



# Registered Observer Handbook

First Edition

2009-2010

## **PURPOSE & GUIDELINES**

### **PURPOSE OF THE MHSAA:**

1. Increase and promote the educational value of interscholastic athletic programs throughout the state.
2. Assist member institutions in their regulation of interscholastic athletic eligibility and competition.
3. Promote uniformity, predictability and competitive equity in the application of eligibility rules for athletic contests.
4. Promote the physical welfare of participating students.

### **PURPOSE OF REGISTERED OBSERVER PROGRAM:**

1. To help all registered officials (new, improving and veteran) learn, develop and grow by receiving constructive feedback provided by experienced, caring observers.
2. To assist the MHSAA in identifying potential and future tournament officials.
3. To provide feedback to local Approved Associations and Registered Assignors in the development, training and advancement of officials.
4. Through the observers program, MHSAA hopes to improve officiating, increase the consistency of officiating throughout the state, and provide officials with increased support and mentoring.

### **GENERAL GUIDELINES FOR OBSERVERS:**

The MHSAA provides an observers program for several sports. The following list outlines some general responsibilities for observers but should not be considered all-inclusive.

1. While working as an observer, know that you are representing the MHSAA. Your conduct and actions should always be beyond reproach and should reflect a genuine commitment to helping officials improve.
2. Recognize new young officials and encourage them to stay in officiating.
3. Help and assist current officials to become better officials.
4. Realize that we cannot see all officials work but try and see as many officials as possible.
5. When the opportunity allows, encourage coaches to do a better and more

thorough job of rating officials.

6. Visit with officials between games or at halftime only if something serious and obvious needs to be corrected immediately.
5. Make every effort to visit with officials after the contest for a brief critique, especially if something needs immediate attention.
6. Be professional at all times in your appearance and conduct and remain strictly a MHSAA observer throughout the contest.
7. Keep clear notes throughout the year so that improvements can be made to “your system” for next year as well as providing suggestions for improvement to the MHSAA.
8. Maintain a friendly but separate relationship with school administration and coaches.
9. Keep an eye out for officials that you will want to recommend to the MHSAA for future tournament opportunities.
10. NEVER become involved with decisions of contest officials on the court/field/venue.
11. Follow a policy of offering no comment to the media regarding your observations. If pressed further by the media, direct that reporter to contact the MHSAA directly.

### **PROGRAM OVERVIEW**

**PROGRAM TIMELINE:** The MHSAA began discussing an observation program in August of 2004 with a presentation by Phil Jansen, formerly of Major League Baseball. From this conversation, observation standards and feedback tools were developed. These standards and tools were approved by the MHSAA Representative Council in 2006. The first class of Registered Observers met in DeWitt on Saturday, August 1, 2009.

**STANDARDS FOR OBSERVER NOMINATIONS:** The requirements for a local Approved Association to nominate an individual to the Registered Observer program are similar to those current requirements for trainers. These requirements include:

1. Individuals selected to earn the title of Registered Observer must annually qualify by meeting specific minimum standards.
2. A Registered Observer should have seven years varsity experience in the sport for which he/she is endorsed by the Local Approved Association.

3. A Registered Observer shall have demonstrated communication skills which identifies him/her as an empathetic teacher and sensitive mentor.
4. A Registered Observer must be endorsed and appointed by the Local Approved Association of which the official is a member. A league or conference may request appointment of observers through a Local Approved Association or directly with the MHSAA.
5. A Registered Observer must be committed to the sport. Working with other observers, supporting the MHSAA observation standards and dedication to study and teaching development are indications of commitment.
6. A Registered Observer shall be currently registered and complete a current MHSAA rules meeting in the sport for which he/she is an observer.
7. A Registered Observer will participate in continuing in-service training provided by the MHSAA annually to maintain current status.
8. Registered Observers will accept that their observer candidacy status is subject to review by the MHSAA and may be denied or revoked if it is determined to be in the best interest of the MHSAA.

In addition, MHSAA may invite additional persons to become involved in this program based on years of service or experience level in officiating.

