



Rooting for Multi-Sport Participation

Coaching Our Coaches

Among the earliest and most emphatic conclusions of the Michigan High School Athletic Association Task Force on Multi-Sport Participation is that coaches are key to shaping the attitudes and actions of students and parents on many topics, including sports specialization that is so early, intense and prolonged that it does more harm than good to a student's success as an athlete and health as an adult.



Coaches have made athletics one of the most cost-efficient and educationally accountable aspects of secondary schools. Nowhere in education do you find it as often as you do in school athletics that teachers are teaching what they want to teach, to students who are learning what they want to learn, and both are willing to work hour after hour on their own time, after school, to make certain that everything that can be taught is taught and everything that can be learned is learned.

Coaches may not be the reason students come out for sports, but they're usually the reason students stay out for sports. Coaches don't give students ability, but they discover or develop it.

Coaches make both the quantitative and qualitative difference.

Coaches are the reason some schools win more than others. Coaches are the reason some schools have better sportsmanship than others. Coaches are the reason some schools have a more educationally based program than others. Coaches make the difference between a program of excesses and a program of education.

Coaches are the critical link in the educational process of athletics, they are the critical link in the sportsmanship at contests, and they are the critical link in the traditions of success which some schools enjoy. It has always been so, and it always will be so.

No one higher up or lower down the organizational chart has more impact on athletes than do coaches. Coaches are the **delivery system** of educational athletics.

More than any other adult in a young person's life, it is the coach who holds the most influence over students' interest in sampling different sports and sticking with them. Coaches do so by what they say and, even more importantly, what they do.

The purpose of this document is to help school administration recruit and hire coaches who, in both word and deed, will encourage multi-sport participation by their players; and to help administrators mentor and manage coaches to do so.

There are few if any tasks which are more important. With overuse injuries resulting from excessive specialization now widely recognized as the No. 1 health and safety issue of youth sports, administering school sports with not only a design but also a demand for multi-sport participation must be our No. 1 priority.

The Game Plan



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In late 2015, the Representative Council of the Michigan High School Athletic Association authorized the appointment of a Task Force on Multi-Sport Participation. It was given this charge:

“Prepare strategies and tactics for the MHSAA, allied organizations and local schools and conferences to promote multi-sport participation by student-athletes.”

This document is intended to provide school administrators a tool for helping coaches promote educational athletics and multi-sport participation among their players.

This tool was developed with the input of Task Force members during interviews conducted by the Institute for the Study of Youth Sports of Michigan State University.



michigan high school athletic association



Michigan State University
Institute For The Study Of Youth Sports

I – Recruiting & Hiring Coaches

Key Elements of Coaching Candidates

Beyond basics of the sport and a clean background, **what are the key things to know about a coaching candidate?**

- Does the candidate coach a sport or coach kids? Is candidate's emphasis on athletic skills or life skills? Does the candidate see the "whole human child?"
- What are the candidate's ideas for attracting students to the team; and what are the ideas for keeping them on the team year after year?
- Does the candidate think so highly of his/her own sport that he/she may even unintentionally diminish the attractiveness of other sports? Does the candidate see the "big picture?" Is the candidate a "team player?"
- Will the candidate put the philosophy, mission and goals of the athletic department above any goals that coach set for his/her team?
- Does the candidate understand that multiple sport opportunities at different times of the year in different contexts and with different coaching styles are important aspects to the physical development of a young athlete?
- How will the candidate play a role in helping make sport participation and physical activity an important attribute throughout an athlete's lifespan?



Sample Questions for the Candidate

Sample questions to help reveal a coaching candidate's attitudes about educational athletics in general and multi-sport participation in particular:

- "How can you as a coach demonstrate that you support your players' participation in one or more other sports?"
- "What benefits do students receive by playing other sports than the one you coach? What sports complement your sport?"
- "Is there a second (or even third) sport you might be able to assist our program with as an assistant coach?"
- "What specific strategies or methods would you use to encourage multi-sport participation by students within our athletic department?"
- "What will be the definition of success if you are the coach of this team?"
- "How do you get or keep players focused on academics?"
- "How do you keep players interested in your team during the school year out of season and during the summer?"
- "What will you do in the off-season to support other sports in our program?"
- "What benefits beyond the skills of your sport will students receive from being a member of a team you coach?"
- "What will we see if we come to one of your practices? To one of your contests?"
- "What would the year-long calendar for this sport look like? Describe the off-season."
- "How do you connect with your kids regarding character development and lifelong lessons when you are not in season?"
- Have you defined your core values in your role as a coach? What are those core values?
- Have you developed and written a coaching philosophy? What is your coaching philosophy?
- Are you promoting a well-rounded development of your athletes?
- Are you a model of the behavior that you are expecting of your athletes?
- What is your main objective as a coach?
- "What didn't I ask you that you were prepared to answer in this interview?"

II – Mentoring and Preparing Coaches

Job Description Components

What might be placed in a coach's contract or job description to effectively promote educational athletics/multi-sport participation?

- “Complete various levels of **CAP** curriculum.”
- “Work with the entire school's coaching staff to agree on **shared expectations**.”
- “Help **nurture the ‘whole child,’** encouraging the athletic, academic and social balance of team members, and promote multi-sport participation.”
- “Attend other school sports events, as well as non-athletic events. ‘Show you care by being there.’”
- “**Consistent with school policy, connect with kids in the off-season through technology** – emails, blogs, Snapchat, Instagram, Twitter, websites, motivational quotes. Ask not only what they are doing to get better in the off season, but also what other sports they are playing.”



Reinforcing Multi-Sport Participation

What might be done to reinforce educational athletics/multi-sport participation during the school year?

