

MICHIGAN HIGH SCHOOL ATHLETIC ASSOCIATION
ICE HOCKEY COMMITTEE MINUTES
East Lansing, January 22, 2019

Members Present:

Joel Breazeale, Grandville
Andrew Brodie, Flat Rock
Shane Finney, Bloomfield Hills
Joe Ford, Lansing
Brian Gordon, Novi (MHSAA Finals
Manager)
Bob Hayden, Temperance (Advisor,
NFHS)
Sean Jacques, Calumet (video
conference)

Tyler Kindle, Kalamazoo
Dennis Krynicki, Grand Rapids
Meaghan Rourke, Allen Park (MATS)
Pete Ryan, Saginaw
John Thompson, Brighton (MIAAA)
Christian Wilson, Gaylord
Don Wright, Chelsea (MHSICA)

Staff Member

Cody Inglis (Recorder)

The 2019 Ice Hockey Committee met in the MHSAA office to review the MHSAA tournament, policies and procedures governing hockey, playing rules changes, process to make recommendations to the MHSAA Representative Council, and discuss topics concerning high school hockey in MHSAA member schools. After introductions, the charge of the committee was reviewed.

REPRESENTATIVE COUNCIL REVIEW

The committee was given an update on last year's committee recommendations to the Representative Council. The proposal to change the MHSAA pre-regional system to a regional system was approved in May of 2018 and is in effect for the 2018-19 MHSAA hockey tournament. Feedback on this change was positive given the number of teams sponsoring high school hockey in MHSAA play. The hockey seeding proposal for use at the Regional or Semifinal level in the MHSAA tournament was not approved by the Representative Council. While there was considerable discussion in regards to the seeding proposal, the Council did not feel the proposal using an MHSAA RPI-type formula was ready to implement. The hockey coaches association this Council decision and intends to come back with a workable plan in the future. This may include basic seeding at the first round only and will continue to be worked on by the hockey coaches association. It is clear that seeding is desired by many hockey coaches. Finding the best plan for schools without significant unintended consequences will be the challenge. Seeding will continue to be a topic of discussion for the hockey committee.

NATIONAL FEDERATION AND MHSAA PLAYING RULES

Committee members reviewed the new NFHS ice hockey rules changes presented by Bob Hayden, outgoing NFHS Ice Hockey Committee chair from Michigan, who has served the MHSAA and the NFHS well for the past four years. NFHS points of emphasis for high school hockey were reviewed and emphasized including player safety and dangerous hits. MHSAA adaptations of NFHS rules were reviewed including the neck guard rule, as well as the rules comparisons chart which shows the differences between the three main rules making bodies that govern hockey in Michigan which includes USA Hockey, NCAA and NFHS.

MHSAA playing rule adaptations were also examined by the committee including the supplemental game suspension regulations. Conversation centered on the reasons why high school hockey has the two game suspension after a game DQ. Both past history, as well as the higher number of game disqualifications in the sport of hockey, caused the action that led to the extra game penalty after a DQ. While most agree that the conditions and culture of high school hockey have improved since the 1990's, there is still reason to continue this penalty structure. While many on the committee felt that the two game suspension is severe, the committee also reviewed data that showed that overall major penalties are down significantly so far this season in high school hockey. A USA Hockey discussion on checking at the Bantam level was brought forward for discussion and discussion on how that might impact the high school game at the NFHS and MHSAA level with potential rules changes. While currently this is only a discussion item, it is something that the committee will continue to monitor and receive information from USA Hockey so that we are on top of changes that other rules making bodies make to their rules.

Continued diligence by coaches on controlling dangerous hits by players including blindside hits, hits to defenseless players, checks from behind and boarding remain critical to protect the high school game. This diligence includes coaches teaching the game safely and more players coming into the game with an understanding of a new style of play. There is still a need for continued teaching and coaching on the issue of player safety.

The committee reviewed the relatively new USA Hockey coaches' helmet rule while on the ice and the 30-day mandatory suspension for not wearing a helmet. There was strong sentiment among the committee to develop a similar rule for the MHSAA and high school coaches while on the ice coaching high school practices. The committee requested that MHSAA staff investigate the feasibility, liability and legal significance of such a rule on high school coaches. In addition, the committee asked the high school hockey coaches association to discuss this item with its membership.

The committee reviewed NFHS rules on stick length and a potential rules change proposal to the NFHS rules committee in April.

TOURNAMENT PROCEDURES

Updates on the MHSAA tournament were discussed including tournament structure, time schedule and a review of the 2018 tournament. The new regional model of assignment was reviewed with tournament assignments and draws shared with the committee. Quarterfinal sites were reviewed and approved as well as discussion on the Finals venue, USA Hockey Arena in Plymouth. Positive reviews continue for the placement of the MHSAA Finals at USA Hockey Arena.

