

# MICHIGAN HIGH SCHOOL ATHLETIC ASSOCIATION, INC.

## CLASSIFICATION COMMITTEE MEETING

East Lansing, January 11, 2017

### Members Present:

David Chrisinske, Middleville  
TG Cook, Pittsford  
Kevin Guzzo, St. Joseph  
Jason Kasparian, Port Huron  
Jason Kemler, Brethren  
Kevin Langs, Climax  
Vic Michaels, Detroit  
Steve Newkirk, Clare  
Brian Osborn, Fowlerville  
Pete Ryan, Saginaw  
Meg Seng, Ann Arbor  
Marty Simmonds, Pontiac  
Jon Studley, West Branch  
Don Watchowski, Royal Oak  
Pat Watson, West Bloomfield

### Members Absent:

Ron Stoneman, Manistee  
Al Unger, Kingsford  
Mark Werley, Zeeland

### Staff Members Present:

Andy Frushour  
Nate Hampton  
Geoff Kimmerly  
Andi Osters  
Tom Rashid  
Jack Roberts (Recorder)

## INTRODUCTION

Origins of the Classification Committee trace back to the 1980s when a forum was created to discuss relationships between public and nonpublic schools, which resulted in some policy changes, especially related to the transfer rule. 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 more administrators, 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.

## 2016 MEETING MINUTES

Topics of the 2016 meeting of the Classification Committee included the format of MHSAA Football, Ice Hockey, Upper Peninsula Golf and Lower Peninsula Cross Country Tournaments. The Classification Committee made a recommendation to the Representative Council to allow for cooperative programs in excess of the 1,000-student enrollment maximum in baseball, girls softball, soccer, golf and tennis for two or more schools of the same public school district (same governing board) provided there is a demonstrated history of inadequate numbers of participants to support teams; and the Representative Council expanded and approved that concept at its May 2016 meeting.

## SPORTS SPONSORSHIP TRENDS

The sports with the greatest **decline** in sponsorship for 2015-16 (as reported to the MHSAA as of 5/10/16) are boys golf (-12 schools) and boys tennis (-10). The continuing decline in boys tennis since 2006-07 – 53 schools (15 percent drop, largest of any sport) – is of most concern. One committee member inquired as to what the MHSAA might do to rejuvenate interest in high school golf and tennis, and the response was that the MHSAA should consider changes or additions to its tournament formats, e.g., team tennis and Ryder Cup style golf, both possibly coed.

The sports with the greatest **increase** in sponsorship are boys bowling (+22), girls bowling (+16), boys cross country and girls cross country (+15), girls competitive cheer and girls track & field (+14), girls golf (+12) and girls volleyball (+10).

## **NATIONAL OVERVIEW**

The committee was given a September 2016 survey compiled by the Illinois High School Association that provided a frame of reference for methods in use in other large states to classify schools for competition, and Mr. Roberts provided a sampling of discussions and actions in other states related to tournament classification. State associations across the country are learning that more tournament classes leads to more problems – practical, financial and political – and that they lack the authority to treat nonpublic schools differently than public schools; and increasingly, state associations are focusing more on transfer abuses than on additional or modified tournament classifications.

Committee members discussed socioeconomic factors that have been linked to participation rates and would welcome research on why students play or choose not to play school sports and on how participation rates affect rates of success in competition. MHSAA staff will begin its response to this request by reaching out to MSU's Institute for the Study of Youth Sports.

## **EIGHT-PLAYER FOOTBALL**

The major task of the meeting was to provide input to the MHSAA Representative Council on the trends in 8-player football and how to prepare for its future and the effect on the 11-player game in MHSAA member schools. A six-point outline guided the start of the committee's 80-minute discussion.

Mr. Langs provided perspective by reminding committee members and staff that the potential for school sports to impact lives is far greater during the regular season than the comparatively short postseason tournament and that there is equal potential to impact lives whether the football is an 11-player or 8-player game. He acknowledged that attrition in the number of 11-player schools in Class D was making it hard for remaining 11-player schools to maintain 11-player programs, not because they lack numbers of players or have limited on-field success, but because of expense for travel to complete a nine-game schedule of 11-player football against Class D and C schools.

It appears there will be 55 to 60 Class D schools and 3-5 Class C schools sponsoring 8-player football at the varsity level for the 2017 season. It is likely there will be fewer than 10 Class D schools sponsoring 11-player football by 2020, and there will be an increase in sponsorship of 8-player football at the varsity level among Class C schools and at the subvarsity level among schools of all four classifications.

While a vote was not taken, there was modest consensus that the 8-player tournament should be expanded for 2018 to two 16-team divisions, conducted over four weeks and concluding in a double-header event in the Superior Dome of Northern Michigan University one week prior to the 11-player Finals at Ford Field. There should be a grace period for schools to continue in the 8-player tournament for one year if their enrollment is above the maximum allowed by less than ten percent. There was less consensus that the maximum enrollment for the 8-player tournament should be fixed at a certain number rather than change each year as the maximum enrollment for Class D schools moves up or down.

## **EQUAL DIVISIONS**

The committee received a brief history of MHSAA tournament classification, including the introduction of "equal divisions" to all sports except basketball and girls volleyball in 1997.

The committee reviewed lists of schools which sponsored a sport but opted out of the MHSAA tournament for that sport during the winter 2015-16, spring 2016 and fall 2016 seasons. The committee considered altering the equal divisions system by not including at the time when divisions are set those schools that had intended to sponsor the sport but did not enter the previous MHSAA tournament for the sport. While there was consensus that this change should occur, committee members wanted the Representative Council to see in May how that might have changed divisions for 2016-17 and/or would change divisions for 2017-18 and then decide if the change in procedure should be adopted for the 2018-19 classification process.

The committee was also apprised of the December 2016 MHSAA Basketball Committee recommendation to the Representative Council that the Classification Committee consider making a recommendation to the Council to conduct the MHSAA Basketball and Girls Volleyball Tournaments in equal divisions. Jay Green of Kingston High School, an advocate for conducting all MHSAA tournaments under the equal divisions system, presented some of his research and opinions. Mr. Green noted how the average size of Michigan schools is declining and he posed these key questions: If 250 was once okay for the maximum enrollment for a Class D school, why isn't 250 or 240 or 230 okay as the Division 4 maximum today? And if equal divisions is tolerable in sports where the Division 4 enrollment spread is greater, why isn't it tolerable or preferable in basketball and volleyball where the Division 4 enrollment spread would be the smallest of all MHSAA tournaments?

### **SEEDING BASKETBALL TOURNAMENTS**

The committee was apprised of the December 2016 MHSAA Basketball Committee recommendation to the Representative Council to adopt a specific seeding plan for the MHSAA Boys and Girls Basketball Tournaments, called the "KPI Flex Seeding Plan." There was insufficient time for discussion.

### **COOPERATIVE PROGRAMS**

The committee was provided the history of cooperative programs in Michigan, beginning in 1987, and a list of five chronic issues that frustrate administration. There was insufficient time for discussion. The topics could require the attention of a separate task force meeting over several months.

**No recommendations to the Representative Council were completed.**