

JUNIOR HIGH/MIDDLE SCHOOL COMMITTEE MINUTES

MHSAA, January 17, 2014

Members

Alan Alsbro, Berrien Springs
Joe Alessandrini, Livonia
Steve Babbitt, Blissfield
Jeff Dassance, Eaton Rapids
Todd Farmer, Muskegon
Cathy Gross, Farwell
Dave Mammel, Coleman
Jason Mellema, Pewamo-Westphalia
Mike Messner, Constantine

Steve Newkirk, Clare
Jim Okler, Grosse Ile
Kevin Polston, Grand Haven
Brian Swinehart, Walled Lake
Sean Zaborowski, St. Clair Shores

Staff Members

Randy Allen, Recorder
Cody Inglis

The MHSAA Junior High/Middle School Committee met in the MHSAA Office Building to review topics suggested for discussion by the MHSAA Staff and member schools.

REPRESENTATIVE COUNCIL ACTION

The 2013 JH/MS committee proposal and subsequent Representative Council approval that fixed the fall sports start date as the 14th Monday prior to Thanksgiving was reviewed. 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 change to a 13 consecutive week season in all sports was viewed as satisfactory under current regulations for maximum contests/meets.

HANDBOOK REGULATIONS

The Committee discussion focused on three major topics; Changing MHSAA JH/MS membership to a grade 6-8 definition in the Constitution, eliminating the waiver requirement for 6th grade participation with grade 7-8 teams and increasing the maximum number of contests and length of contests. The Committee was also apprised of the formation of a JH/MS Task Force that will have more comprehensive and frequent meetings on these subjects, with reports to both the Representative Council and JH/MS standing committee for review prior to any final proposals and decisions.

Contest Limits/Length: The committee was unified in opposition to increasing contest maximums, as adding games or meets would mean less practice time, longer seasons, difficulty in a four-season schedule and added expense. An increase in individual game length was preferred to allow greater participation opportunities for students. Leagues & conferences would be required to adopt policies and coaching guidelines regarding playing time and participation opportunities.

In reviewing sports typically sponsored at the JH/MS level, it was recommended to increase lengths of quarters in basketball to 8 minutes, football to 10 minutes and allow students to participate in 4 events in track & field.

6th Grade Participation: Much discussion took place regarding a change in regulations governing 6th grade participation at the grade 7-8 level. 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 given only to small enrollment schools. The Committee was in agreement that any change in current regulations regarding 6th graders, or increasing contest maximums or length of contests would not diminish the attraction to or existence of competing non-school programs, and that changes should be considered based solely on school sports philosophy and membership needs and preferences.

Recent survey results on these subjects were shared with the Committee, showing a trend of more favorable opinion regarding 6th grade inclusion over the past 10 years. Results of a previous study committee on the 6th grade topic were also reported, with opinion at that time split between

smaller schools favoring change and larger schools favoring the status quo. Several concerns were expressed regarding a more liberal approach to the 6th grade question as follows:

- Adding 6th grade to MHSAA membership would cause pressure to include 5th graders.
- Although 6th grade only teams would probably not be a result of any change, more students in 6-8 programs would mean more coaching, added expense and stress on facilities for practice.
- A grade 6-8 program may risk “displacement” of average players with more talented 6th grade students.
- Would such a change be done for the “right reasons”?
- Would skills levels of a 6th grader competing with or against grade 7-8 students be compatible?
- Would local leagues & conferences be given maximum flexibility to adopt their own policies to make such a change workable?
- Would parent expectations and pressures be heightened with a grade 6-8 program?

Although there was no consensus on the major topics of discussion, the Committee in general favored a change in the current JH/MS regulations and policies regarding 6th grade students and supported the following options for Task Force study and consideration:

- A constitutional amendment for MHSAA JH/MS membership to be grades 6-8 with local leagues & conferences to determine specific regulations an emphasis on broader participation opportunities for students. Although not unanimous, this option was the preferred choice of the committee if a change was to take place.
- Change the current 6th grade waiver process to allow schools of any enrollment size to be considered for waivers on a case by case basis that is need specific, not granted only to small enrollment schools.
- Eliminate the waiver requirement for 6th grade participation in individual sports, keeping the waiver process and criteria for team sports.

MEMBERSHIP

The committee was asked for suggestions on how the MHSAA could retain current JH/MS members and make membership more attractive to schools not currently members. The following thoughts were expressed for consideration:

- Make membership required at the 7-8 level for 9-12 members, i.e. required district membership, fully recognizing the difficulty with private school members.
- Provide MHSAA CAP courses at no change or a greatly reduced cost to JH/MS members.
- Modify the Limited Team Membership rule at grades 7-8 to allow some participation with restrictions in same sport non-school programs during the school season.
- Give member schools flexibility on the start of fall football practices.
- Allow more local league & conference decision making within broad statewide MHSAA regulations.

HEALTH & SAFETY

The committee suggested consideration for a pitching count limit for JH/MS baseball. Also suggested was more flexibility for schools to determine weight classes, opponents and meet procedures for JH/MS wrestling.

GENERAL TOPICS

On the subject of the MHSAA conducting regional post season tournaments in some sports at the JH/MS level, there was no support and unanimous opposition to such a plan.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE REPRESENTATIVE COUNCIL

Given the forthcoming deliberations by the planned JH/MS Task Force on several of the same subjects on this agenda, the committee did not have specific proposals for the Representative Council. However, it was suggested that the Council consider increasing the length of contests in some sports as follows for the 2014-15 school year while awaiting more comprehensive study and proposals from the JH/MS Task Force:

Basketball – 8 minute quarters, 32 minutes maximum for the game.

Football – 10 minute quarters

Track & Field – 4 events per individual in a meet.