

2022 MHSAA SOCCER COMMITTEE MINUTES
Thursday, January 13, 2022, 9:30 a.m. – held via Zoom

MEMBERS PRESENT

Kathy Bondsteel, Jonesville
Greg Ceithaml, Holland
Ken Delaney, Coldwater (MIHSSCA)
Jeff Engbers, Hudsonville
Kevin Guzzo, St. Joseph (MIAAA)
Kelly Horne, Clawson
Ryan Knudsen, Leland
Jeff Lyon, East Lansing

Chris Morgan, Ann Arbor
Chris Riker, Portage
Allison Sartorius, Waterford
Kevin Schwedler, Frankenmuth
Rich Kieft (Guest/MATS)

MHSAA STAFF

Andy Frushour (Recorder)

The 2021-22 MHSAA Soccer Committee met via Zoom to review topics involving soccer and the tournament series. The meeting began with a review of the MHSAA decision-making process and the charge of the Soccer Committee. Agenda items were compiled from correspondence, staff, committee members and the soccer coaches association.

DISCUSSION ITEMS

SAFETY

The 2020-21 NFHS RIO Injury Surveillance Study was provided to the committee. Strategies for head injury mitigation have been status quo for the last few years, with coaches focusing on proper technique and limiting live heading in practice. Injuries to female ACLs were discussed, as were safety concerns of fields with tracks too close to the soccer touchline.

FALL SURVEY REVIEW

As part of its annual fall Update Meeting tour and AD In-Service program, a survey was conducted with administrators across the state. Five of the survey questions were discussed by the committee. Using school transportation in the summer and considering Minnesota as a border state would be popular additions to the MHSAA Handbook, but the other three questions provided more complex discussion.

CONTACT DAYS provide more time for school coaches to work with kids, especially in areas where club sports and indoor facilities are less available. There is also a question of why we would take this opportunity away from those schools and coaches who want it. Others believe kids are already under too much pressure to play one specialized sport. They should be allowed to enjoy other sports, without feeling the need to practice with another team while in season (and risking injury). We should continue to allow conditioning opportunities for those not in season. Contact days also put pressure on coaches to use the days, or else be labeled as “not trying.” The majority of this group was against the use of contact days.

The new system for **CLASSIFICATION** would be good for balancing the size of Divisions, but there was concern of how this would affect smaller schools. In boys soccer, for instance, this could raise the enrollment of the biggest Div. 4 schools from around 350 to almost 400. For schools with 100-150 students, the enrollment discrepancy feels more disproportionate to them. Schools at the low end of Division 1 have been making this same argument for years (1,100 students vs 2,800 students) so this is not a new issue, but the change could help narrow the Div. 1 gap.

SOCCER ITEMS

The fifth Update Meeting survey question was specific to soccer. The 2021 committee discussed the potential use of the “**FIVE QUARTER**” rule in soccer, and armed with survey feedback, the 2022

committee discussed in greater detail. The Update survey showed 78% of over 600 administrators favored a “Three Half” rule for soccer, while 58% of almost 200 soccer coaches surveyed by the coaches association also favored the expanded rule. While this rule could help save teams (or even add sub-varsity teams) where there are low numbers, thus increasing participation in the sport, it does not come without questions and concerns. Who tracks and monitors halves or minutes played? Is this truly being used to add programs, or is it simply to give varsity experience to younger players? With which team do you practice, or do you practice with both and risk overuse injuries? With the roster changing from game-to-game, do students lose the feeling of camaraderie or being part of a team/community? At the end of the discussion, however, the committee agreed that if properly used “three halves” could be an effective tool to help schools on the brink of losing a team.

After three years of using the MPR Seeding system for soccer, the committee discussed the status and future of seeding at the District level. The coaches association survey showed 91% in favor of continuing to seed the tournament, which matches anecdotal evidence from MHSAA staff that seeding has been a positive experience in many sports. The same coaches survey also indicated two suggested changes to the system: seeded teams should get home games when games are not played at the designated host site (75%), and all teams within the District should be seeded 1-8 (67%).

Home games in the MHSAA soccer tournament are determined by top-line position on the bracket. In soccer, where all District First Round games and about half of the District Semifinals are played at top line sites, the position on the bracket is very important. Coaches of seeded teams feel they have earned a home game in these situations, but often have to play on the road. While the Representative Council has not given this homefield advantage in the past, this committee would like to see a change.

Seeding ALL teams in the District bracket does not have the support of the Soccer Committee. The tournament is a new start for all teams, and the randomness of the current system is helpful to “lower-seeded” teams. There are questions of why a #7 or #8 seed team would want to play in the postseason if it was guaranteed to play a top seed. In addition, in many Districts, we would see many of the same matchups year after year. Finally, at this point there are minimal complaints about the two teams at the top of the District MPR rankings, but if all eight teams are seeded it would invite more argument about adjustments up and down the rankings list. (Defeated 10-2.)

The Committee also discussed a number of other topics. It does not want to see changes to the Limited Team Membership in relation to club soccer players. The status of UP Soccer was covered, as was the wish to one day have a more prominent Finals location in the fall. The struggle to find officials is a problem statewide, but could be alleviated if each school registered one graduating senior every year. Officials may also stay registered longer with improvement in fan behavior.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE REPRESENTATIVE COUNCIL

1. In an extension of the Football and Basketball five-quarter rule, allow students to participate in no more than three halves on a day not followed by a school day. For multi-team tournaments, if two school teams are at the same event, allow participation in no more halves than what is being played by the school’s highest team level that day. (Multi-team tournament example: if the varsity team is playing three 30-minute half games for a total of six halves, a player playing both JV and Varsity on the same day can play in six TOTAL halves that day.) (12-0)
2. For games not played at the pre-arranged District host site, the two seeded teams get the opportunity to host their own games. For Districts without a pre-arranged host site, #1 seed gets hosting priority, then the #2 seed, then the team on the top line of the bracket. (10-2)