ATHLETIC ACTIVITIES EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS PLANNING STRATEGY

These guidelines are designed specifically for athletic events and are not intended to be used as a school emergency or crisis plan.

This document covers underlying emergency preparedness principles and sets out the MHSAA’s approach to understanding risks and mitigation and provides guidance to the response process utilized to prepare for and respond to disasters and critical incidents that could occur at school athletic events.

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The information reflects the best efforts by ARK-CIM to provide answers to common questions regarding Emergency Preparedness measures for officials engaged in high school athletic events. ARK-CIM, LLC. and the Michigan High School Athletic Association has made every effort to ensure the information contained in this publication is reliable, but makes no guarantee of its completeness, contents of this guideline may change at any time without notice.
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Preamble

As the association for high school athletic events, the MHSAA considers safety a priority of every athletic event. With the occurrence of critical incidents in the school environment occurring more frequently, ‘failure to act’ considerations have come to the forefront.

Inevitably, when faced with the questions of responsibility and accountability for the actions or inactions during the critical situation, the affected school and MHSAA will face tough questions. As schools have moral, as well as legal, responsibilities to all students, staff and visitors in their care, the provision of planning for critical incident situations at athletic events cannot be ignored.

The MHSAA has the opportunity to establish new approaches to Athletic Event Emergency Preparedness. There is a need to think beyond “it doesn't happen here” when developing a comprehensive, practical, and achievable Emergency Preparedness Program. In taking this proactive and innovative position, the MHSAA can initiate a policy that tournament hosts have an Emergency Preparedness Plan. The policy will establish a foundation to ensure that administrators and staff are taking all the necessary precautions to minimize the effect of a critical incident. The policy will also include a procedure for responding if and when it does happen. Further, this policy recognizes the school’s obligation to keep students and visitors safe while participating or attending school events.

Accepting the status quo will lead to failure; people will not be prepared for a critical incident. As a result of this initiative, Athletic Events Emergency Preparedness Plans can create a framework for change and enhanced safety.

Through this program, the MHSAA encourages schools and their stakeholders to work together before a critical incident occurs. This Emergency Preparedness initiative extends the MHSAA’s commitment to our membership and community to support it not only in the aftermath of a critical incident, but also in preparing and preventing such an event.
Preface

During a crisis, will student athletes, coaches, officials, volunteers, and spectators know what to do?

Even schools with the best Emergency Plans will struggle to keep students safe if they don’t consider the multitude of potential situations that can impact an athletic event. Evidence suggests that school Emergency Plans do not address athletic events, and that there are generally few efforts to establish protective action measures in the awareness and implementation of Emergency Preparedness Plans. As critical incidents have occurred more frequently and safety issues continue to attract national attention, schools have not invested in programs and initiatives designed to improve emergency preparedness at athletic events.

Challenges to incorporating emergency preparedness into the fabric of the school athletics process seem to be endless. For example:

- Staffing and time are increasingly precious commodities.
- Funding for critical incidents preparedness programs is sporadic at best, and not generally in the priority of limited resources for even basic athletic program needs.
- Absence of clearly defined roles and responsibilities directly tied to immediate actions to stop or minimize the impact as it unfolds.
- Considerations with ‘Duty Of Care’ provisions.

Having an Athletic Events Emergency Preparedness plan in place will minimize the confusion, panic, and collateral injuries, and influence a more positive outcome than would otherwise occur with a critical incident. There must be a paradigm shift to require schools to be proactive and create effective Emergency Preparedness plans that address actions to be taken before, during, and after an athletic event both at the home school and venues where events occur.
Chapter I. Background & Introduction

Shortfalls of Not Planning for Athletic Activity Critical incidents:

Schools often focus too narrowly on the normal school day, as planning centers on the safety at the school during those hours. Athletic events are the ‘black hole’ in this process. Typically, planning is limited to lightning strikes for outdoor events, and even here, gaps are found in ensuring movement away from bleachers to safe areas.