DISCUSSION ITEMS

The Michigan High School Hockey Coaches Association submitted a proposal to increase the length of the MHSAA hockey tournament from its current two weeks to two and half weeks. This proposal would spread out the playoffs over a longer time period while not changing the MHSAA finals in hockey. The current playoff structure requires teams to play up to six games in as little as 12 days. This is usually more hockey with less rest than teams play at any time during their season. The proposal would finish the regular season of MHSAA competition earlier, allowing MHSAA tournament action to commence earlier. In addition, the lengthening of the MHSAA tournament would allow bigger and better venues to be used and prime time game slots for Regional final and Quarterfinal games. Discussion among the committee was overwhelmingly in favor of this proposal. Some minor tweaks to the proposed calendar were discussed and unanimous approval was given by the committee to forward this proposal to the MHSAA Representative Council.

The MSHCA reviewed their coaching education series from the fall when they visited Marquette and East Lansing to conduct coaching clinics lead by university hockey staffs, MSHCA staff, USA Hockey staff and MHSAA personnel. Future plans were shared with the committee in the areas of coaching education, requirements for attendance and involvement of other groups, coaches and speakers. All agreed the coaching education is critical to high school hockey continuing to thrive.

A background with details and discussion on the number of cooperative programs and opt-up programs in MHSAA hockey was continued from last year's meeting. The committee agreed that cooperative programs continue to be created by schools to allow students to play high school hockey, not create "super teams" that dominate MHSAA tournaments. Data was discussed to show this point. The high number of cooperative programs – 55 of the 138 programs - as well as high number of opt-ups, 25, cause this to be a concern for high school hockey divisions and tournament structure. Both the cooperative program number as well as the opt-up number are the highest of any MHSAA sport and may necessitate hockey division realignment. This discussion led the group to ask several questions as to the history of cooperative programs, the size of enrollments in MHSAA hockey divisions and the history of opt-ups in hockey. While there was considerable discussion on potentially changing hockey divisions and plans submitted to change the division alignment, there were no proposals approved. The committee asked the staff to continue to monitor the number of cooperative programs and the number of opt-ups. Strictly enforcing the August 15th date to opt up so as to finalize division placement and MHSAA tournament decisions.

An update was given about preliminary discussions between the MHSAA, the MSHCA and USA Hockey to establish a high school hockey summer event to benefit high school hockey players. The concept and idea will follow a similar path that the MHSAA "Reaching Higher" basketball event has used

successfully in the past emphasizing skill development, educational components, officiating development and recruitment as well, as parent seminars from coaches and others. While these discussions are in the early stages, there is optimism that a plan can be coordinated between the three hockey entities.

Seeding of hockey tournaments was discussed at length, with no proposals coming forward from either the committee or the hockey coaches association at this time. The primary reasons were that the hockey coaches association wants to ensure that the proper data, research and ultimately plan are put forward that is communicated to its membership, as well as athletic directors of hockey schools to ensure an understanding of the seeding plan. With other MHSAA sports now discussing seeding, with an RPI-type formula, hockey will have the data from two years to ensure that this plan is what all desire.

MHSAA high school hockey growth and promotion was discussed at length by the committee. The committee looked at the of number of programs, the growth of high school hockey in some communities that have never had high school hockey, as well as ways to ensure that hockey's unique characteristics were discussed. This included potential future discussions on coaches' involvement in out of season training in the sport of hockey which may be different from other MHSAA sports. The primary reason for this is that high school hockey is one of the few sports in which the non-school season is at the same time as the high school season. Non-school hockey has continued to start earlier in the school year and while there is no desire by the committee to push a starting date earlier for the high school game, there was desire to look at ways to emphasize that high school hockey is a viable alternative to non-school hockey. This may include proposals in the future to get coaches involved more in out of season coaching with a certain number of days of contact or potential practices. This discussion will continue for future hockey committees and with the hockey coaches association.

Officials' retention and recruitment continues to be a challenge with not enough quality or quantity of high school hockey officials in many areas of the state. The committee discussion centered on identifying the issue and problems behind this challenge, as well identifying how coaches, athletic directors and others can emphasize the need for current players to enter the field of officiating.

Sportsmanship and the need to continue to emphasize this part of the game of high school hockey continues to be discussed by the committee. The desire of the committee is to ensure that the game remains a safe and healthy part of school based athletics and that strong sportsmanship and respect towards opponents, coaches, officials and spectators is emphasized by those in a position of influence.

A draw was conducted for the 2019 MHSAA Tournament Semifinal pairings as follows:

Division 1 – QF #4 vs. QF #3, QF #2vs. QF #1
Division 2 – QF #6 vs. QF #7, QF #5 vs. QF #8
Division 3 – QF #12 vs. QF #9, QF #11 vs. QF #10

Recommendations to the Representative Council

Beginning with the 2019-20 season, start the MHSAA Ice Hockey tournament three Mondays before the current date of the Finals. (Feb. 24, 2020). The Finals would remain on the same date, the 2nd Saturday in March (March 14, 2020). The regular season would begin on the same date as in the past, but end one week earlier (Sat. Feb 22, 2020). Calendar attached. (Approved 13-0)