

**2023-24 MHSAA BOWLING COMMITTEE MINUTES**  
Wednesday, March 13, 2024, 9:30 a.m. – East Lansing

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

Loraine Brinker, Dryden  
Rick Dodick, Bay City  
Eric Johnson, Britton  
Jason Malloy, Westland  
Joe Manor, DeWitt  
Patrick Ramsey, Salem  
Scott Spahr, Sturgis  
Robert Tubbs, Davison (MHSIBCA)  
Adam Valk, Wayland  
Sheri Yanik, Pontiac

**GUESTS**

Deb Alexander, Flint  
Kevin Fleming, Hanover (MATS)  
Rudy Godefroidt, Hemlock  
Judy Jaeger, Highland  
Tom Stockton, Sterling Heights

**MHSAA STAFF**

Cole Malatinsky (Recorder)

The 2023-24 MHSAA Bowling Committee met in East Lansing at the MHSAA's John E. "Jack" Roberts building on March 13, 2024. The meeting began with a review of the MHSAA decision-making process and charge of the Bowling Committee. Agenda items were compiled from correspondence, staff, committee members, and the coaches association. The committee was reminded that the scope of their work was to focus on growing the sport of bowling, protecting the health & safety of participants and spectators, and maintaining the proper philosophy of educational, school-based athletics.

**DISCUSSION ITEMS**

**2023-24 MHSAA TOURNAMENT REVIEW**

The committee reviewed two changes implemented for the 2023-24 tournament: 1) expansion from six to eight Regional tournaments in each division with the top two teams and seven singles in each gender advancing out of each Regional, and 2) a best-of-five game Baker format for the Team Finals head-to-head bracket match play.

According to the committee, the addition of two Regional tournaments in each division worked as intended, reducing the number of competitors and spectators at each event. Fewer teams allowed increased flexibility in scheduling, helping to minimize interruptions of regular leagues and open bowling schedules at some Regional venues. The smaller Regionals also allowed adjustments in lane assignments, incorporating periodic open pairs in the team competition, and limiting the number of bowlers on each pair during the singles event, effectively spreading out spectators, improving sight lines, easing transitions during lane rotations, and speeding up the events. Finally, a record number of teams received recognition for their performance, with eight additional teams and 16 additional individuals winning Regional championships under the new format.

The committee also discussed criticism of the change. Specifically, the reduction of the number of teams and individuals qualifying out of each Regional, with only the top two teams and top seven individuals advancing from the Regional to the Final, compared to the top three teams and top ten individuals under the previous format. It was noted that the size of the Finals field was decreased minimally, and taking the same number of qualifiers from each Region with two additional tournaments and therefore expanding the Finals field was not an option given existing crowding issues at Finals venues. Only two fewer teams and four fewer individuals in each gender qualified for the Finals. With fewer teams competing in each Region, but two more Regions, the percentage of competing teams qualifying remained almost identical. Criticism from those teams and individuals that just missed the cut will likely exist, regardless of the number of qualifiers.

Similarly, criticism of the best-of-five game Baker format during Team Finals match play was expected, especially in instances where teams perceived to have more skilled bowlers, better depth, or with higher overall pinfall failed to advance during match play. With very competitive head-to-head matchups, increased engagement, and great excitement created by the new format, feedback from the committee was exceedingly positive.

Finals managers from each of the four Divisions were in attendance and provided reports:

Division 1 – Thunderbowl Lanes – Allen Park

Division 2 – Century Lanes – Waterford

Division 3 – JAX 60 – Jackson

Division 4 – Northway Lanes – Muskegon

The committee was provided a historic list of MHSAA Bowling Finals hosts, as well as year-by-year spectator attendance data as part of a brief discussion on future Finals host sites and format. As a means to address continued crowding issues during the singles Finals competitions, a potential three-day Finals event was suggested by the committee, with the combined boys and girls team event on one day as it is conducted currently, and separate days for the boys and girls singles events. Discussion will continue on the topic during future meetings.

### **LIMITATIONS OF COMPETITION**

Under the current *MHSAA Handbook* language, students are not allowed to participate in a JV and varsity bowling match on the same day. With “five-quarter” rules in basketball, football, soccer, and boys lacrosse, and the success of this allowance in saving some subvarsity programs in these sports, the committee was asked to consider if a similar allowance in the sport of bowling would be appropriate. Concern was expressed by some on the committee regarding potential abuse or use of the allowance in some manner other than intended, especially in instances where JV matches and varsity matches are conducted at the same time, in the same bowling center, with athletes being moved back and forth between teams. Issues of fairness, team dynamics, and overuse were feared prior to implementation in other sports, but have been successfully managed in those other sports through local school and league/conference policies. With the potential to allow schools to conduct JV programs and expand participation opportunities for students, the committee unanimously put forth a recommendation to change Regulation II, Section 10(C), to allow students to participate on multiple levels on the same day.

### **WINTER SPORTS CALENDAR**

As part of bowling season calendar discussions, given the continued challenges of finding available bowling centers to host MHSAA Regional tournament events, the committee was asked to discuss dates outside of the traditional Friday-Saturday tournament dates. The committee was unanimously in favor of a recommendation to allow hosts to deviate from the published Friday-Saturday dates, and conduct the Bowling Regionals on two consecutive days, Wednesday-Saturday. While not ideal, as students will potentially be missing an additional day of school, this change is likely necessary for the purposes of increasing bowling center availability and scheduling flexibility.

