

MICHIGAN HIGH SCHOOL ATHLETIC ASSOCIATION, INC.

CLASSIFICATION COMMITTEE MEETING

East Lansing, January 8, 2014

Members Present:

David Chrisinske, Middleville
Terry Evanish, Flint
Barry Hobrla, Westphalia
Jeff Melvin, Bangor
Vic Michaels, Detroit
Mike Roberts, Hillsdale
Peter Ryan Saginaw
Al Unger, Kingsford
Jeff Upton, Niles

Members Absent:

Jeri Christie, AuGres-Sims
Tom Hardy, Traverse City
Sean McNatt, Breckenridge
Brad Robinson, Fraser
Jeffrey Thoenes, Williamston

Staff Members Present:

Nate Hampton
Gina Mazzolini
Tom Rashid
Jack Roberts (Recorder)

INTRODUCTION

Participants who were able to attend the meeting in spite of inclement weather introduced themselves and all shared something good about their holiday break activities.

Origins of the Classification Committee trace back to the 1980s when a forum was created to discuss relationships between public and nonpublic schools. When the ad hoc committee was made a standing committee, two additional purposes were established: (1) to perform intermediate review (between sport committees and the Representative Council) of proposals related to MHSAA tournament classification for a sport; and (2) to review proposals related to the policies and procedures of counting students and collecting enrollment figures for school classification purposes as well as proposals affecting tournament classification generally.

Because the makeup of this committee usually reflects broader diversity than MHSAA sport committees in that its makeup has fewer coaches and often includes school board members, superintendents and principals as well as athletic directors, and there is usually strong representation of diverse school size, location and demographics, the Classification Committee is also asked to respond to subjects that are not directly related to classification. The Classification Committee has become the principal forum for reviewing policies and procedures related to cooperative programs.

FOOTBALL PLAYOFFS

At its May 2013 meeting, the Representative Council did not approve the Football Committee recommendation to reformat the Football Playoffs to identify the eight divisions prior to the season, require automatic qualifiers to win seven games and emphasize strength of schedule through enhanced playoff/bonus points when determining the expanded field of additional qualifiers. Elements of this proposal were to be discussed at constituent meetings during 2013-14.

Tom Rashid reported that the constituent meetings he has led have not shown majority support for the so-called "strength of schedule" reformatting of the playoffs which would appear to shift football scheduling burdens from the largest, strongest programs to smaller schools with strong programs located in remote locations.

Nate Hampton reported that the MHSAA Football Committee may see at its Jan. 30 meeting a "strength of schedule" proposal from the Football Coaches Association that eliminates the seven-wins criterion for automatic playoff qualifiers.

There is consensus that the current system that provides a five-week postseason tournament for 256 eleven-player programs is reasonable for this collision sport in a cold climate state. Complaints are not directed at the playoffs per se, but the negative effects the tournament appears to have on regular season scheduling as schools try to enhance their opportunities to qualify for the playoffs which, inappropriately but realistically, has become the definition of success for many programs. Nationwide, regardless of the football playoff system in use, every state high school association is hearing complaints about difficulties in regular season football scheduling. Therefore, there may be no change in the playoffs that eliminates or even reduces the regular season football scheduling difficulties about which so many people complain.

Classification Committee members opined that it could be helpful to provide bonus points for schools which play smaller schools within their league. Other members expressed concerns for injuries and liability for those injuries if the playoff system encouraged large schools to schedule small schools during the regular season or required undefeated teams to play against nearly winless teams during the playoffs.

BASKETBALL TOURNAMENTS

The Basketball Coaches Association of Michigan has been processing two proposals to expand the MHSAA Basketball Tournaments from four classes to either five or six divisions. Nate Hampton reported that the MHSAA Basketball Committee at its Dec. 4, 2013 meeting, adopted by a vote of 8 in favor, 1 opposed, and three abstentions to recommend to the MHSAA Representative Council that the MHSAA Boys and Girls Basketball Tournaments be conducted in five equal divisions.

It was shown to the committee that the reasons stated for the BCAM proposal – the addition of small charter schools to MHSAA membership and the increasing enrollment range of the largest and smallest schools in each classification – are not valid. In fact, there have been more member schools closed than added to the MHSAA membership in recent years; and the enrollment range between the largest and smallest school in each classification has diminished significantly over the past two dozen years.

The committee also discussed the scheduling difficulties created by a fifth division at the Semifinals and Finals at a single site like the Breslin Student Events Center and the increased travel distances for District and Regional tournaments that are required in most cases when the number of tournament classifications is increased.

While it is likely a fifth division of basketball would have a positive effect on association finances, the fifth division in basketball would create pressure for a fifth division in other sports which would have a negative effect on association finances because the MHSAA subsidizes most tournaments with funds from football and basketball.