### **OBSERVER EXPECTATIONS**

Registered Observers should identify themselves at the entry location / gate by using the identification provided by the MHSAA that indicates you are a current observer. At no time should an observer ask for additional persons (friends, family, colleagues, etc) to be admitted at no charge for regular season contests. If you will observe at any MHSAA tournament site, please contact the MHSAA office in advance.

The Registered Observer should move to as inconspicuous of a location as possible to observe the game or match. Do not demand to be seated in a press box, media area or scoring table. It is understood that in some sports the observer must be near the scoring table / bench area to effectively provide feedback for the officials (volleyball being one such example).

Each individual observer will make the best judgment call regarding this.

At no time should a Registered Observer go out of his or her way to make it known to spectators at a venue of their role and purpose. Complete your duties in as low-key of a manner as possible.

Observation reports may only be submitted for games you are observing; never submit a report as an observer if you were also working the game or

match as an active official.

A Registered Observer should make every attempt to observe the entire game; however, feedback provided for a portion of a game is better than no feedback.

During the game or match, record as much information as possible to share with the officials in a post-game conversation, as well as a written follow up report. Please only use the MHSAA Observation Standards and Observation Report forms that are on the MHSAA website.

### **CONFLICT OF INTEREST POLICY FOR OBSERVERS**

Registered Observers at a contest should have no emotional or vested interest in the outcome of the contest in any way, shape or form. A similar conflict of interest policy for the working officials will apply to an observer. In all cases, observers must be neutral and may not conduct formal observations in any contest involving relatives or other similar close relationships. The following list shall be considered automatic conflicts of interest for observers:

- a. Observer's son/daughter is competing in the contest.
- b. Observer (or an immediate family member) is a current coaching staff member involved in the contest.
- c. Observer has a close connection or relationship to any coach of a participating school.
- d. Observer is a recent graduate (1-5 years) or connected alumni of a participating school.

An observer should also avoid formal observations of officials that they have a close relationship, connection or personal history. Keep this process professional by avoiding observation reports that may be overly kind to the "close officiating friend" or overly harsh to the official with whom you have never enjoyed a good, or at least civil, relationship.

### **TIPS WHILE OBSERVING ONSITE**

1. **VISIT WITH THE OFFICIALS** after the contest. This can vary from time to time and does not have to be done the same way at each site. Sometimes it is better not to identify yourself to officials until after the game; officials may officiate differently if they know they are being observed. It is also telling to see an official

officiate when the presence of the observer is known; some officials may handle this pressure better than others.

2. **THE BEST CRITIQUE** is the face-to-face critique with a follow-up written report to follow. However, time will not always allow for a face-to-face critique except to explain any glaring weaknesses which you have observed. Anything you did not understand or had a question about during the contest should be clarified with the officials before leaving the site. Do not become involved in any controversy that may occur on the field/court but do observe the conduct of the officials, coaches, spectators and all others before, during, and after the contest. Be able to report clearly to the MHSAA any major incidents that take place.
3. **SEE AS MANY DIFFERENT OFFICIALS** as you possibly can, especially those with three years or less experience. We need to train and re-train the newer officials – be especially helpful to them. Try to observe several sub-varsity games during the season. Any officials you recommend for tournament assignments should have been observed during the season.
4. You probably won't influence **VETERAN OFFICIALS** as much as you will the newer ones; however, we must point out weaknesses to all officials, especially, when it affects the caliber of officiating and the safe conduct of the game.
5. **WRITTEN REPORTS** are to be thorough and timely. Hopefully, you can get them to the official before their next assigned game.
6. **BE VERY PROFESSIONAL** at all times as well as dedicated and serious.
7. **DO NOT DISCUSS** MHSAA regulations or policies; please do not attempt to interpret them.

#### **COMPLETING THE OBSERVATION REPORT FORMS:**

1. Go to the Officials page of the MHSAA website. Click on "Officials Observation Forms" from the main menu on the left side of the page.
2. Fill out the top portion of the observation report with the game information- name of official, partner(s), site, date, level and observer name.

