

JUNIOR HIGH/MIDDLE SCHOOL COMMITTEE MINUTES

MHSAA, January 13, 2015

Members

Alan Alsbro, Berrien Springs
Steve Babbitt, Blissfield
Todd Farmer, Muskegon
Jolinda Lucas, Grand Rapids
Cheri Meier, Ionia
Steve Newkirk, Clare

Jim Okler, Grosse Ile
Michael Porco, Grand Rapids
Scott Robertson, Grand Haven
Brian Swinehart, Walled Lake

Members absent:

David Beyer, Gladwin
Cathy Gross, Farwell
Sean Zaborowski, St. Clair Shores

Staff Members

Cody Inglis, Recorder
Mark Uyl

The MHSAA Junior High/Middle School Committee met in the MHSAA office to review topics identified for discussion by the MHSAA staff, member schools and the JH/MS Task Force.

REPRESENTATIVE COUNCIL ACTION

The JH/MS committee proposal and subsequent Representative Council approval that increased lengths of quarters in basketball to 8 minutes and football to 10 minutes was reviewed. Unanimous agreement existed among the committee that the increase of time in games was positive for both JH/MS student-athletes as well as JH/MS programs in football and basketball. Benefits of the increased time are that it allows coaches to play all kids longer matches what other youth sports leagues are doing and it gives leagues and conferences the flexibility to try new quarter lengths to fit their needs. Challenges in the first year of increased quarter length included the increased cost that officials are now looking for in compensation and some increase in the amount of lopsided victories at the JH/MS level.

Discussion also took place over the fall season start dates which are the 14th Monday before Thanksgiving. Some committee members expressed concern that the date does not allow schools to meet minimum practice requirements prior to their first football game without weekend or holiday practices. The desire to survey schools during the Update meeting about changing this date to 2 days earlier was requested as a way to garner data and feedback with this relatively new regulation. Giving schools and/or leagues the flexibility to start 2 days earlier would allow schools or leagues the option to get practices in and not have to practice over the Labor Day holiday weekend to meet practice minimums while fitting in current league dates.

The 13 consecutive week season in all sports was viewed as satisfactory under current regulations for maximum contests/meets and very few leagues and conferences represented used the allotted maximum weeks of competition.

HANDBOOK REGULATIONS

The Committee discussion focused on one major Handbook topic of limits of competition within a week and on school nights for JH/MS sports, specifically in basketball, volleyball and wrestling. While no change was supported, the Committee was asked to see if standardizing the language for school day between these three sports was necessary. Discussion centered on the differences in the three sports as to why the current language was used and the sports are treated differently. There was no consensus for change given the differences in sports and the current Handbook language is working for membership.

JUNIOR HIGH/MIDDLE SCHOOL TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATION AND DISCUSSION

Much discussion took place regarding a proposed change in regulations governing 6th grade participation at the grade 7-8 level. The proposed change was recommended by the JH/MS Task Force and was shared for Representative Council discussion in December. The Council provided additional questions regarding the proposal and directed both MHSAA staff and the JH/MS Committee to revisit the proposal and subsequent questions. Current regulations do not allow students in grade 6 to be on a member school grade 7-8 team unless a waiver is obtained in certain sports through the MHSAA Executive Committee, typically granted to smaller – sized enrollment schools.

The Committee was in agreement that any change in current regulations regarding 6th graders should be considered with the following question in mind: “What changes can the MHSAA make that would cause MHSAA membership to be more attractive to some current non-member JH/MS without causing MHSAA membership to be less attractive to some current member JH/MS?”

A summary of the JH/MS Task Force work was provided by staff members Mark Uyl and Cody Inglis, co-facilitators of the JH/MS Task Force, summarizing the four meetings over the course of eight months. In September, the Task Force prepared a recommendation that the MHSAA membership be given a formal amendment to Section 1 of Article II of the MHSAA Constitution that makes 6th grade the youngest grade which MHSAA member junior high/middle schools may include in their enrollment, and to modify Regulation III, Section 1© to allow these schools to permit 6th-graders’ participation with and against 7th- and 8th-graders in all sports except football and ice hockey without the necessity of seeking specific annual waiver from the MHSAA.

The Council’s questions from December guided the Committee discussion. While unanimous support among the JH/MS Committee exists for the support for an MHSAA Constitutional change, the Committee felt strongly that education to and among MHSAA member schools principals and athletic directors was essential for the 6th grade amendment.

For this reason, the Committee’s recommendation was to support the JH/MS Task Force recommendation with additional clarity and language, including potential MHSAA Handbook interpretations prior to it being forwarded to the Council (and potentially MHSAA membership). This additional language and education would come in the form of an FAQ document and/or additional “items to note” regarding what this Constitutional change would do for MHSAA member Junior High/Middle Schools across the state. In addition, MHSAA Handbook interpretations regarding the rule change could be communicated by staff at meetings, MIAAA meetings and MASSP meetings to get the proper information out regarding the change and promote clarity among all. Appendix “A” is an initial effort to identify and provide the requested clarifications.

HEALTH & SAFETY

The committee suggested continued reminders regarding the upcoming changes relative to coaches education, CPR/first Aid and making these requirements streamlined and focusing on the ease of use for JH/MS coaches. Additionally, MHSAA CAP and JH/MS coaching education should continue to be promoted as a way to increase MHSAA philosophy on JH/MS sports and school based athletics.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE REPRESENTATIVE COUNCIL

The committee voted (10-0) to recommend that **with additional clarifying language, education and interpretations to MHSAA member schools** that the Representative Council support the following JH/MS Task Force recommendations that would allow MHSAA member schools the option to include 6th graders with and against 7th and 8th graders in track, cross country, swimming, bowling, golf, tennis and wrestling. Additionally, except for football and ice hockey, with league or conference approval, schools may include 6th graders in team competition at their junior high/middle school:

1. Approve for submission to the membership, proposal to amend Article II, Section 1 of the MHSAA Constitution to allow school membership in the MHSAA beginning at the 6th grade.
2. Replace Regulation III, Section 1 (C) with the following:
 1. Schools have the option to include 6th-graders with and against 7th and 8th graders in track, cross country, swimming, bowling, golf, tennis and wrestling.
 2. Except in football and ice hockey, with league or conference approval, schools may include 6th-graders in team competition at their junior high/middle school.
 - a. *Handbook* Interpretations 263, 264, 265 would be deleted.
 - b. If a school does not belong to a league or conference (independent), individual schools would have the option to include 6th-grade students in team competition except for football and ice hockey.
3. Regulation III, Section 1 (D) would need to be edited from grades 7-8 to 6-8.
4. New Regulation III, Section 2 (A) would be needed (assuming for 2015-16 school year):

SECTION 2 (A)—A 6th-grade student who competes in any interscholastic athletic contest limited to 6th graders must be under thirteen (13) years of age, except that a student whose (13th) birthday occurs on or after September 1 of a current school year is eligible for the balance of that school year. Any 6th-grade student born before Sept. 1, 2001, is ineligible for interscholastic athletics in Michigan except that he or she may play on the 7th grade or 8th-grade squad of that junior high school, or on a team of combined seventh and 8th-grade students. In each case all other regulations pertaining to eligibility must be met.
5. Would need to add 6th grade references under sections covering: **Maximum Enrollment, Maximum Competition, Undergraduate Standing, Previous Academic Credit Record, Current Academic Record, Transfers, Undue Influence, Amateur Status, Limited Team Membership, All-Star / National Championships, and Out of Season Coaching.**