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New School Sports Season On Horizon; Rules Changes Include Sportsmanship Emphasis

EAST LANSING, Mich. – Aug. 1 -- A preventative effort to promote sportsmanship at school sporting events is a point of emphasis in all sports for the 2001-02 school year, which begins for over a quarter of a million young student-athletes who begin fall practice in eight sports at member schools of the Michigan High School Athletic Association in August.

The fall season is generally the most popular participation season, with over 115,000 youngsters taking part. Football practices commence on Monday (August 6) for all schools wishing to begin regular season games the weekend of August 23-26. All football schools must conduct three required conditioning days of practice before beginning contact, and the conditioning sessions may not include any pads. Practice also commences that week on August 9 for schools sponsoring boys golf in the Lower Peninsula, with competition in that sport beginning August 13.

The remaining fall sports begin their practice schedules on August 13, and all but three sports can start competition that day. The first game date for boys soccer is August 24, girls swimming and diving in the Lower Peninsula may open activity on August 25, and girls basketball begins on August 27.

The sportsmanship emphasis, a constant in Michigan, is getting additional national support in 2001-02, as the games rule-making body for high school sports, the National Federation of State High School Associations, is asking game officials to address proper conduct prior to the beginning of a contest with coaches and participants.

In Michigan, officials are being provided with a wallet-sized card from which to read a sportsmanship statement during pre-game meetings with coaches and captains. The card says: “The Michigan High School Athletic Association requires and expects officials to enforce all rules regarding unsportsmanlike conduct by coaches and student-athletes. There will be no tolerance for negative statements or actions between opposing players or among team members and coaches -- especially trash talking, taunting or baiting of opponents or casual use of vulgarities. If such comments are heard, a penalty will be assessed immediately!”

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"The best sportsmanship efforts are proactive," says John E. "Jack" Roberts, executive director of the MHSAA. "The short statement our staff developed to read prior to games will provide an emphasis that sportsmanship is an important part of our games, and that even minor deviations, such as casual cursing, are no more appropriate in the athletic arena than in the academic classroom."

Rules changes in football for the coming season include: Players legally blocking below the waist must be on the line of scrimmage and in the free blocking zone at the snap of the ball; a penalty of five yards has been added for running into the kicker or holder; clothing and arm covers or pads manufactured to enhance control of the football are prohibited; and the automatic declination of fouls committed by the opponents of the team scoring a touchdown have been eliminated.

In basketball, the major change permits a team to run the baseline on a throw-in when the scoring team, immediately following a made basket or during the ensuing throw-in, commits either a violation or a foul. Other changes include a prohibition on noise makers of all types at basketball games, and places conditions on the playing of music and sound effects by bands or over the public address system during play; a requirement that all players shall remain standing during a 30-second time out; and counts as a three-point goal, any thrown ball from beyond the 19-9 arc on the court. Previously, the official had the latitude to not count anything that was not considered a legitimate field goal attempt (such as an alley oop pass) from beyond the arc. Michigan will also not participate in a NFHS rule modification which allows states the option to extend the coaching box on the sideline to 14 feet in length.

In soccer, a team in possession of the ball for a throw-in may substitute, and if the team in possession of the ball chooses to substitute at that time, the opposing team may also substitute, provided all substitutes are at the scorer's table at the time of the throw-in. Teams electing or required to play with fewer than 11 players for reasons other than misconduct may have the player(s) reenter the game during a stoppage of play. The most visible change occurs when the goalie takes possession of the ball within the penalty area, that the ball must be released back into play within six seconds.

The 2001 fall campaign culminates with championships beginning with the Upper Peninsula finals in girls tennis on October 5, and wraps up with the girls basketball finals on December 1.

Here is a complete list of fall championship dates:

- **Girls Basketball:** Districts -- Nov. 12-17
Regionals -- Nov. 19-21
Finals - Nov. 27, 29-30-Dec. 1

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- **Cross Country:** U.P. Finals -- Oct. 20
L.P. Regionals -- Oct. 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. Boys Golf:** Regionals -- Oct.12 or 13
Finals -- Oct. 19-20
- **Boys Soccer:** Districts -- Oct. 22-27
Regionals – Oct. 30-Nov. 3
Semifinals -- Nov. 7
Finals -- Nov. 10
- **L.P. Girls Swimming/Diving** Diving Quals -- Nov. 13
Finals -- Nov. 16-17
- **Girls Tennis:** U.P. Finals -- Oct. 5
L.P. Regionals -- Oct. 12-13
L.P. Finals --Oct. 19-20

The MHSAA is a private, not-for-profit corporation of voluntary membership by over 1,300 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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