Planning considerations often overlooked include, but are not limited to:

- Orientation to host schools emergency procedures for the visiting team, officials, volunteers and others.
- Who is in charge of making the ultimate decision to evacuate or shelter-in-place prior to or during a critical incident? Who is the decision-maker at non-school venues?
- Student accountability, including athletes, spectators, siblings of athletes and others. Do coaches and other school officials really know exactly who was on the bus and where the students are during an activity?
- Consideration of how to communicate with the scores of responders, parents, and media who would arrive at the event location in the event of a critical incident.
- Knowing the layout of non-school venues.
- Does planning consider responding to likely or potential incidents, as well as new and evolving threats?
- Exercising for all types of critical incidents whether they are natural disasters or human caused (man-made).

The MHSAA Athletic Event Emergency Preparedness plan makes every effort to provide solutions to these shortfalls.
Chapter II. Six Steps to Athletic Event Emergency Preparedness Planning

MHSAA’s model to the Athletic Events Emergency Preparedness plan has a holistic approach to the planning for a potential disaster and encompassing all events from preparedness through the crisis response. Many consequences from critical incidents can be prevented or at the very least, minimized; therefore, the plan needs to describe arrangements for responding to those critical incidents that might occur in/at the school and at offsite athletic venues. In a written description, the hazards to which the school might be exposed are identified; this allows development of prevention, response and initial recovery plans and/or procedures.

Step 1: Solicit and Obtain Buy-In

Challenges to incorporating all-hazard emergency preparedness into the fabric of the educational process seem to be endless: regulatory compliance and increasing pressures on educators to improve academic achievement overtask administrators as time is an even more precious commodity than money.

Fundamental to the success of the Athletic Event Emergency Preparedness program is the ‘buy-in’ from the entire athletic department, school administration, district administration, board and parent volunteers. Buy-in will provide necessary support for all athletic events (i.e. sports, marching band, etc.).

Step 2: Vulnerability Assessment

Emergency Plans cannot be created without understanding what potential hazards to which the activity might be exposed to both on the school grounds and at ‘away’ venues. School administrators must understand the full scope of vulnerabilities, whether they are likely or not in order to make judgments and investments that appropriately mitigate risks to an appropriate level.

Vulnerability assessments are systematic processes to identify risks and analyze the likelihood and consequences of identified risks from disasters and emergencies. Accepted practice to gain a clear picture of identified vulnerabilities and establish areas for improvement is the vulnerability assessment. The assessment can be conducted by various means: internally by athletic department staff, internally but including facilities, transportation and school administration, by local public safety and emergency management agencies, and/or partnering with ARK-CIM.
Definitions of Hazard, Risk, Threat, Vulnerability:

**Threat** – Anything that can exploit vulnerability, intentionally or accidentally, and obtain, damage, disrupt or destroy an asset. A threat is what we’re trying to protect against.

**Vulnerability** – A weakness or gap in a security program that allows access to an asset, which can be exploited by that threat.

**Risk** – The potential for loss, damage, disruption or destruction of an asset as a result of a threat exploiting vulnerability.

**Hazard** – Something causing unavoidable danger, peril, risk or difficulty.

*See Chapter III for further information*

**Step 3: Creating the plan**

The third step towards making an Athletic Event Emergency Preparedness plan is to create understanding for the overarching needs identified in part by the vulnerability assessment. All interested parties should be in sync with the common operating picture and be engaged in the planning and implementation process.

This document, *Athletic Event Emergency Preparedness Strategy*, follows general principals of the National Incident Management System (NIMS), lessons learned and best practices as it applies to those disasters and emergencies (natural hazards and threats from human-caused events) that occur, or are likely to occur, within or impact on school athletic events.

Individual school safety plans should be preventative in nature. This would include addressing proactive solutions to mitigate identified safety concerns found as a result of the school vulnerability assessment. School athletic event Emergency Preparedness plans should include: incident command structure, roles and responsibilities of emergency team members, and protective measures procedures to follow for emergency situations. Each school’s plan should reflect the school’s unique characteristics and needs.

**Step 4: Warning and Communications**

Essential in every coordinated preparation for and response to critical incidents is the ability for all key parties to a) receive proper warning and b) share information with one another. Typically, gaps in the communication processes are what lead to diminished ability to implement and activate protective measures, as well as share necessary information with responding agencies.
• Notification of an onsite emergency will usually come from a spectator, staff, parent volunteer, or athlete.