3. When completing the numbered checklist (1-5), every official should start in each category with a “3”. This means that the official is meeting the standard as defined in the observation standards for each sport. If the official works a routine and uneventful game, a value of “3” is where the official will finish in that game.
4. If the official handles some situations well or very well, the official will now move up to the “1” or “2” level. Conversely, if things are not handled well or poorly, the official will move down as this is below the standard.
5. In some sports, the form will require you to indicate if the game was difficult, average or easy to officiate. Please provide your best assessment in this area.
6. In the narrative portion of the form, please include as much possible information as you can so the official can receive as much feedback as possible. Give the official both positive and constructive feedback.
7. When completing the form that will be sent to the MHSAA, please provide any comments or recommendations to MHSAA staff in the final section of the form. This information should only be included on the form being sent to the MHSAA; the copy that goes to the official should leave this section blank.
8. Your observation reports should ALWAYS be reflective of the official’s work on THAT GIVEN DAY. Avoid giving the experienced or established official a better report simply based on reputation; conversely, if the new or rookie official does a great job, don’t downgrade him or her just because they have not worked as long. Gear all comments to what was actually observed during the contest on the day that the observation was completed!

### **TIMELINES FOR ALL OBSERVATIONS**

#### **PRIOR TO THE CONTEST:**

1. Registered Observers should identify themselves at the entry location / gate by using the identification provided by the MHSAA that indicates you are a current observer. At no time should an observer ask for additional persons (friends, family, colleagues, etc) to be admitted at no charge for regular season contests. If you will observe at any MHSAA tournament site, please contact the MHSAA office in advance.
2. Have materials ready (notebook, clipboard, computer, voice recorder) to catalog your observations (areas of strength, areas for growth) for all working officials during a contest.

3. Thoroughly review the Observation Standards as published by the MHSAA for your sport. Your feedback should always be based on the official's performance relative to the standards, not your own personal preferences or pet peeves.

#### **DURING THE CONTEST:**

1. Record as much information as possible regarding any observations (positive and negative) you have during the contest. Again, your feedback should always be based on the official's performance relative to the standards, not your own personal preferences or pet peeves.

#### **FOLLOWING THE CONTEST:**

1. Make every attempt to meet with the officials following the contest. However, time will not always allow for a face-to-face critique except to explain any glaring weaknesses which you have observed. Anything you did not understand or had a question about during the contest should be clarified with the officials before leaving the site. Do not become involved in any controversy that may occur on the field/court but do observe the conduct of the officials, coaches, spectators and all others before, during, and after the contest. Be able to report clearly to the MHSAA any major incidents that take place.
2. During the meeting with officials, you should first start with the positive/good things you observed during the contest. Always start with the good! Next, move on to the things that need to be addressed or corrected, and then conclude one more time with the positive things.
3. The more information you can include in the narrative portion (page 2) of the observation feedback form, the better. Lists and bullet points are the best ways to organize this information. It is best if you can identify times during the game with your comments to help all involved remember the specific contest situation.
4. Within 10 days, provide the completed observation report form to the officials involved and the MHSAA office. This can currently be done via US Mail, fax (517-332-4071) or email ([muyl@mhsaa.com](mailto:muyl@mhsaa.com)). In the future, these reports will be completed and submitted completely electronically. Complete the forms as completely as possible. The one exception is the final portion regarding recommendations/comments to MHSAA staff which should only be completed on the version sent to the MHSAA (not to the official).

## **CONCLUSIONS FOR 2009-2010**

Following each season during the 2009-10 school year, all participants (observers and observed officials) will be surveyed by the MHSAA for feedback on the program. This data will be shared with all involved as the program continues to grow for future years. The MHSAA will also be reaching out to other organizations that have been observing officials for many years at the professional, collegiate and amateur levels of sport.

**Please refer the Officials page at [mhsaa.com](http://mhsaa.com)  
for all Registered Observer rosters,  
Observation Standards and Observation  
Report forms.**

For questions regarding the MHSAA Observation Program, please contact:

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