

2025-26 MHSAA SOCCER COMMITTEE MINUTES

Wednesday, January 21, 2026, 9:30 a.m. – East Lansing

MEMBERS PRESENT

Justin Ansel, Comstock
Branden Bennett, Big Rapids
Steve Bossert, Beverly Hills (MIHSSCA)
Kevin Guzzo, St. Joseph (MIAAA)
Chris Hartman, Kingsford
Kyle Lawton, Holland
Matt Moffett, Cedar Springs
Ed Sack, Bloomfield Hills
Jeff Suffolk, Harbor Springs
Connor Thomas, Mason

Steve Vissia, Fremont
Brandon Woodworth, Laingsburg

GUEST

Marci Pionk, Ionia (MATS)

MHSAA STAFF

Andy Frushour (Recorder)
Maddie Maloney

The 2025-26 MHSAA Soccer Committee met in the John E. “Jack” Roberts MHSAA building to review topics involving soccer and the tournament series. Due to weather, half of the members joined via Zoom. 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 2024–25 NFHS RIO Injury Surveillance Study was provided to the committee. On-field safety concerns have been relatively quiet compared to previous years. Shinguards were a major topic at the 2025 meeting; however, aside from continued frustration with access to legal shinguards in some parts of the state, there was less discussion than in the prior year.

PARTICIPATION

The longest discussion of the meeting focused on the MHSAA Limited Team Membership (LTM) rule. Soccer and ice hockey are the only MHSAA sports played concurrently with high-level club seasons, making this issue largely unique to those sports. Over time—particularly for girls soccer in the spring—the MHSAA has made limited allowances for students to participate with club teams during the high school season, typically with a penalty. Committee members expressed strong perspectives on both sides. Some felt the LTM rule is overly restrictive and should be loosened, while others emphasized the importance of encouraging loyalty to school teams and maintaining stricter regulations.

Several related questions were raised, including whether students should be allowed to participate in both club and high school soccer simultaneously, whether limited outside competition (similar to individual sports) should be permitted, or whether a defined window for club participation during the season should exist. The committee also acknowledged that some families view participation decisions as a “business decision,” which can create tension and feelings of disloyalty among teammates. While the needs of elite players were considered, members emphasized the importance of fairness and opportunity for all participants. Any changes to soccer’s LTM rule would also require consideration of potential impacts on other MHSAA sports. The committee agreed that further discussion with coaches and athletic directors is needed.

The committee also explored whether smaller LTM adjustments could improve participation opportunities. Results from a January survey of coaches and athletic directors indicated general support for the current rule, with some openness to expanded allowances for college ID camps,

showcases, and in-season club tryouts. Ultimately, proposals to allow in-season showcases and tryouts were not supported.

Lastly, the committee discussed the three-half rule in soccer. Reports of misuse remain infrequent, and the rule continues to be viewed as a positive measure that helps sustain subvarsity programs.

SOCcer ITEMS

The committee revisited the MHSAA disqualification rule requiring a one-game suspension following any red card, regardless of the reason (see 2025 minutes for full discussion). At the request of the Officials Review Committee, the Soccer Committee examined this issue again, with specific focus on handling and DOGSO ejections. There was continued sentiment that not all red cards are equal. Despite potential administrative challenges, the committee recommended removing the automatic one-game suspension for red cards resulting from two cautions, handling, or DOGSO. An exception would remain if either caution involved dissent or abusive language, in which case the one-game suspension would still apply.

Additional discussion addressed postgame handshakes and the marking of team areas. Regarding postgame procedures, there was no consensus for change; officials' associations will be encouraged to determine whether officials remain on the field during handshakes (potentially nearer the midfield circle), exit immediately, or use some other procedure that works in their area of the state. The committee also emphasized that team and coaching areas should be clearly marked—using paint, cones, or similar methods—prior to games, as outlined in the NFHS Rule Book. This will be emphasized during the 2026–27 rules meeting.

POSTSEASON TOURNAMENT

No major changes were proposed for future MHSAA soccer tournaments; however, several concerns were discussed. The Boys Soccer Finals are held on the same day as the Cross Country Finals, which created a conflict this past fall for one school that qualified for both events. While the order of games was discussed, no changes were recommended.

Halloween will coincide with the Wednesday Semifinal date three times over the next 15 years. A proposal was approved to move Semifinal games to Tuesday in those years. The committee also noted that three Districts include competing teams from the Upper Peninsula, which can result in extended travel for all participating teams. No action was taken. The coaches association will continue working with MHSAA staff on potential alternate seeding models for District and/or Regional tournaments.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE REPRESENTATIVE COUNCIL

1. Expand the Limited Team Membership allowance for college ID camps to permit unlimited participation during the girls season. (12–0)
2. Eliminate the “Next Day” penalty for red card ejections for two yellows, handling or DOGSO (Rule 12-6-1, a-d). If either caution is for dissent or abusive language, the suspension remains. (10-2)
3. In years where Halloween falls on the Wednesday Semifinals date (2029, 2035, 2040), move the Semifinals to Tuesday. (12-0)