• Notification of an offsite emergency situation that may threaten the activity could come from:
  o Police/Fire Department.
  o Weather radio (National Weather Service) via cellphone.
  o Emergency Alert System via cellphone.
  o Radio and Television.

• Staff and/or parent volunteers will calmly and confidentially notify the athletic director, or designee whenever they receive information or detect an emergency situation.
  o The following information will be provided:
    - Type of problem (smoke, fire, water, weather, bomb threat, etc.).
    - Location of problem (location in/out of building, bleachers, parking lot, etc.).
    - Time reported or detected and name of person providing the information.
    - Apparent injury, damage or illness.

• As necessary, spectators will be provided emergency information and instructions via the public address announcements.

Delegate an individual as official communicator (OC); this primary responsibility will be the communications link with responding agencies. The OC will need to be knowledgeable of the plan, will be in attendance at the activity and have a direct communication link to the primary responding service. Ideally, a link via two-way radio will be established. Alternate links would expectedly be by cell phone; however, depending on the criticality of the situation, cell coverage may be disrupted.

Further, reports from a number of critical incidents involving suspected gunfire near high school football games has shown that there was a greater level of confusion when spectators, teams, officials and others, either did not receive any information via the announcer and/or received different direction from those on the field and the announcer.

It is imperative that school announcer(s) are part of the planning team, have communications with officials on the field, and have pre-prepared messages they can follow.
The hosting school, in events that are held at non-school venues, will need to provide communication equipment (i.e., two-way radios).

**Communicating with Parents:** Communicating with parents is complicated. While essential, there is a risk that untimely or inappropriate communications may not be helpful and even put more people at risk. Event staff need to understand these complexities and have the flexibility to make sound decisions as to the timing and the content of communications.

While the community and, in particular, parents, have expectations for timely communications, insufficient and/or misinformed messages can cause parents to rush to the school while the incident is still active creating a situation that may generate a risk to themselves and others, complicating the police/fire response and distracting school staff, both host and visiting, from their tasks.

School staff responsible for providing information need to have appropriate information as to the situation, coordinating with responders that are likely providing information as well, will ensure the messages to parents are accurate.

**Step 5: Funding**

As budgetary limitations are preventing schools from capitalizing on resources to better support preparation, response and recovery operations, there are highly effective solutions that need not be expensive or complicated.

Don’t overlook local businesses as potential sources of funding to support the program. Many companies and/or organizations provide either money or equipment directly to public and/or non-profit agencies as part of their community commitment. Even if they don’t have grant programs per se, they may be willing to assist schools in procuring necessary equipment and/or supplies.

Walmart, Walgreens, Target, insurance agencies/companies, Home Depot, Lowes, civic organizations (i.e., Masons, Jaycees) all have grant programs. These are very easy to approach and are established to support a wide spectrum of community needs.

**Step 6: Force Multipliers**

*Force multiplier, in military terminology, is a factor that dramatically increases the effectiveness of an item or group.*

A significant challenge in the execution of the emergency preparedness strategy is how to meet the eyes & ears objectives - the problem is in how to use the limited resources at the school’s disposal. Persons needed are almost always short as demand exceeds the needs (for example, when implementing the Layered Surveillance System, where people are spread across a wide area).
Most approaches to dealing with the idea of being able to see what's happening over wider areas is to install more cameras, but these things – our already built resources – are often underutilized, or inefficiently used, due to our ability to monitor them at all times – termed 'reactive' as the cameras are not being monitored all the time.

With little money, staff and time to throw at these problems, we need to multiply the effectiveness of our available resources (usually acknowledged as the biggest “bang for the buck”). This could be immediately feasible but would require a fresh look at solutions new (or renewed) attitudes and norms that can be implemented quickly and efficiently.

**Your Force Multiplier:** Recruit volunteers to serve as the school safety team. The Team would be the eyes & ears of the Emergency Preparedness program. Ideally, key individuals include recruited members, parents, direct relatives, alumni and/or interested members of the community that have current and/or previous public safety and/or military experience. This act brings a pool of individuals who understand the need for structure and will possess the baseline skills wanted in a soft-security role.
Chapter III: Hazard/Risk/Threat (Vulnerability Assessment)

Common practice in conducting assessments is to create a risk matrix: identify hazards, prioritize them as Low Probability/Low Impact; Low Probability/High Impact; High Probability/low Impact; High Probability/High Impact (see chart below).