- Facilitate coaches' attendance at events where they will get more than Xs and Os. Rather than coaches conferences, send them to . . .
 - MHSAA Coaches Advancement Program.
 - Captains Clinics and other student leadership days.
 - Motivational speakers. (Bring them in so parents can hear them too.)
 - Recruiting realities speakers. (Again, have parents hear this too.)
- Keep an open door policy for informal conversations with coaches. Seek out coaches who don't drop in.
- Pair struggling coaches with strong coaches, that is, with coaches who are sold out to educational athletics and have a positive record of promoting and facilitating multi-sport participation on their teams.
 - This works even if the sports are unrelated.
 - Invite the mentor coach to practices to observe and, afterward, provide ideas for improvement.
- Make coaches meetings more than reminders and “sit and get.” Make them interactive; for example, have them discuss the meaning of success, have them share ways to motivate reserves. Consider year-long projects, such as . . .
 - Have coaches work together to write a profile of what they want an athlete in the school program to look like. Include both behavior and work habits.
 - Have coaches work together to write and post their definition of a great athletic attitude.
 - Have coaches work together to identify positive character traits to be used as a part of their team selection process.
 - Have coaches develop a school-wide incentives or awards program for two- and three-sport athletes.
 - Have coaches agree on and enforce an out-of-season “dead period” where sports not in season can have no four-player workouts or other expectations.
 - If not in existence already, have coaches develop and agree on an athletic department mission statement and/or goals. If those do exist, have coaches develop new strategies to communicate them to students, parents and others.
- Supplement meetings with regular (even weekly) emails that motivate: a quick topic that must be communicated, followed by an article, video, quote, etc., that reinforces educational athletics/multi-sport participation.
- Consider school/community size and promote accordingly. Small schools and large schools have unique selling points within their buildings.
- Sweep the hallways to steer non-participants toward high-participation, no-cut sports; or invite students who didn't make one team to try another.

Effective Multi-Sport Topics

What topics could be effective in preseason and weekly or monthly coaches meetings to emphasize the importance of multi-sport participation?

- “**Overuse injuries**” – What they look like, why they occur, how they can be avoided, how they should be treated.
- “**Physical literacy**” – What it means, why it's important, and how to facilitate it as a coach.
- “**Life skills**” – What they are, why they are important, and how to facilitate it when coaching.
- “**Big Picture**” – Emphasize the athletic department is **one** team, only as strong as its weakest link.
- “**Recruiting Realities**” – Inform coaches and equip them to inform students and parents.
- Long-term athlete development-type models or frameworks (for example, USA Hockey).
- Policies and procedures for accommodating the student who wants to play more than one sport during the same season.
- How to communicate to parents about risks of sports specialization and the rewards of multi-sport participation throughout the year.

III – Evaluating Coaches

Evaluate Year-Round

Evaluate coaches on whether or not they are good “teachers,” basing evaluations on team improvement, skill acquisition, enjoyment of their sport and teaching skills . . . in other words, both measurable and intangible criteria.

The season-ending evaluation should not be the first time a coach hears good things or bad.

- Help coaches early with troublesome issues.
- Point positive. Catch coaches doing things well. Praise them and reinforce the action.



The Big Questions

What questions during evaluation sessions would help reveal a coach’s specific actions to a well-rounded, holistic approach to player development/multi-sport participation?

- “How often did you ask your players about the other activities in their daily lives?”
- “How often did you attend other events (athletic and non-athletic) in which your players participated?”
- “How often did you promote or encourage your players to participate in other sports?”
- Have coaches evaluate themselves with self-reflection documents, feedback and journals. Ask coaches how they feel they can get better.

What can be measured that promotes the welfare of the “whole child?”

- The cumulative GPAs of teams.
- The number of team members playing other sports or in other school activities.
- The number of team members retained in the program for two, three and four years.

What are the biggest intangibles to look for?

- The energy and enthusiasm around a program. Do kids want to be there? Are they enjoying themselves? Are they challenged to be better in attitude, work ethic, energy and effort in both games and contests, win or lose?

Whom To Ask

What might be placed in a coach’s contract or job description to effectively promote educational athletics/multi-sport participation?

- **Students** – One-on-one “instant insights” in the lunchroom and hallway are more valuable than team meetings or written surveys.
- **Parents** – Understand that those least pleased offer the most input. Seek out others. Separate playing time complaints from more substantive matters, and deal with them.
- **Other Coaches** – Interview subvarsity coaches before varsity coaches’ evaluation to get a better sense of interaction and integration of philosophy.
- **Officials** – Ask how your coach interacts with him/her on and off the court. Does the coach treat others with respect? Does the coach practice what he/she preaches to the kids? Does the coach teach sportsmanship?

The Task Force on Multi-Sport Participation is a working group invited by the Michigan High School Athletic Association executive director. Task Force members’ terms are not limited; members drop off when their schedules require and members are added from time to time to maintain diversity of background, geography and expertise.

Task Force members (9/1/17):

- Anna Britnell, Canton-Salem
- Todd Cheney, Hartland
- Scott Dane, Grand Ledge
- Keith Guy, Muskegon
- Kevin Guzzo, St. Joseph
- Matt Joseph, Sterling Heights-Utica Ford II
- Jason Kasparian, Port Huron Northern
- Jean LaClair, Bronson
- Anika McEvans, Southfield
- Jason Mellema, Ionia
- Scott Przystas, Grand Haven
- Meg Seng, Ann Arbor-Greenhills
- Brian Swinehart, Walled Lake
- Mike Thayer, Auburn-Bay City Western
- Patti Tibaldi, Traverse City

Resources



MHSAA Coaches Advancement Program



MHSAA Coaches Guidebook