With the 2024-25 bowling season calendar set, the committee discussed two potential calendar change proposals for the 2025-26 season and beyond. One proposal would move both the start of the season and the Finals dates one week earlier. The other proposal would simply move the Finals one week earlier, effectively shortening the bowling season by one week. Committee members did not express any strong opinions either way, but there was some sentiment that shortening the season may create some pushback as some schools find it challenging to get in their 24 allowable dates of competition under the current calendar. With any change, the

committee did express that the start of practice should be on a Monday, as opposed to the current calendar start date, which starts practice on the second Thursday before Thanksgiving. It should be noted these proposals are not exclusive to the sport of bowling but are part of a larger conversation among MHSAA staff and the Representative Council regarding the entire MHSAA winter sports calendar. The Bowling Committee's feedback will be included in those considerations.

### **FOUL LIGHTS**

Following several issues with malfunctioning foul lights during MHSAA tournament competitions, the Bowling Committee in 2022 recommended foul lights be turned off during all MHSAA postseason tournament competitions, regardless of whether the foul-detecting system in the host venue is working correctly or not. That recommendation was approved. After two seasons with foul lights being disabled during MHSAA postseason tournament competition, and numerous questions from coaches during that time, the committee was asked to revisit the policy. Following a brief discussion, the committee unanimously approved a recommendation that the automated foul-detecting system be enabled once again during MHSAA postseason tournament competition. If during competition, there is an issue and it is determined that the foul-detecting system is not functioning correctly, the system will be turned off for the entire house for the remainder of that day's competition. The decision to turn off the foul-detecting system will be made by the tournament manager in conjunction with the bowling center.

### **BALL LIMITS AND SHARING EQUIPMENT**

Since 2022 bowlers have been limited to five balls in the bowling center during MHSAA postseason tournament competition. Although competitive equity was part of the conversation, the five-ball limit was instituted primarily to address space issues within bowling centers. Following a significant violation of the ball limit during the 2024 tournament and numerous questions from coaches as to whether bowlers sharing equipment contravenes the rule and should be allowed, the committee revisited the five-ball limit. The committee discussed the merits of the five-ball limit and sharing equipment. With no USBC rule outside of drilling requirements regarding teammates sharing balls during competition, no change to current rules and interpretations was proposed.

### **COACHING PRIVILEGES AND PACE OF PLAY**

Following an incident at one Finals venue in which a coach standing in the bowlers' area obstructed the view of a spectator and nearly led to a physical altercation, the committee reviewed current coaching privileges. In most all other MHSAA sports using NFHS rules, only one coach is allowed to stand during competition, and in most of those sports, stadium seating helps ensure spectators are not blocked by the team and coaches standing on the sidelines. With two coaches allowed in the competition area, consideration should be given to spectators, who paid to watch the competition. The committee unanimously approved a recommendation that if two school-approved coaches are in the bowlers' area, only one coach is allowed to stand during competition.

The committee also discussed continued issues with slow pace of play. While it is partly the responsibility of coaches to ensure their direct instruction does not delay play, bowlers leaving the competition and not being ready to bowl when it is their turn appears to be the more significant issue. A rule restricting bowlers from leaving the field of play during competition and a potential penalty for the resulting delay in play will be discussed at future meetings.

### **MHSAA TOURNAMENT OIL PATTERN**

The committee was provided a year-by-year summary of MHSAA tournament oil patterns and MHSAA Finals singles event scoring as part of a review of the current pattern, the Phantom 2. 2024 was the first year of the Phantom 2. It should be noted the pattern is not an entirely new pattern, but an alteration of the original Phantom pattern used during the 2022 and 2023

tournaments. No change will be made after one year of use, but all feedback from the committee indicates the pattern was an improvement from the original Phantom. The committee will continue to discuss tournament oil patterns and related concerns at future meetings.

### **REGIONAL SINGLES COMPETITORS**

With fewer teams assigned to Regional events and theoretically more space available in the bowling center, the committee expressed interest in potentially expanding the number of competitors from each team in the singles competition from 6 to 7, so the team event roster and singles entrants match. With only one year of data, the MHSAA will continue to monitor and discuss with hosts and bowling centers to see if the expanding singles event would be feasible.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS TO MHSAA STAFF**

1. The automated foul-detecting system will be enabled during MHSAA postseason tournament competition. If during MHSAA postseason tournament competition there is an issue and it is determined that the foul-detecting system is not functioning correctly, the system will be turned off for the entire house for the remainder of that day competition.
2. If a team has two (2) school-designated coaches present in the bowlers area, only one (1) coach is allowed to stand during competition.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE REPRESENTATIVE COUNCIL**

1. For the purposes of increased bowling center availability and scheduling flexibility, allow hosts to deviate from the traditional Friday-Saturday dates, and conduct the Bowling Regional events on two consecutive days, Wednesday-Saturday. (10-0)
2. Add bowling to the list of sports allowing students to participate in a subvarsity and varsity match on the same day under Regulation II, Section 10. (10-0)