Contemporary threats to schools:

Schools may be subject to a range of threats, which due to their vulnerability, may pose significant risk to the students and staff. The threats may emanate from extreme weather events, explosions or fires, infrastructure failures or disruptions, gas or chemical spills, accidents, acts of violence or terrorism. In today’s environment we have seen the rapidly increasing emergence of:

- Threats from persons using the Internet as a vehicle for delivering threats.
- Threats from a person who may implement an indiscriminate armed attack on athletic events.
- An attack by a person and/or persons, who may undertake a ‘terrorist’ style attack at an athletic event.

These and other threats or incidents require school administrators to have an understanding of actions police may take to manage such an incident. It also magnifies the importance of relationships with police and having an understanding of how they may respond and operate within an athletic event environment.

Based on findings from the vulnerability assessment, the development of the Athletic Events Emergency Preparedness plan can be achieved.
Chapter IV: Event Day Preparedness

**Preparedness:** A set of actions that are taken as precautionary measures in the face of potential disasters. These actions can include both physical preparations (such as emergency supplies depots, adapting buildings to survive earthquakes and so on) and trainings for emergency action. Preparedness is an important quality in achieving goals and in avoiding and mitigating negative outcomes.

There are different types of preparedness, such as local emergency preparedness and public health preparedness, but probably the most developed type is "Disaster Preparedness" which is “forecasting and taking precautionary measures prior to an imminent threat when advance warnings are possible”. This includes not only natural disasters but also all kinds of severe damage caused in a relatively short period, including acts of violence. Preparedness is a major phase of emergency management, and is particularly valued in areas of competition such as athletic events.

**Layered Surveillance System:** Lessons learned from critical incidents have shown that acts of violence can be reduced, or the impact minimized, by extending the perimeter leading to the venue. Professional and many college sports venues, airports and other large gathering venues use this approach.

For school athletic events, measures can also be implemented including putting volunteers in the parking lots, at entry points, around the venue public area(s) and the playing fields or courts. Their task is to act as eyes & ears if something unusual is noticed, they do not intervene, but they notify a designated person(s) who then notify police to investigate and take appropriate action.

**See Something/Say Something:** Go to any airport and there are continuous announcements to be vigilant, and if something unusual is noticed, report it to airport personnel. As we all know, the Department of Homeland Security and public safety agencies carry the same message, extending to our communities with Neighborhood Watch and other vigilance messages.

The concept is clear but often we dismiss it as just “one of those things”. Suppose the concept was taken to school athletic events? Why can’t schools adopt the DHS See Something/Say Something campaign and add a layer of awareness? Signage around the school athletic areas and announcements (see Appendix 2) at events engage the school’s athletic community as a potentially sizeable preparedness force.

**Safety Briefing:** Reports from violent incidents around the country have shown that spectators, teams and others lack information and direction of what to do in an emergency (both severe weather and violent incidents), lead to more confusion, fear and panic, and in a number of cases, injuries. For the sake of the
student athletes, coaches, parent volunteers and officials, one of the easiest means to minimize these situations is to provide safety information prior to the event. Basic information as to the location of evacuation routes, shelters and/or safe areas and home team emergency procedures.

Conducting a short safety briefing prior to the event will provide much needed information should a critical incident occur. Preparing a handout with this information (see Appendix 3), will enhance the safety of visitors a to the event.

**Pre-Event Inspection:** An added layer of event preparedness is to conduct a pre-event inspection of the venue, this should be done prior to the gates opening and consist of completion of an Inspection Checklist (see Appendix 6) that is specific to the venue, look over everything and everywhere the school has identified as potential areas where a bag, package, vehicle or any other unusual item might be left.

Should something be noticed that is questionable, that information should immediately be report to the designated individual. If the situation dictates, gate opening can be postponed until the situation is resolved.
Chapter V: Protective Measures

Decision makers are at times confronted with circumstances that require the ability to make decisions under demanding and stressful circumstances. Such decisions inevitably have to be made when threats are being applied against vulnerabilities, which result in a dramatic rise in the level of risk being exerted on the activity and where the consequences of poor decisions are significant.

