of this rule.

In soccer, the penalty has been increased for a player, coach or bench member who receives a simultaneous yellow and red card from the officials. The penalty shall now be suspension from the remainder of that game, plus suspension from the next day of competition. The previous penalty for what has been termed a “soft red” card was disqualification only for the remainder of that contest.

In swimming and diving, the MHSAA post-season tournament in the Lower Peninsula shall now be conducted in three nearly equal divisions of competition. The tournament had been conducted in two classes or divisions in the Lower Peninsula since the fifth year of girls competition in 1976; and since the fifth year of boys activity in 1929, with the exception of 1935, when the finals returned to a single open class for one year

In volleyball, the libero position will now be allowed to serve, providing an opportunity to participate fully while in the back row. The libero position, added two years ago, has generally been a defensive specialist, but often turns out to be one of a team’s better servers. Another new rule also prohibits the use of artificial noisemakers at all times during a match.

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The 2007 Fall campaign culminates with post-season tournaments beginning with the Upper Peninsula Girls Tennis Finals on Oct. 4, and wraps up with the Football Playoff Finals on November 23-24. Here is a complete list of Fall championship dates:

Cross Country:

U.P. Finals -- Oct. 20
L.P. Regionals -- Oct. 26 or 27
L.P. Finals -- Nov. 3

Football:

Selection Sunday - Oct. 21
Pre-Districts – Oct. 26 or 27
District Finals -- Nov. 2 or 3
Regional Finals -- Nov. 9 or 10
Semifinals -- Nov. 17
Finals -- Nov. 23-24

L.P. Girls Golf:

Regionals -- Oct. 11 or 12 or 13
Finals -- Oct. 19-20

Soccer:

Boys L.P. Districts -- Oct. 15-20
Boys L.P. Regionals – Oct. 23-27
Girls U.P. Semifinals – Oct. 24
Girls U.P. Finals – Oct. 27
Boys L.P. Semifinals – Oct. 31
Boys L.P. Finals -- Nov. 3

L.P. Girls Swimming & Diving

Diving Quals -- Nov. 13
Swimming/Diving Finals -- Nov. 16-17

Tennis:

U.P. Girls Finals – Oct. 4
L.P. Boys Regionals -- Oct. 11 or 12
L.P. Finals -- Oct. 19-20

Girls Volleyball:

Districts – Oct. 30-Nov. 1 & Nov. 2 or 3
Regionals – Nov. 9 or 10
Quarterfinals – Nov. 13
Semifinals – Nov. 15-16
Finals – Nov. 17

The MHSAA is a private, not-for-profit corporation of voluntary membership by over 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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NOTE – A graphic illustrating the restraining line for football can be found on the Football Page of the MHSAA Web site.

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