



Accommodating The Media

(From the 2017-18 MHSAA MultiMedia Regulations)

One of the things that defines high school sports as unique from all other levels of youth sports is the daily media coverage of our games.

For most of our participants, this is the only time in their lives their name will be in the newspaper, or the only time their name will ever be called by a local radio or television announcer for playing the games they love.

As athletic administrators, we have a role in seeing that our student-athletes are recognized for their efforts by providing the details of our athletic events to the media, and by properly accommodating media when they attend our events.

First, it should be stated that no single school or single sport has a right to receive media coverage. Even in the smallest communities, automatic coverage is not a given. Media outlets are driven by advertising dollars, circulation, viewership/listenership numbers, and by providing coverage of what they determine interests most of the community they serve. Regardless, schools need to service all sports equally in terms of their promotion to the media.

In discussing coverage issues with the media each summer, we have found the same themes to be sounded, themes which will help schools receive the maximum coverage possible.



Before The Season

- Be sure you provide a list of schedules, including starting times, for all sports for the upcoming season well in advance of the first event. Some smaller newspapers may also run subvarsity schedules -- check with your sports editor to see if the outlet is interested in the information. You should also check to see if e-mailing the information is preferred.
- Once team rosters are available, provide that information to your local outlets. Having a roster handy will increase the chances of your students' names being spelled correctly in stories.
- Find out the timetable your local outlets have for receiving event reports on game nights. Be sure the individuals responsible for calling in results know the deadlines, and the consequences if they don't meet them. Find out if submitting results for information-intensive sports like swimming and track can be done by e-mail.

For Home Events

- Set up a working press area that is protected from the elements. Make sure it has counter space for notebooks, laptop computers and broadcasting equipment; and electrical outlets. Access to telephones and the Internet is desirable, but may not always be feasible.
- Press boxes are called that for a reason. Don't turn what should be a working area into a skybox for school administrators, boosters and other non-workers.



- Be sure you provide visiting media access to your facilities on a reasonable timetable. This includes marking off seats for media who have made advance arrangements with you, so they are not made to arrive early to be guaranteed working space; and providing them the time following a contest if they are on deadline to write their report, and transmit it back for the following day's paper. Every effort should also be made to accommodate those media who do not call in advance; but it would not be inappropriate for you to request that courtesy if they plan on making return trips to your school.
 - Providing rosters and statistics about your team is an appreciated courtesy.
- While not required, complimentary coffee, soda, or bottled water in the press area is appreciated.

- Some photographers may wish to set up strobe lighting in your indoor venues. Such lighting, properly set up, does not affect play. Be sure the strobes are not set up in a manner which creates a safety hazard with cords and light stands being in the way of spectators. Strobes are allowed at MHSAA post-season tournament venues in all sports except competitive cheer, gymnastics and diving. See pages 8 & 9 of the MHSAA Multimedia Regulations for additional information.
- Be sure photographers visiting your venue are aware of where they can -- and cannot -- work.



Press Box Seating Arrangements

Local schools hosting MHSAA Tournaments should make arrangements to provide all working media wishing to cover an event appropriate working space in a facility which shelters them from the weather at outdoor events, and provides a counter/table space with ancillary accommodations such as electricity; and when available without additional expense to the local site – telephone and internet. When space is at a premium, Tournament Managers may wish to follow this **recommended** formula for seating media:

- Reporter for the primary local newspaper covering the home team (as determined by the home team AD - 1 seat)
- Reporter for the primary local newspaper covering the visiting team (as determined by the visiting team AD – 1 seat)
- Audio broadcast of the primary outlet covering the home team (as determined by the home team AD-2 seats)
- Audio broadcast of the primary outlet covering the visiting team (as determined by the home team AD-2 seats)
- Reporter for the secondary local or regional/statewide newspaper covering the home team (as determined by the home team AD – 1 seat)
- Reporter for the secondary local or regional/statewide newspaper covering the visiting team (as determined by the visiting team AD – 1 seat)
- Video broadcast of the MHSAA Network and its television partners, or of the primary local outlet covering the home team (Local outlet as determined by the home team AD – 2 seats in press box, 2 camera positions on press box roof/camera platform or at top of stands)
- Video broadcast of the primary local outlet covering the visiting team (Local outlet as determined by the visiting team AD – 2 seats in press box, 2 camera positions on press box roof/camera platform or at top of stands – on a space-available basis after the first crew has been accommodated)
- Video broadcast of a local outlet covering the general market (2 seats in press box, 2 camera positions on press box roof/camera platform or at top of stands – on a space available basis after the first two crews have been accommodated)
- Repeat rotation to accommodate additional newspaper and audio outlets as needed.



The old football press box at Spartan Stadium, East Lansing, circa 1950's

Following An Event (Home or Away)

- Unless you are absolutely certain a media outlet was at the event, be sure it is given a telephone call. Television stations often send a single camera out on a given night with the assignment of getting footage of several games. You can't assume they were there at game's end.
- Be sure the call is made to your local media in a timely manner. The closer you call to deadline, the more chances increase of getting a shorter report, or not having your score on the TV report's graphics. Call as soon as the game is over.

- Be sure you have accurate information about both teams. This includes first and last names for key players, season records, and key statistics. Schools which make up such information quickly get found out by their local media.
- Be sure the coach is available for interviews. After a brief cooling-off period, the coach should be prepared to meet with the local media. Some coaches oblige interviews as they're walking off the playing surface, but it would not be impolite to ask a reporter to wait until after the coach has had a brief postgame meeting with the team. Interviews should be conducted outside the lockerroom.
- Be sure you call, win or lose. Don't earn a reputation with your local media for calling only when you win; the only losers in that case are your kids.



Media Responsibilities

This is a two-way street in many respects. However, with dozens of schools in its coverage area sometimes, it is difficult for a media outlet to get out and cover all the schools and teams. Some of the media's responsibilities when covering your events include:

- Calling in advance. You can best plan for servicing media at games when you know they're coming. In your preseason communication with your local media, request their help by asking them to call you in advance when they know they're coming to your venue.
- Compliance with game management. The more you can do to communicate in advance with the media what the do's and don'ts are at your athletic venues, the more you reduce the likelihood of questions being raised or confrontations taking place. The media does have the responsibility to respect game management when such requests are initially made in a respectful manner.

Conclusion

The school-media partnership, providing student-athletes and teams with recognition for their once-in-a-lifetime participation in educational athletics, is what helps make our games unique. Cooperation and good sportsmanship on both sides of this partnership will give our youngsters memories for their scrapbooks which will last forever.