While general responses to certain threats are well known, others by the nature of the threat, the vulnerabilities of school’s athletic activity and the risk to staff and students make them difficult to deal with.

THE MHSAA has adopted an ‘all hazards approach’ to the planning of response strategies to disasters or emergencies and subsequently there are generally three response strategies that can be implemented prior to, or during, a disaster or emergency. The response strategies, which can be implemented singularly, or jointly, are:

- Evacuation of the activity venue.
- Lockdown of the venue (building where indoor events are being held).
- Temporary Closure of the venue.
- A combination of these responses.

Note: Responses will be concurrent to agencies responding to support the activity such as police, fire and EMS.

Protective Measures - Outdoor Sports:

Pre-event:

- Prior to any competition, the athletic director (AD), or designee, will greet the officials, explain emergency procedures, and advise they will be notified during the game if there is imminent danger from a potential or developing hazard (i.e., severe weather, known chemical release, etc.).
- Identify a safe location to be used as the student accountability area.
- AD conducts safety briefing with any activity volunteers, briefing to include:
  - Review of emergency procedures.
  - Evacuation routes and shelter areas.
  - Content and use of protective actions card.
- Administrator provides protective action cards for AD to distribute to all activity volunteers (ticket takers, ushers, etc.).
• Prior to game starting, an announcement will be made:
  o “May I have your attention. We have been watching the potential of approaching inclement weather. If it arrives during the game, activity will cease until we have determined it is safe. If we need to evacuate the stadium/gym/arena/field, we will advise you to seek appropriate shelter in the school and follow directions from staff. If you wish, seek shelter in your vehicle. Thank you for your cooperation.”
  o “May I have your attention. The school district has an emergency plan to keep our students, staff, parents and visitors as safe as possible. If an emergency should occur during the game/event and we need to stop the event to evacuate or take shelter, we will advise you to seek appropriate actions and follow directions from staff and/or event volunteers. If you wish, seek shelter in your vehicle. Thank you for your cooperation and enjoy the contest.

During Event:

• Evacuation of the playing field: Immediately following the announcement of suspension of activity, all athletes, coaches, officials and support personnel are to evacuate to the designated area.
  o Student athletes and/or support should be directed to assemble at designated location to ensure accountability.
    • Report any un-accounted students to arriving emergency personnel.

• Evacuation of the stands: During competition once the official signals to suspend activity, the announcer will announce:
  o “May I have your attention. We have been notified of approaching inclement weather. Activity will cease until we have determined it is safe and the risk of lightning is diminished. We advise you to seek appropriate shelter in the school, follow directions from staff. If you wish, seek shelter in your vehicle. Thank you for your cooperation.”

Resumption of Events:

Activity may resume once the host management gives permission.

If severe weather, lightening related, 30 minutes after the last lightning strike, lightening activity or the sound of thunder is heard.

If other severe weather or other hazard related, activity may resume once the host management gives permission.
Away Event Preparedness:

Coaches:

- Survey the area for appropriate and accessible shelter areas.
- Determine if the home team, or facility has established procedures.
- Identify a safe location to be used as the student accountability area.
- Provide safety briefing for all school participants (athletes, parent volunteers) as to what protective measures might be taken and what directions they should follow.
- Apply District procedures if the home team and/or venue does not implement protective measures.

Protective Measures – Indoor Sports:

- **Evacuation:** Once host management determines an evacuation is appropriate, the announcer will announce:
  
  "May I have your attention. Due to an emergency situation in the school, we are evacuating the building. Activity will cease until we have determined it is safe and the risk has been resolved. Please follow directions from staff, exit the school and move away from the building. Responding police/fire personnel will provide further instructions. Thank you for your cooperation."

- **Shelter-In-Place:** Once host management determines Shelter-In-Place is appropriate, the announcer will announce:
  
  "May I have your attention. Due to an emergency situation in the school, (approaching inclement weather, hazardous materials incident, etc.) activity will cease until we have determined it is safe and the risk has been resolved. We will be taking shelter inside the school, please follow directions from staff:
  
  - Remain in the building; you are fee to move around or,
  - Quickly move to shelter areas in the building.

