

JUNIOR HIGH/MIDDLE SCHOOL COMMITTEE MINUTES

MHSAA, October 18, 2017, 9:30 a.m.

Members

Jordan Ackerman, Oxford
Jeff Dassance, Eaton Rapids
Ken Dietz, Watervliet
Steve Graf, Bloomfield Hills
Don Gustafson, St. Ignace
Craig Kueffner, Mason
Jolinda Lucas, Grand Rapids
Bryan Masi, Northville
Steve Newkirk, Clare
Kevin Sankey, Big Rapids
Edward Tomlin, Detroit

Members absent

Damon Amey, Saginaw
Jody Noble, Okemos

MHSAA Staff

Cody Inglis

The MHSAA Junior High/Middle School committee met for the first of two 2017-18 meetings to review topics identified for discussion by the MHSAA staff, Representative Council and member schools.

The Junior High/Middle School committee started its meeting reviewing committee responsibilities and purpose including the uniqueness of an MHSAA committee meeting twice in a school year. A thorough review of the 2017 JH/MS meeting minutes as well as the proposals forwarded to the MHSAA Representative Council were discussed. Survey questions specifically related to JH/MS were sent to all MHSAA JH/MS schools just prior to the meeting so the committee spent significant time reviewing that data from the membership as well as the annual MHSAA Update meeting survey questions related to JH/MS. In addition, the AD In-service poll questions were also reviewed, as they were pertinent to the discussion. This review of data gave the committee both information and discussion topics. Some of these topics of discussion included modifying the Limited Team Membership rule to allow student-athletes at the JH/MS to compete in up to two outside events in the same sport in the same season, having the MHSAA sponsor regional or even state competitions in certain sports and expanding the number of JH/MS games and contests allowed during the 13 week season.

MHSAA JH/MS Survey data review and discussion on Regional and Statewide tournaments

The committee focused its discussion upon current MHSAA JH/MS school membership; and while membership has increased by over 100 schools in the past two school years to near 800 total JH/MS in Michigan, the committee wondered about how the growth might be increased even more if an MHSAA sponsored tournament might be conducted in some sports. The survey data including when the surveys were given and who took them and the potential skewed data that comes from each survey, was discussed by the committee. Survey data indicated that MHSAA member schools were hesitant to embrace the new idea of regional or state MHSAA sponsored competitions at the JH/MS level, with comments spreading the gamut from very positive to very negative.

The committee discussed various reasons for the responses including that the true JH/MS concept of sports is to learn and introduce sports to student-athletes, not promote winning or state championships. The topic of middle school athletic administrators being challenged by the hectic pace of their jobs and responsibilities might also explain some negative reaction to the new concept of regional or state MHSAA sponsored competition. JH/MS Athletic Directors do not want to or cannot add additional responsibilities to their plates. Survey data also showed where there was support for regional and statewide competition was in the individual sports like Cross Country, Track and Wrestling. Support for team sport regional and state competition was tepid at best and outright rejected by most surveyed. Finally, given that the surveys were very broad in nature, the JH/MS committee suggested that potentially more structure and specifics should be given to schools in the future and this may adjust thinking on this concept. These specifics could include which specific sports, what the format would be, when the season would commence, when the tournament would occur, and who could be involved.

MHSAA discussion and update on MHSAA Presenting Sponsorship and Ambassador program

A review of the current MHSAA pilot program on “Presenting Sponsorship of JH/MS events” was completed. The update included the positive experiences of MHSAA staff at already existing League and Conference track events last spring where the MHSAA visited five areas of the state and joined in presenting those meets with an MHSAA presence and financial support. “Money and messaging” was the philosophy behind these events. The events were well received by leagues, conferences, administrators, coaches and the student-athletes themselves. One of the big takeaways was the power of the MHSAA brand. Student-athletes flocked to get themselves in a picture with the MHSAA banner behind them and with their trophies or medals won. The power and positivity of the MHSAA brand is something that will be used to get additional JH/MS programs into school membership. Updates on plans for this fall and winter presenting sponsorships were given with 5 leagues and conferences on board for their events in sports such as cross country, volleyball, wrestling and basketball. The next stage of the JH/MS committee task is to continue to develop the MHSAA “regional strike teams” or “Ambassador Program” with ideas for people and responsibilities being discussed and approved for the future. Committee discussion also took on the next stage of presenting sponsorships and ideas of developing MHSAA JH/MS specific trophies and medals, banners and other ideas to enhance this burgeoning market for the MHSAA.

MHSAA JH/MS game and contest limits

This uniqueness of each MHSAA sport presents challenges for the JH/MS committee to forward a proposal regarding each sport’s contest limits. All agreed that while a modest increase was needed in each sport, it would be best to have each individual sport committee determine this number. Additionally, the JH/MS committee felt strongly that there should be no increase in the 13 week JH/MS season. The committee urged the MHSAA, athletic directors and JH/MS school coaches to “guard the gate” of potential excess while opening it enough to allow moderate increases in contest limits. This will take continued education and support from educational athletics advocates like athletic directors and coaches with parents and student-athletes. Last year a recommendation was forwarded to the MHSAA Representative Council representing the sentiments of the committee to expand each sport’s maximum contest limits in both number of games or days of competition, as well as increasing the amount of multigame events not followed by a school day. This school year, MHSAA sport committees will be discussing increasing the limits at the JH/MS level within their own sport and determining what might make best sense for their sport at this time. The JH/MS committee will be kept up to date on this progress.

MHSAA JH/MS Limited Team Membership discussion

Last year, a recommendation from the JH/MS committee was made to the MHSAA Representative Council to modify the Limited Team Membership rule to allow student-athletes at the JH/MS level to compete in up to two outside events in the same team sport in the same season. While there was much discussion, the Representative Council tabled this proposal in order to get more feedback and opinions from schools during the 2017-18 school year. The committee’s goal for this proposal would be to bring non-school athletes into school-based athletics sooner and as an option to include non-school competition in their experience. This year the JH/MS committee reviewed the survey data as well as expressed some of their thoughts on this topic. Some sentiments that were expressed included: How do schools track the limited team membership rule with JH/MS student-athletes? And would there be an increase in the amount of violations because of misunderstanding of the rule? Some committee members expressed that this potential change could be a “hook” for drawing the non-school sport athlete into the mix of school based educational athletics and it could be used as a “carrot” to entice those schools which did not join at the JH/MS level to do so in order to involved more student-athletes in the JH/MS sport experience.

Next steps for the Junior High/Middle School committee

The committee discussed several next steps to prepare for the next meeting of the JH/MS committee in February . These included:

- Education pieces for JH/MS schools about what JH/MS MHSAA membership is all about. Why we do and what we do for member schools?
- Developing a survey for non-MHSAA member schools about why they don't join the MHSAA at the JH/MS level
- Increasing the JH/MS presence on the MHSAA website
- Developing the next stage of the MHSAA presenting sponsorship plan with pilot programs in regional tournaments.
- Developing in conjunction with the MHSAA Multi-sport task force some tools for parents and schools to use such "Sports the Right Way" and "What parents should know"

Next JH/MS committee meeting date will be February 7, 2018