

2014 SOCCER COMMITTEE MINUTES

Monday, February 3, 2014, 9:30 a.m.
(rescheduled from January 27)

MEMBERS PRESENT

Van Dickerson, Kalamazoo (MIAAA)
Mark Hage, Livonia
Todd Heugh, Troy
Zack Jonker, Petoskey (MHSSCA)
Rick Noorman, Grand Rapids

MEMBERS ABSENT

Mike Evoy, Detroit
Ken Erny, Fruitport
Ann Lowney, Clarkston
Brian O'Leary, Novi
Meg Seng, Ann Arbor
Brent Sorg, Williamston

MHSAA STAFF

Andy Frushour

The 2013-14 MHSAA Soccer Committee met in the MHSAA office to review topics involving soccer issues and the tournament series. The meeting began with a review of the MHSAA decision making process and charge of the Soccer Committee. Agenda items were compiled from correspondence, staff, committee members and the coaches association.

DISCUSSION ITEMS

JUNIOR HIGH/MIDDLE SCHOOL

The proliferation of club soccer at the youth level is widespread in Michigan, which likely is a key reason why few member schools play soccer at the junior high/middle school level. Club soccer can be expensive for families and a cheaper school alternative could be enticing, if in fact, schools could find a way to fund soccer at this level. School soccer should be focused on participation opportunities, and longer, 70-minute games may be a way to offer more chances for participation. While 6th grade participation on 7th-8th grade teams is a good solution for smaller schools, there is no sentiment to allow all 6th grade students the opportunity to play with older students.

SAFETY

Members of the soccer committee have noticed an increased awareness of head injury issues in the past few years, with a particularly positive response to the MHSAA's concussion protocol. Coaches are more cautious than ever when dealing with a potential head injury, and are especially conscious about putting kids back in to play. Equipment, like the Full 90 head gear, is available to both field players and goalkeepers, but coach opinions are mixed as to its effectiveness.

The committee recognized that public discourse on head trauma in soccer is likely to gain steam, especially as the topic is discussed more in football. Data from the NFHS Injury Surveillance Overview was corroborated by committee anecdotes. Most head injuries occur during head-to-head contact in 50-50 aerial situations, in head-to-ground contact, and when balls are kicked unintentionally off the head. Head injuries seem to

happen more with girls than boys, and they happen more in games than in practice. Reasons why fewer injuries happen in practice: more time is spent with ball on the ground; focus is more on positioning of players; balls in the air are typically for the practice of service and crossing; and practices are often played while on smaller fields with less than 11v11 competition.

Continued focus should be placed on head trauma prevention and return to play guidelines, perhaps through a public awareness campaign. Preseason baseline testing should be encouraged, and proper heading technique should continue to be a focal point of practice.

Before playing rule changes are made, many questions should be asked: what are the unintended consequences of eliminating headers? Would the game become more physical if played more on the ground? When are most injuries occurring, and would a new rule limit these situations? Should a lighter ball be used like is used at the youth level? Is a single heading of the ball an issue, or is the problem the aggregate of balls headed over a season or even over a practice session?

Heat and hydration issues were also discussed, with the committee appreciating the new Heat Index cards provided by the MHSAA. Mid-half water and cool down breaks are a common, and welcomed, solution on hot game days.

MULTI-TEAM TOURNAMENTS

The committee re-visited its 2013 recommendation to allow two 80-minute games to count as one game against the 18 game maximum. The committee remains of the opinion that two 80-minute games are a great option for schools, especially since the 160 minutes played would be less than the 180 minutes played in a multi-team tournament with 30 minutes halves. The committee added that this could create some flexibility in scheduling (perhaps allowing two league games on a day), and may save on officials fees (when compared to current multi-team tournaments). The committee asked if 35-minutes could be a compromise, and noted the Girls Lacrosse rule on multi-team tournaments which allows two games under 120 minutes. The committee will likely revisit this topic in 2015.

SCRIMMAGES

In 2013 the Soccer Committee recommended a change to allow four scrimmages at any time, particularly to help northern teams in the spring. While four scrimmages at any time is still preferred, the committee did agree that a change to two scrimmages before the first allowed date of competition could also be a beneficial solution.

OFFICIALS ISSUES

Over the past year, a common recommendation from officials has been to allow the use of the blue and green official's uniforms. Allowing the two additional uniforms would add some flexibility for officials, and since these two colors would be optional, it would not be an added expense for officials.

While three officials are required for the District Final and beyond, some early round District tournament games are played with only two officials. The committee would like to see the entire tournament played with three officials.

DEVELOPMENT ACADEMY/ELITE CLUBS NATIONAL LEAGUE

While many of the elite players have chosen to play on Academy and ECNL teams, participation in school soccer has not wavered as new players have filled in those spots. Opinions are mixed among coaches and administrators: some think there is no problem with students making a choice between school and club (much like the choice made by students in other sports), while others hope there can be efforts for school teams to co-exist with club programs. In addition, it was reported some coaches are concerned with players joining the school team at the end of the club season, especially in the spring. There is no consensus on this topic, so the status quo should remain.

ADDITIONAL ITEMS DISCUSSED

- Overview of the new yellow card rules during the fall season
- Penalties for wearing non-compliant white uniforms
- Tournament set up, and seeding systems used by other sports
- Continuing suspended league tournament games
- Weather delays during one-goal postseason OT games
- Clock requirements in the postseason
- Playing postseason games indoors
- Playing multiple postseason games in one day

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE REPRESENTATIVE COUNCIL

1. Allow MHSAA officials the option to wear blue and green uniforms. Currently the primary uniform colors are yellow, red and black; this would allow blue and green as an additional, but not required, option. (5-0)
2. Require three officials for every game in the MHSAA postseason tournament. Currently three officials are recommended, but optional, for the first two rounds of the District tournament. (5-0)