



media information

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 media@mhsaa.com

MHSAA Web Site Media Page: www.mhsaa.com/media

An MHSAA Commentary From Executive Director John E. "Jack" Roberts: The Need To Look At Season Realignment

All you may be reading and hearing about additional seasons shifts in school sports is the result of our promise and prediction last spring, summer and fall that we would not spend the 2007-08 school year validating that schools were right and plaintiffs were wrong in the sports seasons litigation, but would instead work vigorously to implement the court-ordered changes while envisioning and evaluating plans to help solve problems created by the court-ordered changes.

We have challenged the administrators of individual schools, districts and leagues to ask the question 'What can we do next year to solve the problems of this year without hurting participation?'

It is not the MHSAA's role to dictate changes, but we will advise and mediate at the local and league levels. The MHSAA's role is to facilitate statewide discussions of the overall structure of school sports, including starting and ending dates for seasons and limitations in and out of season. We will float and develop ideas, provide forums and lead discussions, and then mine for consensus.

This process will uncover – in fact, it has already revealed – some ideas that will stick, that are not so modest that they would do no good and not so radical that they would lack popular support and be practical failures. Ideas that can relieve some of the pressures and solve some of the problems being experienced by the court-ordered seasons changes.

There was an almost nine percent drop in girls golf participation last fall and an almost 11.5 percent drop in boys tennis participation, as both sports seasons were changed by court order. We're looking for ideas to arrest or reverse those declines.

The pressure of two basketball programs (girls and boys) in the same season is resulting in too many events for administrators to supervise, for officials to work, for media to cover and for fans to attend. Revenue to local schools has dropped at a time they cannot afford to have it happen at. Students are practicing too early in the morning, too late at night or, if not, there are too few practices to teach athletes and prepare teams well.

Michigan has enjoyed per school participation in girls basketball that is historically 10 to 25 percent higher than neighboring states. The worry is that all this will lead to schools reducing the levels of teams they sponsor for girls and boys. If so, Michigan will suffer the same double-digit drops in participation that occurred in other states when girls basketball combined with boys in the winter.

This is what motivates all you may have been reading and hearing about additional seasons and shifting seasons in Michigan high school sports. We cannot wait several years to let this play out. The facts are undeniable. Schools and kids cannot become the losers.

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NOTE: This commentary can be heard this week on the radio program MHSAA Perspective, which airs on over 40 radio stations across the state, and can be heard on-demand on the MHSAA Internet Broadcast Network – www.mhsaanetwork.com. Additional information about the Four-Start Season Concept can be found on the Media page of the MHSAA Web site. This information will be periodically updated, uses the 2009-10 school year for illustration purposes, and is not now scheduled for action by the MHSAA Representative Council during the 2007-08 school year.

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