GIRLS VOLLEYBALL TOURNAMENT

The MHSAA Girls Volleyball Committee on Dec. 3, 2013 voted 7-5 in favor of conducting the MHSAA Girls Volleyball Tournament in five equal divisions. Gina Mazzolini reported that this vote was taken because a committee member was aware of the five-equal-division proposal advancing from BCAM to the MHSAA Basketball Committee. She reported that, prior to this vote, the Volleyball Committee had been near taking a vote to reformat the MHSAA Girls Volleyball Tournament from four classes to four equal divisions.

This led the Classification Committee to a discussion about the use of the traditional four classes (A, B, C and D) as opposed to four equal divisions (1, 2, 3 and 4) in basketball and volleyball, while all other MHSAA tournaments utilize equal divisions. Because it has been 17 years since the MHSAA Representative Council placed the tournaments of all sports but basketball and volleyball in equal divisions, the Classification Committee asked staff to show the Representative Council in May what equal divisions tournaments would look like compared to traditional classifications in 2014-15.

MINIMUM ENROLLMENT

At the Classification Committee meeting in 2012, a new member school submitted a proposal to reduce, or to make two exceptions to, the minimum requirement for MHSAA membership, which is 15 students in onsite daily attendance, pursuant to Article II, Section 1 of the MHSAA Constitution as adopted by MHSAA member schools in 1995. One proposed exception would be if a school offers the ACT/MME at its location; the other would be if the school is in a cooperative agreement with another member school that meets the minimum enrollment requirement. Classification Committee members reviewed the history and rationale of the minimum enrollment requirement which tends to permit membership only for those schools that have sufficient onsite attendance to actually sponsor one or more sports teams and provide appropriate support to and supervision of students and teams.

Of many ideas raised through the committee's discussion in 2012, the one that had most support was to examine this Constitutional requirement at some time in the future when a package of proposals is being prepared for a membership vote, and to consider permitting membership to schools with less than 15 students in grades 7 and 8, or grades 7 through 9, or grades 10 through 12, or grades 9 through 12, if the school building's total enrollment exceeded some higher number (perhaps 40, 60 or 80 students).

Since that time, several schools have dropped below the 15-student minimum enrollment at either the junior high/middle school or high school level and have been dropped from MHSAA membership at that level, and several schools have been returned to membership when their enrollment returned to the level that qualified for membership.

Coincidental to this matter are other questions whose resolution could relieve pressures on very small schools to sustain enrollment numbers that support MHSAA membership, including:

- a. Should the MHSAA Constitution (Article II, Section 1) be revised to include grade 6?
- b. Should Interpretation #262 be replaced by wording that allows member schools to permit participation by 6th grade students on teams with 7th and/or 8th graders, without the MHSAA Executive Committee's advance approval, in sports other than football, ice hockey and wrestling?

The Representative Council discussed these questions at its December 6, 2013 meeting. The Council has appointed a Junior High/Middle School Task Force for the purpose of studying these two and other questions that are related to overarching questions of junior high/middle school philosophy, marketing and membership.

The Classification Committee discussed this additional question:

- c. Would the changes in a and b above make it easier for very small schools to meet and maintain the 15-student minimum at the JH/MS level (could count students in grades 6, 7 and 8, not just 7 and 8)?

While the answer is “yes” and a clear majority of committee members expressed support for a revision of the MHSAA Constitution to include grade 6 for this and/or other reasons, no recommendation to the Representative Council was requested, in deference to the Task Force that is being appointed to consider this issue fully.

Because of inclement travel conditions, Kathleen McNamara, former superintendent, substituted for the superintendent/principal and the athletic director for the Beaver Island Community School in meeting with the committee to highlight problems created by the 15-student requirement for MHSAA membership and to suggest more flexible membership requirements.

The committee reviewed the policies of surrounding states designed to assure that membership is limited to schools which have sufficient student enrollment to sustain sports programs. These policies, like the MHSAA's, are not intended to penalize small schools but are reasonable policies that establish modest standards which tend to limit membership to institutions with the resources to realistically sponsor and adequately supervise a sports program on which opposing schools can depend.

RECOMMENDATION TO THE REPRESENTATIVE COUNCIL

The Classification Committee recommends that the Representative Council prepare and distribute to the membership the following proposed amendment to the MHSAA Constitution and, while the proposal is pending, that the MHSAA Executive Committee actions be consistent with this proposal:

Add a new Section 2 to Article II as follows:

“Sec. 2 – If, after two full years of membership in good standing, a member school's enrollment declines below the 15-student requirement for membership, its MHSAA membership may continue if that school conducts on its own (not in a cooperative program) an interscholastic program that allows participation opportunities for each gender enrolled in that school. In other cases, if a member school in good standing drops below 15 students on what it believes to be a temporary basis, it can request of the Executive Committee to maintain its MHSAA membership for a period of time approved by the Executive Committee.”