Responding police/fire personnel will provide further instructions. Thank you for your cooperation."
Chapter VI: Exercising & Training

Having an Emergency Plan in place is important but you must practice it to ensure that you can carry out the necessary actions in an emergency situation.

In particular, it is important to practice evacuation, Shelter-In-Place, and lockdown procedures with children and their families*. Practice drills are recommended every six months and should be scheduled in advance with notice provided to parents and preparing staff. Schools can include the schedule for practice events in your emergency planning calendar. Drills related to seasonal weather-related emergencies should also be planned in advance of when severe weather is expected.

Schools should also consider participating in larger community-based drills or exercises. This participation will help build relationships with the relevant response organizations and to improve the coordination between all plans. Finally, after each practice the school should review the emergency plan and update the plan as needed.

While most schools are adept at practicing techniques such as fire drills and severe weather, most are not well rehearsed in planning for such events as chemical release, threats to self or others, intruders and other possible emergencies.

Training is important on at least three levels: 1) Team Training for general emergency preparedness; 2) Training to address specific emergency response or recovery events (i.e., severe weather training, threat assessment training, or); and 3) awareness training for all athletic involved staff (i.e., protective measures).
Appendix 1: Sample Maps

Evacuation maps indicating:

• Evacuation routes leading to
  o Exits
  o Assembly Areas
  o Buildings including the nearest available resources for off-site sheltering
Appendix 2: Sample Announcement

Athletic Events Emergency Preparedness Announcement:

Twice prior to game starting, and during the halftime, make the following announcement:

“Welcome to [Insert School Venue]. For your safety and security, the Athletics Department & School Administration encourage you to be aware of unusual activity.

Please report any suspicious activity to us here in the announcers stand immediately.

Enjoy the game & remember:

**REPORT SUSPICIOUS ACTIVITY**

SEE SOMETHING – SAY SOMETHING!
Appendix 3: Home Contest Safety Booklet

SEE SOMETHING—SAY SOMETHING

Bags

Report Suspicious Activity and/or Unattended

Prepare for and handle typical and emergency

from designated safe and immediate personnel

Do not release students under circumstances when decision

Improvised survival and emergency personnel

to

After an Emergency

This information is intended to assist your team.

in an emergency.

The information in this booklet is subject to change at any time.

HOME CONTEST SAFETY

BOOKLET

Michigan High School Athletic Association

DURING AN EMERGENCY:

INDOOR ACTIVITY:
Appendix 4: Safety & Security Protective Measures for Officials

Official Responsibilities To Arrive At The Contest

- Ensure each official arrives at least 45 minutes prior to the start of the contest.
- Coordinate and check-in all officials at the designated check-in location.
- Assign responsibilities and roles to each official.
- Ensure all officials are familiar with their role and responsibilities.
- Provide officials with a copy of the event schedule and any relevant materials.
- Ensure all officials have the necessary equipment and supplies.
- Coordinate with the contest director to ensure smooth operations.

Official Responsibilities To Official After The Contest

- Confirm the official's role in the official's notebook and take necessary action.
- Coordinate with the contest director to ensure the proper completion of tasks.
- Ensure all officials' notebooks are updated as necessary.
- Address any issues or concerns that may arise during the contest.
- Summarize the contest and provide feedback to the contest director.

School Responsibilities

- Ensure all school staff are aware of the official's role and responsibilities.
- Coordinate with the contest director to ensure smooth operations.
- Provide school staff with a copy of the event schedule and any relevant materials.
- Ensure all school staff have the necessary equipment and supplies.
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Special Notes

- Each school should designate a coordinator to meet the official's needs.
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## Appendix 5: Shelters & Areas of Refuge

### Designated Shelters

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<th>School Building</th>
<th>Venue Area(s)</th>
<th>Notes</th>
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Appendix 6: Sample Pre-Event Inspection Checklist

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<tr>
<th>DATE:</th>
<th>UNUSUAL ITEM/ACTIVITY VENUE SWEEP LOG</th>
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<td>BLEACHERS</td>
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<tr>
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<td>ENTRY</td>
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<td>REST ROOMS</td>
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<td>CONCESSION</td>
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<td>LOCKER ROOM(S)</td>
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<td>COMMENTS</td>
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NAME:____________________________________________________
TIME:____________________________________________________